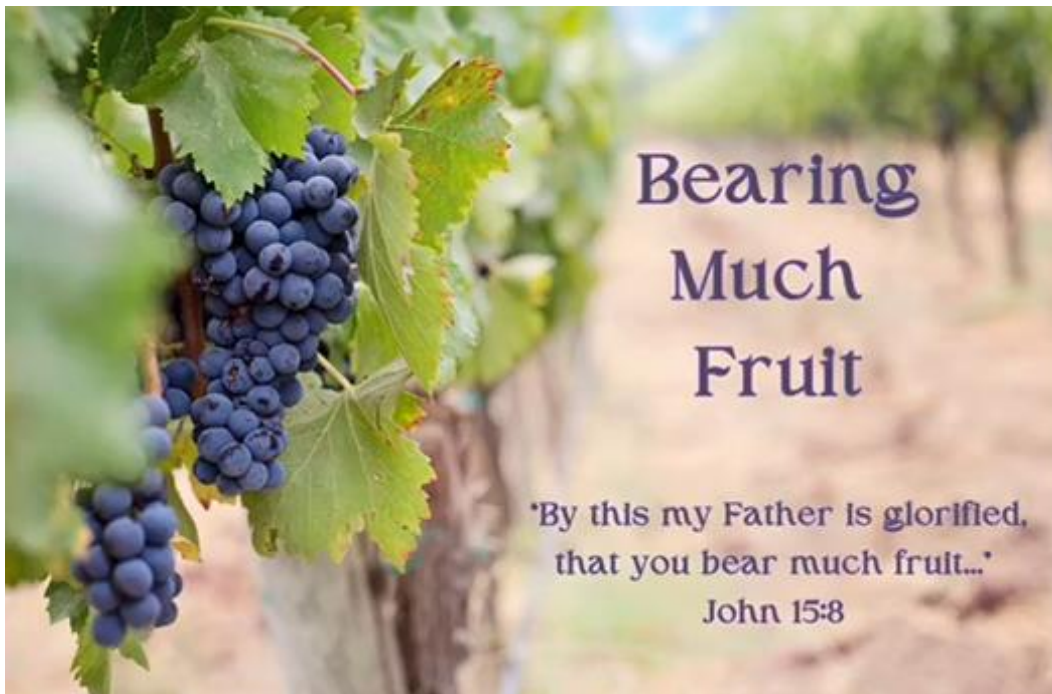


St. Olaf Lutheran Church 2025 Lenten Devotional Booklet



Day 1: That you bear much fruit...MUCH FRUIT! - by Pastor Tom

So you pr, pr, prove to be disciples of me, uh huh! Yes, people will know we are Christians by our love. Our love of God, as we express it in words and actions publicly and our love for one another. The only way we can *love well* is by remaining connected in the Vine, Jesus.



Many Christians, these days, seem to go it alone, without Jesus or with Jesus' branches, our brothers and sisters in Christ, who seek to remain connected with the Vine and the Vinegrower (God the Father).

Our mission is to connect people to the Vine/Vinegrower.

I'm always discerning how God can use me like Jesus, who constantly expanded his "public ministry" to places and people the Pharisees/Sadducees/Scribes would not go to. God has made it obvious to me to go to the funeral homes, the bar/restaurants, golf courses and softball fields, to minister to whoever shows up there. And all I do is strike up a conversation with mostly people I do not know. I'm bold in who I am as a believer in Jesus and pastor. I'm real, authentic, and say it as it is, so they see me as a human just like themselves, no holier because I'm a pastor. They like that... a lot!

The Holy Spirit ministers through my listening ears, good questions asked, and the dialogue that forms. Sometimes I'll ask, "How may I pray for you?" That's when the rubber meets the road. That's when God's love for them pours out through me and God bears much fruit (MUCH FRUIT!) in that holy moment of prayer.

Be blessed by the individuals/households that have shared key parts of what they are learning in the faith. Know that we are all students/learners seeking to follow in the Way of Christ. But we are trying, and that's all that matters.

Holy and huge God, intimately near to us in Jesus, humble us towards being like You and empower us to be bold in our faith so that we may bear much fruit (much fruit!) in Jesus' name, amen.

When the storms rage, give us the boldness to stand firm, knowing You are in the boat with us. When the world says, "It's impossible," remind us that nothing is impossible for You. Help us to trust not just in what You can do but in who You are—faithful, good, and endlessly loving.

Lord, we want crazy trust. The kind of trust that moves mountains, walks on water, and says yes to You before we even know the question. Stretch our faith, Jesus. Lead us into deeper waters where our feet can't touch the ground, and all we have is You to hold on to.

We surrender our fears, our doubts, and our need for guarantees. Fill us with a peace that doesn't make sense and a joy that overflows, simply because we know You are with us.

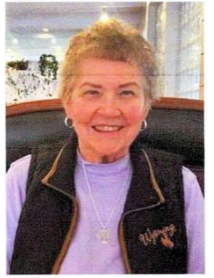
You are our everything, Jesus, and we trust You with our whole hearts.

In Your mighty and unstoppable name, we pray. **Amen.**

Day 2: by Jane Christenson

1 Corinthians 10:31

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”



My first job out of college was supposed to be helping those individual in need of guidance, support and safety. Instead, it was helping me! I forgot who got me the job (God did), and I used it to indulge myself with the desires I had. I was focused on myself, not others. I did not give God the glory.

It was not until several years after leaving that job that I was faced with my failure. The Holy Spirit brought me up short, by the scruff of my neck, and made me realize that God knew about my laziness, self-indulgence, and cheating of my employer's time. He made me realize I needed to do everything all for the glory of God!

It helped me realize that my job was there for me to give God the glory! I thank Him every day for pulling me up short and setting me on my way to glorifying God in all that I do.

Thank you, Lord, for focusing me on the right path, working unto your glory. Help me to keep it up.

Day 3: Life - by Kristin Thiel

Psalm 147:3

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

Matthew 11:28

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Life isn't always easy nor what we hoped it to be. It wears us out, it's sometimes hard to endure, and it certainly throws plenty of curveballs.

These passages remind me that even when I'm tired and run down, when I feel like giving up and my heart remains broken; God sees me and he is working to mend my tired spirit.

Faith and following the path of Christ, especially alongside my children, is the most healing waters one could ever search for.



Day 4: What Armour? - by Cindy Schlieve

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (New International Version)

⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Pastor spoke to us about perhaps having one devotional for each person in our households. I had submitted two devotionals and then thought, “well our oldest son Nick is part of our household, let me find out what his favorite Bible verse is”. The ones noted above are what he said. So, as I looked it up in my NIV study Bible, I realized that the topic deals with arming ourselves with God’s weapons; not weapons of destruction, but weapons that help us to live in this world and to share God’s word with others. My Bible did have a very helpful explanation for these particular verses. It reads: “Paul is prepared for warfare; his weapons, however, are not the weapons prized by this fallen world and fashioned by human pride and arrogance. Spiritual weapons can also be seen in opposite terms from worldly weapons: Physical weakness is a weapon because it can mean spiritual strength in Christ; God-centeredness is a weapon because it produces a supernatural authority that self-centeredness cannot; truth is a weapon because it overcomes cleverness and deceit; even suffering is a weapon because it can be a means of life.” There was also a reference to this reading in Ephesians 6:14-17. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” As I noodled on these verses, it occurred to me that this guidance is something that is so appropriate for us right now in our world. It seems that there is so much war, hate, and animosity all around us. Putting on the armor of God is the best way we can deal with all the sadness, anger, and hurt we are constantly being dealt. I don’t think it is easy to put on the armor of God, but if that is our personal goal, we can achieve it more often than not. We know that God loves us and will always be with us which is the very best way to follow his Word. Let us pray.

Let Us Pray

Dear Lord, help us to look to you for guidance in everything in our lives. When we feel like we are being crushed by the sadness, anger, and hurt in our world, you alone are our guide and protector. You alone are the only way for us to survive and thrive. Help us to continually look for you in our world, because you are always with us and will never leave us. In Jesus Holy Name we pray. **Amen.**



Left to right: Nick, Jerry, Cindy, T.J. Schlieve

Day 5: I Am with You - by Cindy Schlieve

Matthew 28:16-20 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."



As we know, Pastor's theme for 2025 is "Bear Much Fruit". This passage from Matthew doesn't actually talk about bearing fruit, however, if we look at what he has asked his disciples to go and do, we can see that they will be bearing much fruit. Another point here is that whatever Jesus asked of his disciples, he also asks of us. How can we possibly comply with the wishes, actually commands, that Jesus has given? There are certainly times that I wonder how on earth I can attempt to follow his commands. But let's look at some of the things we already do that show how much we love and wish to follow Jesus' commands. First of all, when we attend worship faithfully, we are giving our glory to God and by doing so we may also be showing the love we have to other worshippers as well as those who may not be a regular worshipper. To me, it seems that being a role model is a very good way to help "make disciples" as verse 19 above commands. Second of all, anytime we share our faith with another we may be making disciples, or at the very least we are sowing seeds for those people to consider. A third thought I have revolves around the wonderful members of this congregation who help plan worship, share their gifts and abilities for our worship services, lead worship, share their faith when bringing a message to the congregation, and really show their love for God and his commands. I know I feel very blessed to be able to be an assisting minister as well as a person who brings the message occasionally. God is always working to guide us, and certainly me, in all those endeavors. Another blessing that we have in this congregation is members who are willing to offer communion to members or friends of members who are unable to attend worship. It is a huge blessing for those who receive the communion, and it is just as much of a blessing to those who offer the communion. I know that when I am able to offer communion to a member or friend, I feel joy. Sharing our faith in that way is enriching to the person sharing and to the one(s) receiving. Finally, always remember Jesus' final words in this passage: *"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Whenever we remember that He is always with us, we will be able to accomplish the tasks we have been given. Let us pray.

Let Us Pray

Dear Lord, help me to always remember that you are here with me and will always offer guidance if only I ask it of you. Being able to share my love for you with others is truly a blessing and I thank you for all that you provide. **Amen**

Day 6: Having the Faith to Get in the Wheelbarrow

by Dave Johnston

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."



There's an old story about a famous tightrope walker, Charles Blondin (born Jean Francois Gravelet in 1824). I heard about this watching a movie called "Hoovey". To top off his fame Charles Blondin strung a cable across Niagara Falls. He asked the crowd if they thought he could walk across, and they all cheered. He then asked if they thought he could walk across pushing a wheelbarrow and they again all cheered. After accomplishing these feats, he turned to the crowd, and asked, "Do you believe I can push a person across in this wheelbarrow?" "Yes!" they cheered. But when asked "Who will get in?" there was Silence.

This story illustrates a powerful truth about faith. It's one thing to say we trust God, but it's another thing entirely to step into the wheelbarrow—to fully rely on Him in situations where we feel unsteady or afraid.

In life, we often want to stay safely on the sidelines, believing in God's power without actually stepping out in faith. We trust Him in theory but hesitate in practice. God calls us to more than just belief; He calls us to action. Sometimes, that means stepping into the unknown, surrendering control, and letting Him carry us through.

So, three questions for you:

1. Are there areas in your life where you hesitate to fully trust God?
2. What "wheelbarrow" is He asking you to step into today?
3. How can you move from saying "I believe" to actively living out that belief?

Let Us Pray

Lord, We know You are trustworthy, but sometimes we struggle to let go of our own control. Help us to not just say we believe, but to act in faith. Give us the courage to step into the wheelbarrow, knowing that You will never let us fall. Amen.

Day 7: It is Important to Have Faith - by John and Diana Dorosz

It is important to have faith — faith that our thoughts, words, actions, and deeds ... and interactions with others, if done with kindness, love, and positive intention — will bear much fruit and honor the Lord.

There are many phrases from Scripture that show us examples of faith, give us reasons to have faith, share and reaffirm our faith, such as 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 "Love is kind"; John 3:16 -- "For God so loved the world"; Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you"; 1 Peter 2:17 "Above all, love each other deeply"; Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me", well ... ALL of Philippians Chapter 4, really, as the common thread of faith carries through nearly all of its verses — for example:

Philippians 4:5 "Let your gentleness be evident to all", 4:6 "Do not be anxious about anything", 4:11 "for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances"; but in recent years we've been drawn specifically to Philippians 4:8 --

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" and its corollary, Philippians 4:9 "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

And 4:9, as a lead-in to Philippians 4:13, which for us kind of summarizes the whole thread of having faith" -- "I can do all this through him who gives me strength".

Faith in assuming with quiet confidence (bearing much fruit) positive outcomes and succeeding by being connected to the Lord (he is the vine, we are the branches). Trust that He helps us find ways to pay it forward in kindness, love, and caring for others, to help make their lives easier.

Let Us Pray

"Lord, please help us focus on the grace You have given us and all the blessings in our lives, and to have faith to work through the challenges of life with trust in You always. Amen".



Day 8: Sometimes We Need a Comma - by Steve and Vickie Stretz

Inspired by the book "I Love to Tell the Story" by Paul J. Bernhagen

Several times in the book Paul references a "comma" in life. Just like a comma in a sentence a "comma" in life is a pause, a time for additional information, a time to think about what we've done. A "comma" may be small, a pause before making a purchase or saying something. Sometimes a "comma" is large, a pause or realization that can change your life.



Even Jesus needed a "comma". The scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus one day and they brought a woman before him who was caught in the very act of adultery. They pointed their finger at the woman and said "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such woman. Now what do you say?" This is a bigger deal than we often realize when we hear this story.

From the book: "If he said to go ahead and stone her then the woman would be killed, which, first of all, would have made Jesus very sad. Secondly, it could have put him in trouble with the Romans, as they alone had the right to put people to death. Thirdly, he would have been accused of being merciless, and he might have lost his credibility with the masses. If he said to leave her alone because they didn't have the right to do such a thing, then the Jewish religious leaders would have accused him of being a lawbreaker. Jesus was in a hot spot, and he knew it." And, there was a big crowd gathering. What to do?

Jesus needed a "comma". He took his finger and started writing on the ground. We don't know what he was writing or if anyone understood it. It did cause curiosity in the crowd. What is he doing? He was buying a "comma", a time to think before acting. After a bit he stood up and said "If any of you are without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." This turned everything around, the accusers were now the accused.

The book takes this in a different direction. I'll take you mine. Today we are bombarded with so much, images, videos, text, emails, messages everywhere and all the time. Some is useful but much like the scribes and Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus they are to trigger a reaction. It may appeal to our fears, our emotions, even our prejudices. We react with indignation, click the "like" button without thinking, pass it on to someone else like a virus. We get to the point of not knowing what to believe. Maybe what we need is a "comma". Maybe that comma is simply a pause, time to think. Maybe it is a prayer.

Let Us Pray

Jesus, shine a light for us so we can truly see. Be with us during this "comma". Let us see what is hidden. Give us the knowledge and courage to know how or if to react. Take from us what is not ours to be concerned with and give us the strength to handle what is.

Day 9: How Do I Know God is by My Side?

by Jeff and Sonja Daly

Psalm 16:8

I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

I never had a vision or heard God's voice like Moses did on the mountain. I can't remember the first time I felt that God was in my heart, but I know when I feel the sun shining on my face, that is the warmth of God. When the wind is blowing in my hair he is sending me whispers. When I see the amazing colors of a rainbow he is sharing his beauty.

God is not with us just one day a week when we are in church, but he is there every second, every hour and every day. It is a personal connection and each of us experience this differently. You might hear a song and feel that God is speaking with you directly. You might be listening to a sermon and sense that it relates to you and your situation. You might read a devotional and know the words were meant specifically for you. This is when you know that God is with you.

Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Remember God will be there to provide comfort and give you strength during difficult times. Know that God will be there in your time of need. When there are difficult times in my life, I will close my eyes and ask God for guidance. I feel he puts me in the palm of his hand and closes it like a clam shell, giving me the protection that I need. I know he is there for me, and this gives me immediate comfort.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

If you allow him in your heart, you will receive peace and you will know that he is with you at every moment. How do you know God is by your side?

Numbers 6:24-26

Prayer: May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.



Day 10: The Lord is My Shepherd - by Marilyn Carlson

I find this way to meditate on God's word very helpful!

Take a verse and emphasize each word separately and think about it!

For example: Psalm 23:1!

The

Lord

Is

My

Shepherd!

My favorite word there is "my"! He is MY Shepherd!

Try it with other verses and see if it helps you!

I'll leave you with the words of Numbers 6:24-26.

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

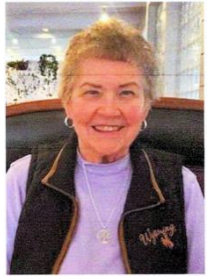
This promises us God's presence and favor!



Day 11: Prayer - by Jane Christenson

Mark 1:35

“And rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”



As I read the gospels, I see over and over again Jesus going off by himself to pray. He is always talking to the Father, seeking his will and direction. Each time he healed someone, faced persecution or taught the multitudes, he first looked and spoke to the Father, and then acted.

It makes me realize how important prayer is in my everyday life and activities. Just as Jesus needed the support and guidance of his Heavenly Father, so do I need His support. The Holy Spirit helps with those prayers and gives me direction and insight. I find talking to God helps me focus on my walk as a Christian and gives me the assurance of His presence with me always!

Let Us Pray

Dear Lord, thank you for being with me and allowing me to talk to you directly about my walk with you. Help me find the time to spend talking to you!

Day 12: The Blessing of Eating Together - by Dave Johnston

Acts 2:46 (NIV)

"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."



Growing up I remember going to church Sunday morning and then getting together as a family for Sunday dinner. Usually around 1 PM (or as soon after noon as possible). My dad would cook some kind of roast and potatoes. Grandma would bring a fruit pie. We ate and talked about what was going on. Sometimes my dad and grandma might get into some kind of discussion, even though my mom would tell Dad before Grandma came not to get in an argument. But they would always keep their voices down. I remember my dad saying it's a discussion until someone raises their voice and then it's an argument and he would not argue. But the point of what I'm saying is that we were together to talk about life and we all learned from it.

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy for family members to eat separately—grabbing meals on the go, eating in front of the TV, or being distracted by phones and other devices. I'm guilty of this myself.

However, throughout the Bible, we see how sharing meals was a vital part of community and faith. Jesus Himself often ate with His disciples, using those moments to teach, encourage, and build relationships.

When families eat together, they do more than just consume food; they build connections, share their hearts, and create lasting memories. Studies show that families who regularly eat together experience stronger bonds, better communication, and even healthier lifestyles. More importantly, these moments provide opportunities to pray together, express gratitude, and grow in faith as a family.

We need to make an effort to eat together as a family or friends as often as possible. To use this time to talk about our day, share blessings, and support one another.

Let Us Pray

Heavenly Father, thank You for the blessing of family & friends and the provision of food. Help us to cherish the time we have together at the table. May our conversations be filled with love, encouragement, and gratitude. Teach us to see these moments as sacred, where we can grow in unity and faith.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 13: Memorizing Scripture - by the Thusius Family

Psalm 119:9-11 (NIV)

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all of my heart, do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

Reflection: As part of the focus on Luke this year, I was recently reading Luke the 4th chapter. The beginning of this chapter (Luke 4: 1-13) is about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. It struck me that in every instance of temptation, Jesus quoted scripture to defeat the temptation. This spoke to me and I decided that I would recommit to memorizing scripture beginning at that point. I have been working on this for some weeks and started working on verses that would address the usefulness of God’s word. Psalm 119:9-11 was the verse that impacted me the most and is a verse that I go to in my heart and head often. As we continue to travel through the book of Luke together, I am focusing on instances in which Jesus uses scripture to teach, rebuke, correct or train and would encourage others to take note of this as well. We can never be completely like Jesus, but as we strive to live a life similar to his, a deep ownership of scripture seems to be a must.

Other supporting verses: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Joshua 1:8

Let Us Pray

Father, we thank you that you have provided your word to us and for allowing us to live in a country in which we are free to read your word at any time. Father, give us a thirst and hunger for your word for it is useful in all things. Help us to treasure it in our hearts that we might be able to defeat temptations as they arise each and every day. As we have opportunity, allow us to use your word as a witness of your love to those who we come in contact with. Give us not only the tools of your word but also the courage of your Spirit as we face challenges and opportunities alike. We pray for those who do not have access to your word that they would come to receive it and know it and we also pray that those of us who have are exposed to your word all the time, that we grow in our desire to know it in a deep and profound way. We pray all this in Jesus' name – Amen.

Day 14: The Mindset of Jesus - by Jane Christenson

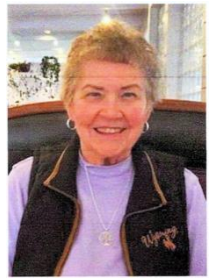
Philippians 2:5

"In your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

What does this look like? How can I relate to others as Jesus would? When I think of how Jesus treated those he surrounded himself with and those he encountered, I am amazed at his tolerance and, especially, the love he constantly showed to them – even his enemies.

He was patient, kind, not jealous or boastful, nor arrogant or rude. In other words, he loved just as seen in 1 Corinthians 13. This is how I need to act and show in all my relationships. The good part is I don't have to do it alone! The Holy Spirit living within me helps me.

Thank you, Lord, for sending the Spirit to live within me and giving me the mindset of Jesus!



Day 15: Trust - by Clara Birkel

Proverbs 3:5

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.”

This verse has been my “go to” for a long time BUT wondering how many times I seem to forget the “trust” and try to go back to “rely” on myself. That’s hard to admit; however, I believe, I’m not the only one that has done this.



Then I have to go back to my next verse of **Jeremiah 29:11**

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give to you a future and a hope.”

This one is a little harder and makes me think of the times that I questioned the “WHY?” or the purpose of what was happening. I then have to go back to “trust”. I still may not understand the “WHY?” BUT hopefully see the “REASON”.

Day 16: The Nudge - by Scott Siegrist

Bearing much fruit (much fruit!), might seem to conflict with the "not by works" idea, foundational in protestant faith, as written in Ephesians.



John 15:1-5



"I am the true vine, and my father is the vine grower. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes[a] to make it bear more fruit. 3 You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

If we continue on to verse 10 in Ephesians 2, we read, "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them." We see that it is not our striving to attain salvation by God, that we are doing these works; it is us being humble and obedient, leading where He calls.

We may see the actions that others are doing and compare their acts to the effort we have put in. We question which is "right" in serving the Lord. We think they have an easier task than our own. Looking to Romans 12:6-8, Paul states "6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness." We are each given abilities, though none of us are given the ability of bench warming. We need to get in the game. If you feel that nudge, the pull that Jesus is calling you to do something, don't resist.

If you have heard my story, you may recall that two of my greatest fears have been public speaking and writing. As a kid, I wanted to be an astronaut or a teacher when I grew up. I would play "school" at home with my younger brother. I must have been pretty good at it, as he learned to do long division and could recite the elements of the periodic table in kindergarten. This was one-on-one. I would shake and stutter, standing as a student in front of the class. It's no surprise, many years later, that God would rekindle this passion for teaching and spark an ability to lead a group. Hesitant to the nudge, but willing to give it a try, with His support, I stand before you all.

Let Us Pray

Lord God, You have crafted each of us wonderfully unique and all in Your image. We are gifted different abilities and called by You for different tasks. One body, many members in Christ. Help us to stay attentive to Your "nudge". That we could recognize Your call and be willing and able to answer. Let us praise the actions of others and uplift them in their faith. Guide us by Your Spirit that all we do be done for Your glory. In Jesus Name, Amen

Day 17: Gathering and Generosity - by 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.

Day 18: Come to the Table - by Pr. Tom

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?

Let Us Pray

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 19: by Pr. Tom

"It Is Well With My Soul" by Mallery Hope

Watch this YouTube by Chris Rice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HLYhEdh92E>

And feel free to sing along.



When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well with my soul

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate
And hath shed His own blood for my soul

It is well with my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more
Praise the Lord, it is well with my soul

It is well with my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend
Even so, it is well with my soul

It is well with my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul

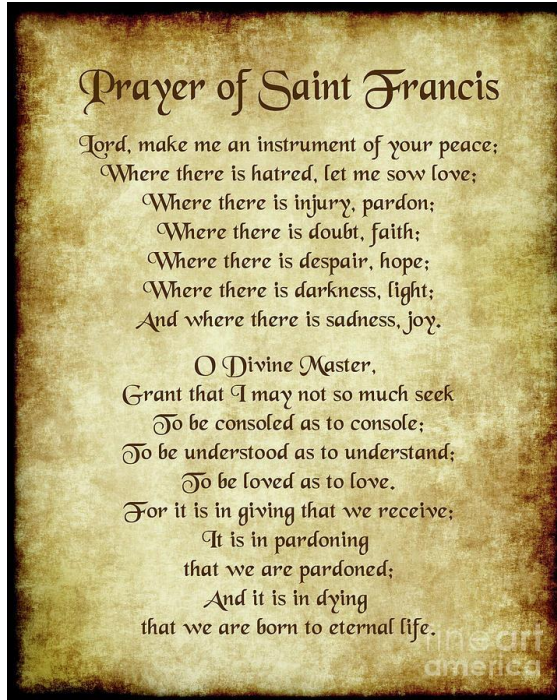
Day 20: Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace - by Pr. Tom

St. Francis was a peacemaker. He loved people and loved animals. He was a caregiver. He gave up all riches and comforts to serve the poor and poor in spirit. Hmmmm, Jesus did that too. He left the comforts of his home and hit the road as an itinerant preacher/camper.

Can you imagine?



We have the ability to travel anywhere by car, plane and boat these days. And many of us are on the road most days. Have you ever thought of yourself as an itinerant preacher? That God is sending you out and that wherever you go, you are speaking on his behalf. Better yet, that you and I are instruments of God's peace. And wherever anyone is struggling, we are to bring peace, comfort, hope to the situation.



Day 21: Reassuring That God Is Really with You - by 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. 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 22: Forgiveness - by Pr. Tom

You are carrying something. You are 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

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.



Let Us Pray

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 23: Living Free... to Seize the Day - by Pr. Tom

Every day is a fresh start. When we rise from our bed, we can rise in the newness of life. It's a choice. I don't know what your life entails. I don't know what fears, burdens, sufferings that you carry, day in and day out. So, I don't say this lightly nor do I think this is easy. But every day is a gift. A gift from God. We do not know if another tomorrow will come for us. We've only got today. Seize it. Carpe Diem! That means "Seize the day!". Carolyn Arends wrote a song that has touched my heart for years. Ponder the lyrics of "Seize the Day" in this simple video, watch:



<https://www.bing.com/search?q=lyrics%20to%20seize%20the%20day%20by%20carolyn%20arends&pc=cosp&ptag=G6C999N1234D020118A98C4AF66BD&form=CONBDF&conlogo=CT3210127>

What would make your day...today? Can you give yourself a few blessings from God? That special coffee or tea? Do something that just gives you joy, laughter, contentment. Allow yourself to be blessed...encouraged...receive grace from God's hand.

*Well one thing I've noticed wherever I wander
Everyone's got a dream he can follow or squander
You can do what you will with the days you are given
I'm trying to spend mine on the business of living
So I'm singing my songs off of any old stage
You can laugh if you want, I'll still say
Seize the day, seize whatever you can
'Cause life slips away just like hourglass sand
Seize the day, pray for grace from God's hand
Then nothing will stand in your way
Seize the day*

Let Us Pray

God, this is the day You have made, help me rejoice and be glad in it. May your Spirit make me mindful of the precious moments to seize to enjoy, to dwell in, that it may be well with my soul. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

Day 24: by Pr. Tom

Read Psalm 139 slowly a few times.



Ask yourself... “Am I content with how God designed me?” “Can I celebrate my beauty, complexity, simplicity, my mind, body, demeanor, my abilities, how God has wired me?” If so, thank God for what you appreciate about yourself. God is your Creator who knit you in your mother’s womb. God delights in you. God knows everything about you. God knows every word before it leaves your tongue. God knows.

Name your anxious thoughts to God. Name the offensive ways in you. Turn over those things that keep you from being loved by God. He loves you...as you are...because you are fearfully and wonderfully made...by Him.

Let Us Pray

Creator God, intimate friend, thank you for making me who I am. Help me to embrace all the blessings of my personality, abilities and life that You have given me. Grant me contentment and gratitude in Jesus' name, Amen.



Day 25: What Does God Require of His People - by 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.

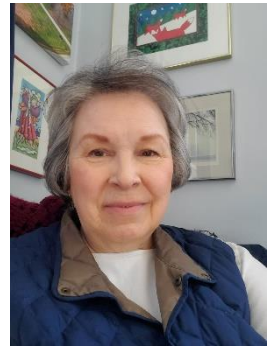
Lord, we ask for your grace to live out the principles of Micah 6:8 in our daily lives.
May we be your instruments of justice, mercy, and humility in the world.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Day 26: Patience - by Mary Hershoff

James 5:7-8

“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”



Each Spring I look forward to seeing the hints of new growth appearing after the cold winter. I check to see if the daffodil tips are pushing their way through the soil in the bed on the south side of our house where the sun has been warming it up. Will the crocus bulbs that I stuck in the ground last fall survive and bloom this Spring or did the squirrels dig them up? What about the parsley that I left in the planter – will it grow again or will I end up replanting?

Sometimes I’m not too patient and convince myself that early March is perfect for cool weather crops, and so I scatter some spinach and lettuce seeds to see if they will sprout. Not very successful with that experiment!

When the Spring sun melts the snow, and plants start greening up I’m happy and my inner farmer gets going. Add some compost, loosen up the soil, pick up packs of seedlings from the local garden centers, figure out what will go where, water thoroughly, and then wait for the fruits of my labors!

Ahh. Spring!

Shalom.

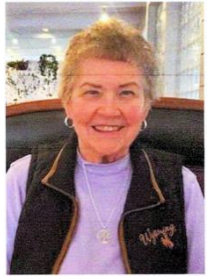
Mary Hershoff



Day 27: Separation - by Jane Christenson

Romans 8:35, 37-39

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”



When I read this verse, I wonder what can actually separate me from Christ. Can I, myself, do this? Can someone else convince me that I am not worthy or that I don't need him? As I continue reading and talking to the Holy Spirit, I get my answer:

(vs. 37-39)

“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.”

Hallelujah! This passage has given me faith in the love of God and I trust His word! May you also!

Let Us Pray

Lord, strengthen our faith in your love that you showed us by sending your son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins!
Thank you!

Day 28: Trouble - by George Monis

Psalm 46 says God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. The reality is that there will be difficult times, but God promises to be our refuge.



Does God come to our help when we are in trouble?

The short answer is emphatically “YES!” The next part of the answer is that it’s not always when or how we want it to happen. I could fill a whole cupboard with times that I’ve been in trouble and God has shown up. Most of the times we were so focused on our problem that we didn’t notice what God was doing to help us. When we look back on those times, we are able to see how God was present in helping us.

One recent example was our trip to Norway. We, of course, didn’t know what or where we would be taken. A ship malfunction provided us with an opportunity to meet a Norwegian “guide” who stayed with us the entire trip. He took us places we never would have experienced alone making our trip a “one of a kind”. God has a very funny sense of humor sometimes in providing relief from our burdens.

Let us close with a quote from Philippians 4:6-7

“Do not be anxious about anything, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus.”



Day 29: Two Are Better Than One or Brother's Keeper

by Dave Johnston

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV)

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up."



I was blessed to be a twin. Those who have a twin know what I'm talking about. My twin brother is Paul. We did a lot together growing up and even though we are far apart I talk with him on a regular basis. We loved the outdoors and did a lot together with friends and family. We have many stories regarding adventures together or the occasional trouble we might have gotten into, but we always had each other's back.

However, there is one thing that sticks in my head. When I was 10 years old, I ended up in a torso cast for 6 months. I couldn't tie my own shoes (no slip-on shoes back then) so my brother would tie my shoes every morning. If I was at school and my shoes came untied, he would be there to tie them again. We soon learned what a double knot was so they would be better at staying tied.

So being a twin is a blessing that comes with built-in companionship. It is a reminder that we are never alone; just as twins share a special connection, God desires for *all* of us to walk in unity with one another.

At times, twins may experience differences, but God's plans always prevail. No matter the challenges, He calls us to love, forgive, and walk together in faith.

Whether you are a twin or not, God wants you to know that you are never alone. He is always with you, guiding and strengthening you just as He does with those born together in a unique bond.

Let Us Pray

Heavenly Father, thank You for calling us to love and care for one another. Help us to be faithful keepers of our brothers and sisters, showing kindness, patience, and grace. Give us hearts that seek to serve rather than be served. May our lives reflect Your love as we look after those You have placed in our path. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 30: God Provides - by Scott Siegrist

Matthew 6:31-33

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."



We read over and over again in scripture, of how God the Father cares for His children. The fact that God cares, does not mean an easy road or a free ride. In most of these accounts, there was hardship that led to a testing of faith, and ultimately to God's provision.

In Genesis 22, God tests Abraham's faith by asking for the sacrifice of his son. Following God's command and ready to commit the act, an angel stops Abraham. Just then he finds a ram caught in the bushes, that he can sacrifice in place of his son. Abraham names that place Mount Moriah, "The Lord will provide". One thousand years later, Solomon built the temple on that same hill. After another thousand years, in that area, in similar manner to the ram as substitution for Isaac, God would provide His Son, Jesus, as sacrifice taking our place.



After their escape from slavery under the Pharaoh in Egypt, Moses lead the Hebrew people on a forty-year journey in the desert. Not long into their travels, they found themselves starving and second guessing their "freedom". From Exodus 16:4, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.'" God continued to provide this manna in the morning and quails in the evening until their arrival to the promised land.

We may read these passages and others that show the provision of God, in Biblical times, and wonder if He still provides in that way, today.

John Cooper, the lead singer of the Christian rock band Skillet has shared multiple testimonies of how God has provided for him and his family at just the right time. In one interview, he told of a time when they were struggling financially, and right when a bill was due, they unexpectedly received a royalty check in the exact amount they needed. Aside from God, what are the chances of that?

In life, there are many things I would not have achieved on my own, would not have received by my own doing. Things that have worked out by His hand. Being a programmer, with an attention to detail bordering OCD at times, I wrote myself a budget app to track monthly bills, able to chart out the coming year. In my most recent example of God's provision for me, the spark of inspiration for this devotional, I had noticed that a few months down the road, my budget would dip into the red. An email came in asking for updates to a program I had written 20 years ago and hadn't touched for a good 10 years. And I would be getting paid for the update. I see that as a gift from God, putting all the pieces in place to land just right.

In our society, we tend to have these ideas of "earned" it or "entitled" to it. If we take on more of a Biblical mindset, we can see even everyday items as gift, provided by our loving Father.

Day 31: Much Fruit: A Life Connected to Christ - by Dave Johnston

John 15:5 (NRSV)

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5 (NIV)

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.



Jesus uses the image of a vine and branches to teach us about spiritual growth and fruitfulness. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must remain connected to the vine. Likewise, our lives will only produce lasting spiritual fruit when we stay connected to Christ.

What does it mean to bear "much fruit"? It means living a life that reflects God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). It also means influencing others for Christ, serving with humility, and growing in faith.

But Jesus also reminds us of an important truth—**apart from Him, we can do nothing.**

No matter how talented, wise, or strong we think we are, without Him, our efforts will not produce lasting spiritual impact.

How do we apply this?

By: Spending time daily in prayer and reading God's Word to remain connected to Him.

By: Examining our lives—are we bearing spiritual fruit? If not, ask God to help us grow.

By: Trusting that God prunes and refines us so that we may be even more fruitful (John 15:2).

Let Us Pray

"Lord, help us stay connected to You, the true vine. We want to bear much fruit for Your glory. Fill us with Your Spirit, prune what hinders our growth, and use our lives to reflect Your love. Amen."

Day 32: Love - by Elaine Monis

God is love. I John 4:8

Love comes from God. I John 4:7

Love God and love each other. I John 4:21

We Love because God first loved us. I John 4:19

Real love is not our love for God, but his Love for us. I John 4:10

My favorite chapter in the Bible is I John 4. John speaks about love:
God's love, and our new life because we are loved.



The Bible verse I John 4:19 was written on our Wedding Cake and has been a cornerstone of our marriage: We love because God first loved us.

If I were to choose my Confirmation verse today, I would choose John 4:9: God showed His love for us when he sent his only Son into the world to give us life. This gift, the gift of grace, brings life, and love, and joy to all of us.

Our daughter's pastor closes the worship service with this benediction:

“And now may the grace of God, deeper than our imagination,
the strength of Christ, stronger than our need,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit, richer than our togetherness,
guide and sustain us this day and in all our tomorrows.”



Day 33: Doubt

Have you ever thought about doing something good or nice only to talk yourself out of it? It happens to me. There is that little voice in your head that tries to mess us up. Is that Satan? What is that? Thoughts like these come to mind:

- The little I can do won't make a difference.
- This is going to take a lot of time, is it worth it?
- There are so many charities and causes I can't give to them all.
- How many is this really helping and how many are just taking advantage?

I wonder what Jesus would do. Well, on one occasion 10 lepers saw Jesus from a distance. Perhaps they had heard about Jesus, we don't know why, but they asked Jesus to have mercy on them and to heal them. Without getting close to them he told them to go show themselves to the priest. They must have had faith. They did what he asked. As they were walking to the priest, they noticed that the leprosy disappeared and they were healed. Of the 10 only one, a Samaritan at that, came back to thank Jesus for not just healing him but totally changing his life.

Now, I'm pretty sure if you look for an explanation of this passage you won't find what I'm about to say but sometimes these passages speak to us in ways we need at the time. What struck me recently was that only one of the 10 was truly affected by what Jesus did. The other 9, it seems pretty clear, didn't understand or truly appreciate what had happened. In Luke where this story appears Jesus asks "Were not all 10 lepers cured? Where are the other 9? Has no one returned to give praise to God other than this foreigner?"

The fact that only one, the least expected one, returned didn't stop Jesus from healing and saving others. He made a point the crowd could hear but didn't then seek out only those that deserved his healing. He never sought validation. He did what he could do. So why am I looking for some sort of validation, some sort of measure? Those things in my head try to move me to do nothing. I think this Bible story tells us, among so many other things, to do what we can and not look for some sort of reward or thanks or validation for what we are doing. Simply focus on what we can do and do it. Don't focus on what I don't have control over.

Let Us Pray

Lord, clear my head of false reasoning. Nourish my desire and give me the strength to do what I can do to help others. Let me be pleased in knowing that I'm following your words to "love your neighbor as yourself". Thank you for being with me on my quest.

Day 34: Saved - by Mary Koepke

Psalm 121:7-8

The Lord will keep you from all harm--he will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

That day in February, 1980, was a sunny one...and that was part of the problem. Our 7-year-old son John had just gotten on the school bus. In our kitchen, I was carrying our 3-year-old daughter Ruth when I heard Jim coming into the house. That was most unusual at this time of day. Normally, Jim was hauling feed for the cattle.

I saw him standing by our back door and noticed some blood by his nose. "I have just been hit by a train," he said quite calmly. I didn't believe him at first...not until an ambulance and police car went past our house and toward the railroad track about a mile away. Neither one of us knew quite what to do. I was too shaken to do anything. In a few minutes, though, we saw the ambulance coming back up the road, and Jim walked out to meet them. He said later that he told them he thought he was "the guy they were looking for". They immediately put him in the ambulance.

Certainly, the Lord was watching Jim's coming and going that morning. Jim was inside the cab of his 5020 John Deere tractor driving with a wagonload of feed behind. As he approached the railroad track, the sun was in his eyes. He looked far down the track, saw nothing and crossed over. But the train was short, only 3 engines and a caboose. It hit him, broke the tractor in two, and Jim fell out of a window in the cab and landed onto the ground. Remarkably he walked to another tractor and drove himself home...and met me at the back door.

At the hospital it was determined that he had a separated shoulder and would need surgery, but was otherwise just fine. As we look back now, we see that both our lives changed that day. Going to church and becoming much more active in church activities became our way of giving thanks to the Lord. Now 45 years on, we both praise Him for watching over both of us, all of us, that day.

Let Us Pray

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for saving Jim's life that day and for giving us many years together with our family. We have been so blessed. Your goodness is overwhelming. In His name we pray. Amen



Day 35: Rooted in Water - by Mary Hershoff

Jeremiah 17:7-8

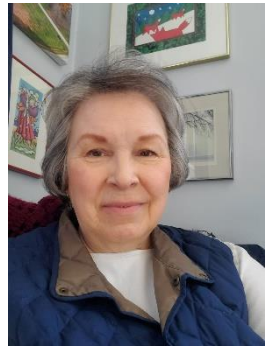
“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

Have you ever gone through a period in your life when you struggled to see a positive outcome? When each day was a challenge to feel like you were accomplishing something? It's in those times that we can be assured that our trust in the Lord will provide the nourishment for our souls, and guide us through to a better day.

If we plant our roots in the streams of living water that God provides – worship, prayer, Christian fellowship, reading the Bible – we will have what we need to flourish through the tough times.

Let Us Pray

Dear Lord, thank you for the living waters that you provide to sustain us through tough times. Help us to drink those waters daily, so that we can bear much fruit for you!
Shalom.



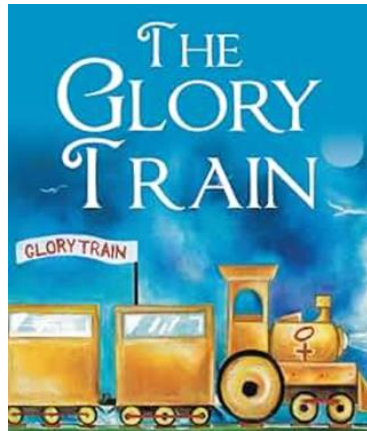
Day 36: The Glory Train - by George Monis

As a young boy, I remember the sound of the steam engine's whistle as the steam train passed through the village of Ashippun. This sound was especially strong at night when the air was crisp and clear. That sound brought thoughts of excitement to my young boy's heart. I only remember seeing the steam engine once during the day as it had stopped to get a fresh fill of water. That was a site to behold!



We can look at our life's journey as a train ride with God being the engineer. God would desire all to be passengers on his train of faith. Accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior is our ticket to ride! God loves us and desires the passenger cars to be filled to overflowing with those who accept him and love him.

We don't need a ticket to ride because Christ has already paid our fare to be on the Glory Train. Have you made the decision to get on the train? It's free and easy, just accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. He has paid the price. It is our free ride to Heaven.



Day 37: Fit of Rage? - by Scott Siegrist

John 2:13-22

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.



Though we can see the wrong that was being committed in the temple, profiting off the sale of items for sacrifice, was Jesus' reaction in a rage? He flipped the tables, chased out the animals and poured out the coins. Jesus? Yes, Jesus.

Most people see my "Sunday best". I admit to my flaws, even rage at times. You don't see me take off from a stop light that has been red for too long. Then it changes to a green arrow with no one waiting to turn. All the while, cars are collecting to go straight, and I am becoming more impatient.

Did Jesus act in rage? Verse 15, easily overlooked, states that Jesus made a whip of cords. He was prepared and deliberate in His actions. The cleansing of the temple was not in a triggered fit of rage, but was carried out in His righteous anger.

We often think of Jesus as soft, quiet and gentle. That is true in most situations, but Jesus was neither timid, nor weak, nor frail. When necessary, He used physical confrontation and was oftentimes bold in his defiance of authority.

Let Us Pray

Lord, Paul wrote of self-control as a fruit of the spirit. Let Your Spirit guide our actions. Keep us from actions that would harm others or harm ourselves. There is a place for anger... when focused toward the evils of this world. Let that anger work in a constructive way and not cloud our judgement or lead us to rash decisions. Help us to mirror the servant nature of Jesus, humble toward others, reflecting His love. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Day 38: Rest - by Randy Parlee

Matthew 11:28

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

This is my favorite bible passage and the only one I have memorized. I think it through at least once a day.

A yoke is a heavy wooden harness that fits over the shoulders of an ox. It is attached to a piece of equipment (like a plow) that the ox is to pull.

A priest once told me that in Jesus' time, many yokes fit two oxen side-by-side. Hence the analogy: Jesus is on one side of the yoke, and you are on the other side with Him. As you "plow through life", with its many labors and burdens, Jesus guides you, teaches you, and keeps you on the narrow path of virtue as a Christian.

The path is not always easy (witness the martyrs). You will face tests, trials, and temptations as a Christian.

But in Matthew 11:28, Jesus is saying this to me: It may not always be easy to follow His path, *but a life of sin is infinitely more burdensome and laborious*. He is saying: Take *my* yoke upon you, not the yoke of sin. My yoke is easy by comparison, and you will find peace and rest in the presence of my gentle and humble heart.

Let Us Pray

Jesus, we place ourselves under your yoke and thank you for your gentle and loving guidance through life. Teach us the path of virtue and protect us from the weary burden of a sinful life.



Day 39: Bearing Much Fruit - by Cindy Schlieve

John 15:1-17 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

[JESUS SAID...] **15** *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Pastor has given us a theme this year to "Bear Much Fruit". The verses above are one of the places in the Bible that truly emphasizes Jesus' directive to each and every one of us. It appears to me, based on this reading, that at least one way we will be able to bear much fruit is to love each other. That does not mean that we love only our own families, but that we love every single person in this world. Now that is truly a tall order to follow! To me it means that I must set aside some judgements I may have against words and actions that are done by others. It means I must accept that others have another set of beliefs from my own. I don't think it means my beliefs are not important, but that my judgement is not warranted against other people. That is God's place, and His alone. So, opening our minds to see, hear, and work with others is a very vital part of "bearing much fruit". We cannot accomplish all that God has asked of us if we refuse to try to understand and work with others in a productive manner in order to accomplish the good that needs to be done. Jesus said that we must believe in him and by doing so we will be granted all that we ask for from God. I believe that means that God is always with us and will guide us in accomplishing the tasks he has set out for us if we only ask for his help and guidance. **Isaiah 41:10** reads "I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you." **Psalms 34:4** reads "I sought the Lord, and he answered me, he delivered me from all my fears".

GOD IS ALWAYS THERE FOR US. We only need to take time to be still and listen to his guidance for us. Let us pray.

Let Us Pray

Dear Lord, help me to take the time I need to look for your guidance and ask for your help to accomplish the tasks that you have given me. Help me to discern those tasks and trust only in you. In Jesus Holy Name I pray. **Amen**



Day 40: Crazy People – Trusting People - by Dave Johnston

I'm listening to this song by Casting Crowns called "Crazy People" (*Following are some of the lyrics*) and thought that's what we have to do to "Bear Much Fruit".)

Lyrics (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nr5-cW_JZyl)

*Who builds a boat with no clouds in sight?
Who walks up to a giant and picks a fight?
Who turns a lion's den into a petting zoo?
Who can have church in a fiery furnace? Well, I'll tell you
Crazy people trust in Jesus
Following Him wherever He leads us
Kingdom seekers, walk by faith believers
Here's the church, here's the steeple, here's to all God's crazy people
Who brings a Bible into a public school?
Who shares the gospel even when the world calls them a fool?
Who's not afraid to go against the flow?
Well cancel me and call me one of those - 'Cause I'm one of those*



To bear "**Much Fruit**" we need to put ourselves out there. We need to "trust" in Jesus and yes, we need to be a little crazy. Nothing is wrong with that.

"Jesus shows us what it means to trust with a crazy kind of faith. He trusted His Father's plan completely, even when it led to the cross. He trusted His disciples with His mission, knowing they were imperfect and would fail at times. And He trusted in love—always.

Jesus calls us to trust in Him with the same boldness. It might seem crazy to the world to put our faith in something we can't always see or understand. But when we trust Jesus, we're reminded that His plans are higher, His love is perfect, and His promises never fail.

Trusting Him isn't crazy—it's life-changing."

He trusted His disciples with His mission, knowing they were flawed and would fail at times. Yet, He reminded them, *'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last'* (John 15:16).

Jesus also calls us to trust Him with childlike faith: *'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'* (Matthew 18:3). This kind of trust may seem crazy to the world, but it's rooted in the truth of His love and faithfulness.

Trusting Jesus might seem crazy to the world, but it's the kind of faith that changes lives, moves mountains, and brings hope to the hopeless."

Let Us Pray

We want to trust You with a faith so wild and fearless that it defies all logic. We want to live in the kind of trust that says, "Even if it doesn't make sense, we know our Jesus has us." Help us to let go of the need to control, to figure everything out, and to understand every detail. Teach us to jump into Your arms with reckless abandon, knowing You will always catch us.