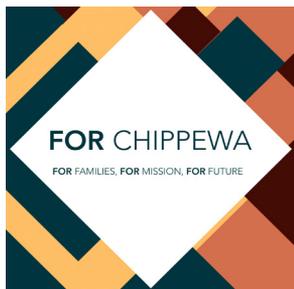


FOR CHIPPEWA

FOR FAMILIES, FOR MISSION, FOR FUTURE

Our Devotions:
Our Why



February 10 - March 3, 2019

Dedication:

As we prayerfully consider our contributions of talent, time, and treasure to Central Lutheran's capital campaign, these devotions are intended to bring us back to our "why." Loving God. Loving people.

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Abbreviations:

- NIV: New International Version
- NLT: New Living Translation
- NLV: New Live Version
- NRSV: New Revised Standard Version

February 10

author: Pastor Aaron Sturgis



FOR CHIPPEWA

Genesis 15:5 (NRSV)

He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

God adds a visual to the promise. Abram is told to look to the night stars and count them if he is able, that his descendants will be that numerous. In the ancient desert, the number of stars must have been staggering; he must have been able to see the swath of the Milky Way. In the years left to wait between this word and the fulfillment in Isaac's birth, Abraham must have been bolstered when he saw the night sky and remembered this word.

At the heart of this interaction is faith and trust. If Abram understands God to be righteous, to be one whose word is firm and secure, to be one who will make good on God's promises, then Abram can believe. The same is true for us. Belief is hard enough when there is a delay between God's promises and their fulfillment. It would be nigh impossible if the God in whom we believe is not trustworthy, is not righteous.

But we know God because we have Jesus. Today, we are embarking on an amazing journey. A journey that is leading us boldly into the future. I won't lie, buying and renovating can create some anxiety. But we will continue to place our faith and our trust in a loving God who is calling us to simply love Him and to love people... to be #ForChippewa.

Lord God, may I be a blessing to others. Enable me to be consistent in my faith for the sake of those who depend on me, and help me to be focused on You, the source of all good things. Thank You, Lord God, for the blessings You give me and all of us through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Psalm 27:13-14 (NLT)

*Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.*

Wait patiently for the Lord.

Be brave and courageous.

Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.

When David wrote Psalm 27, life for him was about as bleak as it could be. He was hiding from his enemies who were chasing him, so they could restrain, dethrone, and even kill him. Yet, he is CONFIDENT that he will see the goodness of the Lord in his life before he dies.

Wow! The road of life we all travel has some mighty hard bumps... hills to climb... dark times. Times when I know I have questioned: Is there a God? Why is this happening? I have felt anger... disbelief... no hope... loss of faith! Yet, he says (v. 14) to be brave and wait for the Lord's goodness. My response would have been: "Huh? Are you serious? Nice words, but I don't see this happening!"

But, it did HAPPEN! It HAPPENED in my family's life! Three years ago, on March 8, my son-in-law (an avid bicyclist) was struck by a hit-and-run driver. In the blink of an eye, our lives were turned up-side-down... six weeks in ICU... three months in the hospital... life/death surgeries... machines keeping him alive... a long journey that ended successfully.

"We will hold you up no matter what the outcome," said a friend! Relatives, friends, strangers, etc. fulfilled that quote. It is a spiritual thing! There are no words to explain it... you couldn't see or touch it, but we could FEEL it! All the love, hope, and faith being sent to us by thousands of people all over the world and from all religious backgrounds surrounded us and gave us the strength we so needed. Those acts of love touched our souls. We, indeed, felt the goodness of the Lord!!

Dear Lord, please make our hearts and souls open to your goodness even during our troubling times. Don't let us give up on you. May we also be that goodness to others. Amen.

February 12

author: Sue Houkom



FOR CHIPPEWA

Matthew 6:19-21 (NRSV)

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

What is our treasure? At first glance, it may seem this passage is talking about our money and possessions, but notes in the Lutheran Study Bible and commentary in Tom Wright's *Matthew Everyone*, lead to a deeper meaning, about our motivations and priorities.

These verses are part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and follow three admonitions in which he calls out people who put on a show while fasting, praying, and giving to the poor. Their treasure is the recognition they get, the pride they feel in being seen by others doing good deeds. That's earthly treasure, subject to earthly dangers like jealousy, gloating, and being self-serving. It is life-draining and there is no future in it.

Jesus, instead, says that we should do these things quietly and unobtrusively. Does that mean going into a closet to pray, or donating anonymously? Not necessarily. It means that we do good deeds, not for the attention they bring us, but because of our relationship to a loving God who saves us, and who desires above all else that we love Him, and through Him, love others. Our focus is on Him, and not ourselves. That's life-sustaining heavenly treasure, in the here and now, and in our future, and cannot be stolen from us.

Dear God, thank you for creating us to be in a relationship with you. Let that relationship guide our hearts and our actions. In your name we pray. Amen.

Mark 4:20 (NLT)

“And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

The beginning of Mark chapter 4 starts with Jesus speaking to the people. There are so many people in attendance, that Jesus decides to go out on the water in a boat to speak to the people on the shoreline! In order to effectively communicate his lesson, Jesus uses a parable about something most people around could associate with: Farming. Later after the crowds had left, Jesus was alone with the disciples. It was then that he realized that even they had not fully understood the message and meaning of His parable. I’m sure even for Jesus that must have been a bit frustrating! In verse 13, he says “Don’t you understand this parable?” Many times, Jesus takes spiritual lessons and addresses them to his followers in ways that are real and relatable. The use of seeds and soil are something seen multiple times in the Bible. Mark 4:20 emphasizes that having a firm foundation in our faith through both scripture and our relationship with God has the potential to reach and affect the world!

I remember when I was a child, my sister and I each planted a pine tree in our back yard. Hers eventually grew and became a beautiful 20-foot-tall tree. Mine, however, never grew and eventually just disappeared. It wasn’t until years later that my mom came clean as to the fate of my poor tree. That it had in fact been accidentally run over by her with the riding lawnmower!!! My poor mother, she probably felt so terrible. Unfortunately, that poor little tree didn’t stand a chance. Even with deep roots, it probably wouldn’t have survived. Luckily, Jesus will protect us from the riding lawnmowers in our lives, as long as we put our faith and trust in him.

God please instill in us the desire and faith to shine your light to the world. Let them see your glory, and your grace for our lives. Help us continue to pursue you, and become closer to you. I pray that as our church grows that we will all continue to point all those to you and you alone. Amen.

February 14

author: Afton Wergeland



FOR CHIPPEWA

1 Corinthians 1:7 (NLV)

You have the gifts of the Holy Spirit that you need while you wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to come again.

Each one of us is blessed with certain spiritual gifts. No one person is good at everything, but there is something that everyone is good at. What one person may be lacking, another person excels at and in this way we can work together to carry out God's work. The time we spend waiting for Jesus to return should be filled with using our individual strengths to live our lives in His image. This way we will be prepared for the day when The Lord returns. All Christians are equally blessed with their own kind of gift, and no gift is better or worse than another. We are all like puzzle pieces that fit together in just the right way.

Holy Spirit, please strengthen me in my search for the spiritual gifts I have been given. Help me to understand how my gifts fit with the strengths of others, so we may work together to make the world a better place while we await the return of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NLT)

*And God will generously provide all you need.
Then you will always have everything you need
and plenty left over to share with others.*

Several thoughts popped into my mind when I read this verse. For instance, "How much do I need?" "How much should I share?" "What actually do I have that I could share?"

Most of us probably think these verses are about sharing our money, giving it to the church, giving it to the poor, giving it freely to whoever may cross our path that looks in need. That's all good and true. However, I believe it's much more than that. We each have much more than money that God has given us. We also have at least one special gift generously given to us from God. How are we using it?

It reminds me of a quote from William James, a 19th Century Philosopher. He said, "The great use of life is to spend it for something that will last forever." What he seems to be saying is, "When we die, what do we leave behind? Are we making a difference with our God-given gifts? If not, why are we here?"

So, what are the gifts God has generously given you? The common ones mentioned in the Bible are Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord. But, what other gifts do you have that you could share with others? Hospitality? Social Ministry? Carpentry? Gardening? Farming? Singing? Cooking? Etc.

Now the question becomes much more than just about sharing money, but also about reaching out and touching others with the gifts God has given you and actually making a difference in their lives.

How are you sharing the gifts generously given you from God that will last beyond your life?

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for blessing us with your generous gifts. Please open our eyes to these gifts and give us the courage to use them to your glory. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

February 16
author: Claire Parker

FOR CHIPPEWA

Luke 18:16 (NLT)

Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children."

What does it mean to have "childlike" faith? In this passage, Jesus calls children to approach him when their guardians try to stop them. Not only did Jesus invite the children forward, he said "*for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*"¹ Belongs. We belong to God, and his kingdom. While it's hard to pin down what "childlike faith" really means, children have at least three unique qualities that we can learn from:

1. Children do not follow rules they don't understand! Often times explaining to a child why a certain rule is important helps them make the choice to follow it. So it is with us and sin. Commandments aren't here for us to feel like we must follow a rigid rule book, but they are there to protect us from further hurts because sin not only hurts God², it hurts us and the people around us.
2. Children are infinitely curious, asking "why" over and over again? I know I was one of those kids; sorry Mom. They wonder about things, and wonder why life is the way it is. God doesn't call us into a "it is how it is" lifestyle, but asks us to press into the unknown. Go to God with your questions; he can handle it!
3. Children are infinitely awestruck. Infants look at the world with new eyes, and are constantly excited about life! We still have the ability to do this as growing individuals. How might we do this when some of us may feel as if we've seen it all? Give thanks. Give thanks consciously to God for the beauty you encounter. Give thanks for the trials you face. Give thanks for what is seemingly mundane.

We were made to be in relationship with God. This does not mean we were made to follow mundane rules without purpose. This does not mean we were made to check going to church and reading our Bibles off a long grocery list. This does not mean that we were made to live a passive life. It means that we were made with a space in our hearts that only God can fill. It means that we were made to belong in His Kingdom.

Creator of heaven, earth, and me. Thank you for the joys I've seen today, and thank you for the ways in which you've given me opportunities for growth. Thank you for the grace that you offer to me every day to be in relationship with you. Allow me to learn more about what it means to have childlike faith, to be a resident of your kingdom, and to be saved by your radically loving grace. Amen!

Footnotes: 1. v.16, NIV, emphasis added 2. God is all powerful and all present- this statement is recognizing that God sees our sin and loves us so much that he aches for us to no longer sin. This doesn't mean that we, as mortal humans, have the power to harm God.

Matthew 25:40 (NRSV)

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

"Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me."

The words of this song I often sang as a child take me back to a nine-year-old me on a mahogany pew in Bismarck, North Dakota, where the world seemed so big, yet I knew Jesus was asking me to help people in my own little ways. Listening to those words in my memory, I feel a child-like desire to serve with a pure love for Jesus.

My parents rarely talked about their faith or explained why they lived the way they lived, they just lived and I soaked it all in. What did I soak in?

- Be kind, even to those who aren't kind to you.
- Be generous with your time whenever asked and, if you aren't asked, volunteer.
- Be generous with your money. Use it to support what you believe in.
- Always give to God first and you will always have enough to cover your own needs. (My dad actually said this to me. This is the only spoken spiritual advice I ever remember him giving and I have tried to honor it my whole life.)
- Use your skills to help others. If you don't have the skills, learn them or help find someone who has them.
- Fight for what you believe in, politely but firmly.
- Every person must be treated with respect, no exceptions.

Thanks Mom & Dad!

Jesus, help me to see you in every person I meet. Give me your servant's heart to treat everyone the way I wish to treat you.
Amen.

February 18, 2019
author: Sue Houkom

FOR FAMILIES

Mark 3:35 (NRSV)

Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.

In the verses just before this one, Jesus is surrounded by a crowd and his mother and siblings are trying to enter and get his attention. When he is told of this, Jesus asks, "Who are my mother and brothers?" While this question and Jesus' answer above may seem harsh, it is very good news for us. You and I can claim close family relationship with the Savior of the world! And since Jesus is God's son, that means we, too, are children of God.

For me, this family of God is embodied in the people of Central Lutheran. When we moved to Chippewa Falls about five years ago, the community at Central made the two of us, who lived far from children and other relatives, feel at home. There were inspiring messages and music, friendly people at coffee after worship, opportunities for education and small group Bible and book studies, chances to help out in the community by serving meals at Barnabas House and Agnes' Table, and offering comfort to others through Mission Possible projects; all of which were occasions to grow into closer relationships with God and people.

Then, when my husband died suddenly last spring, my church family surrounded and supported me with love and prayers, and even helped plant my garden. It is through the words and actions of these brothers and sisters in Christ that I have felt my Heavenly Father's presence, love and care.

Dear Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of making us brothers and sisters with your Son, and therefore, your children. Guide us to lead lives that reflect our love for you and one another. In your name we pray. Amen.

Deuteronomy 6: 6-7

"These Commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

How often do you talk to your children? I mean beyond the usual "Pick up your clothes," or "Don't cross your eyes or they'll stay like that." Deuteronomy 6:6-7 is talking about a special type of talk; you are the sermon your children need to hear beyond the one hour in church and/or Sunday school.

Growing up my Mom and Dad had a book entitled "Little Visits with God." Every night after supper Dad would read the short devotions, usually only a page or two. It covered various topics such as "Service with A Smile," "The Fun of Being Kind," "Learning God's Way," and so on. There were about 200 devotions. We heard all of them, some more than once. It was funny how sometimes the devotion directly related to something we did or didn't do that day.

After Dad read the devotion, he would ask my brothers and sister and me what lesson we learned from the devotion. He would also ask how it applied to our lives and the lives of those around us.

Those talks would stick with us because instead of being told to do something we were asked to be a part of the discussion. We were never told our opinions were wrong, but sometimes Dad steered us into considering another point of view. His new viewpoint always seemed to make sense to us.

Even though Sunday School, Confirmation and going to church on Sunday were an important part of my faith journey, those devotions more important than any of the others put together.

Dear Heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children. We pray that you will guide us as we raise them, that we may teach them to love one another as your Son, Jesus Christ taught us. So, one day they will have their own strong relationship with Christ and pass that along to their children. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

February 20, 2019

author: Janet Krause

FOR FAMILIES

Galatians 6:10 (NRSV)

So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

At first reading, I thought Paul was telling us to be exclusive, "especially for those of the family of faith," reminding me of the clique behavior I often see in teenagers. Knowing this thinking doesn't match up with Jesus' teachings, I dug deeper. It turns out that the churches in Galatia were having some disagreements about what was required of people to become Christians. Some believed that you first had to follow all the laws required of Jews. Paul had helped to start the churches in Galatia so people wrote to him asking for guidance with this dispute. His purpose in writing to them was to remind them that through Jesus, they had been set free from Jewish law to live within the new law of grace. Here I remind myself: grace is getting what you don't deserve. This message holds true for us today. No one deserves God's grace; it is a gift to anyone who believes Jesus is our Savior. Meaning Christianity is not an exclusive club. Hence, we serve everyone, hoping to bring everyone into the family.

Father God, you have given us all a huge family of Christian brothers and sisters, yet there are so many more you wish were members of our faith family. Open our hearts and eyes to opportunities to bring others into this family. Please, give us the actions and words that draw others to you. Amen.

Ephesians 2:19 (NLV)

From now on you are not strangers and people who are not citizens. You are citizens together with those who belong to God. You belong in God's family.

My Mom grew up in a family of eight siblings. Despite being quite poor, there were always guests at their dinner table. Friends, relatives and strangers were continually welcomed. As you can imagine, at times there were a lot of people around that table! Grace was always given (in Norwegian) before dinner. Guests would often ask my grandma if it was too much to feed them all. Grandma would reply, "There's always room for one more." We framed her words and have them hanging in our kitchen. They remind us that Grandma offered a lot more than dinner. She offered grace, love, and family.

My parents shared my Grandma's gift of bringing people together. We went on many family camping trips in which campfire time was the absolute best. My dad was leader of the Campfire Band. He would line us up and give us a part (my personal favorite was the trombone). We'd all "play" the same tune with our imaginary instruments and parade around the campfire. The first night the neighboring campers would give us a sideways glance and then kind of chuckle. By the third night they were pulling up their lawn chairs near the side of the road waiting for our parade. By the fifth night, they were official members of the band! I remember feeling this great sense of belonging, of being part of something... big. It felt warm and good and peaceful.

Good and gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your son and for the family you provide to us all through him. Help me to connect with others and draw them into your love so that they know the peace of being in his family. Amen.

February 22, 2019
author: Scott Parker

FOR FAMILIES

1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

This scripture reminds me of my late brother Jeff. He played in the National Hockey League but was very humble about his career. He had a lot of health problems and was in a great deal of pain but you never would have known it. When you were with him, he wanted to hear about your life. He was very encouraging and had a great sense of humor. He was kind and compassionate. People loved being around him.

The following is one of many similar notes we received after his death.

"My friend and I were getting bullied by a meathead in Jr. High, and my brother asked Jeff to keep an eye out for us. Not only did he keep an eye out for us, he took me completely under his wing. The 9th grade bullies quickly knew that we weren't to be touched. Not only that, but Jeff took to sitting next to me in study hall in the Library. I went from scared little 7th grader to hanging out with the biggest hockey stud in 9th grade. Because of Jeff I have raised my kids to be that kid that stands up for the bullied, be the kid that welcomes the new kid, be that kid that doesn't join in with the bullies because it's easier. In the years since, I always thanked him for that whenever I saw him, and he always downplayed it. But it was a big deal to me. He really did have a heart of gold."

Oh Lord, guide me in the ability to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Help me to see the good in others and generously give of my time, resources, and love. Amen.

1 John 3:16 (NRSV)

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

The verse is saying since Jesus gave up his life for us, to show our thanks, appreciation, and love, we can give up our time and things for others to show them the love of Jesus. For example, we can give our time and work at a food pantry, help with Toyland, buy an extra laundry detergent for someone in need, and even donate money so students can go to Luther Park. Our brothers and sisters will feel the love of Jesus when we do acts for them and people around them. A couple will have food on their table that you provided. A parent will smile knowing their child is receiving a Christmas gift that wasn't expected. A family struggling to make ends meet finally gets to wash their clothes. Students get to learn about Jesus for a full week while doing many activities they wouldn't get to do all summer anywhere else. All of these children and adults will feel the love of Jesus through the time we give and the things we donate, and we will feel his love by how they react to our acts of kindness.

God, open my heart up to others who need to see and feel your love. You sent Jesus down to show us your love by helping others. Open my eyes to see the love you give me daily. Amen.

February 24, 2019
author: Kellee Petik

FOR FAMILIES

Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)

Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important. Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

This scripture has seen me through some of my greatest moments and some of my deepest grief and sadness. Life can be a rollercoaster of events and emotions. As we rejoice in those moments that bring us great happiness, we must also turn to God in our darkest pain. Personally, two of my darkest moments were my divorce after 18 years and seeing my child suffer through an unimaginable experience and not be able to "fix it." I remember asking "Why has God done this to me, to us?" As I cried out for help, I spoke to a wise person who told me it wasn't God "doing this to us" but God was "helping us get through this." What a revelation! At those times, we need our hearts, souls and minds to be open to God to allow the grief, anger and despair to lift and pass. We allow the goodness and grace of God to enter and to see us through to brighter moments, ones that we give praise and thanks to God for!

Love your neighbor as yourself. Anyone else find it hard to love yourself at times? You are not alone! Part of healing is to truly find yourself, be comfortable as you are. That's a work in progress, learning to value yourself and give YOU the time and energy needed. Loving your neighbor is finding the good in situations, being happy for them, for their joy and accomplishments, setting aside envy, although at times it can be tough. Everyone has goals and dreams. Focus on your goals and the steps needed to accomplish them. Loving your neighbor can happen in so many ways; that warm hug, sharing a life experience, just being there and listening. Some of the best "neighbors" I have experienced were the ones that prayed for me, checked in on me, supported me no matter what, and gave me the honesty that at times I didn't want to hear, but you know what? I am so thankful for them and for our loving God who is the true rock and salvation! Find the good, sing praises, and help be the light to your "neighbors!"

I pray with you... Heavenly Father, please guide our hearts, souls, and minds to be a reflection of you. Allow us to let your grace enter and set aside our own ways so that we may act in your glory. Help us to love ourselves so that we may love one another and be a neighbor to those we meet. Allow us to be present in life and to learn to enjoy the rollercoaster ride for all of its ups and down. May we point to you and give you thanks. In your name we pray, Amen!



FOR MISSION

February 25, 2019
author: Christopher Petik (age 8)

Luke 4:8 (NRSV)
*Jesus answered him, "It is written,
'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"*

No matter how the Devil tries to tempt you and get you to do things that you know in your mind you shouldn't do, we must put God in our thoughts first. Sometimes it's hard to make good choices, teasing kids with their hats, playing keep-away, getting carried away when playing, trying to be the first in line. But then I think about how Jesus would want me to be... and I try to make better choices. I open the door and let others in first, I stand up for kids when they are shy, and I am a good friend to those when they are sad (like when our student teacher left school). I pray the Lord's prayer every night before bed. This helps me remember that I serve God and try to be good to others. I would say to you to pray the Lord's Prayer every day too.

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 us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

February 26, 2019

author: Janet Krause

FOR MISSION

Luke 18:16 (NLT)

Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children."

This passage always brings to mind idyllic paintings of clean, sweet, well-behaved children gathering around Jesus. So, it's easy to think, "Sheesh! Those disciples were rude, even down right mean." However, thinking in real-life terms, we know children are rarely that angelic, at least not for long, especially if a friend is at hand to encourage mischief. And what about a child's attention span? They can seem very focused and then... "Squirrel!" and off they go. Some of the most entertaining children's sermons are when a child, who is not afraid to speak his/her mind, goes on a tangent and the preacher has to do some fancy footwork to bring the conversation back to the point of the sermon. In Jesus day, as is appropriate etiquette in some situations still today, children are to be seen and not heard, let alone seen and heard rambunctiously approaching THE preacher. It's not surprising that the disciples discouraged this. Jesus message was serious and, in the disciples' minds, for the adults, not something to be interrupted by ill-mannered, dirty children. We also know that historically, children were seen as disposable. Strong, healthy, well-connected, financially-stable men were valued. Everyone else was disposable. Taking all this into consideration, it's easy to see why the disciples acted as they did. However, time and again, Jesus shows us by his actions, not just words, that all people are valuable, each and every one of us is important to him.

Jesus, we know that your mission is to bring all people to you. Please send your Spirit to open our hearts to people we erroneously view as less than worthy of our time and effort. Give us hearts like yours to value every individual equally. Amen.

1 Corinthians 12:4-5 (NLT)

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord.

Each of us is given something to do that shows who God is. Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful.

Two years ago, after my mom had a stroke, I brought her to live in my home. This challenge came with both tribulation and reward, tribulation when her disabilities created a particular kind of stress I hadn't had before, blessings in the "teardrops" and unexpected smiles. Her recovery has been better than anticipated; I firmly believe the prayers of our congregation and many friends and family helped in her healing process. Although it is not likely she will ever have the use of her left arm, she is able to walk well and eat well on her own.

Recently I broke my wrist. I had been praying for God to give me a break, but this wasn't exactly the break I had in mind. Nevertheless, I didn't have much choice. I would not be able to care for my mom; she had to go temporarily into an assisted living facility. She began taking part in activities she would not have been able to do two years ago. Although she may miss living with me, she is in a better place. God heard our prayers and gave me a very unexpected answer.

Later in Corinthians 12: 22 in talking about One Body with Many Parts, it says, "In fact, some parts of the body that seem the weakest and least important are actually the most necessary." Taking care of my mother gave me a different perspective about caring for others at their most difficult moments. Having my brothers and sisters in Christ to share in this experience and lend their support and prayers reinforced the idea that it takes many members, but we are all one body.

My earthly family came through as well. We have not always agreed on things, but we came together to make decisions about the best interest of our mother and God blessed us for our cooperation, each of us brings a different opinion and gift to the table which provides the perspective of many different parts. Together we worked out the next journey for my mom in a peaceful way. What a blessing!

Thank you for your goodness Father, for making beautiful things out of the dust and giving us Blessings even through tears. Help us recognize the journeys you put us through as ways to help us grow and love each other. In Jesus Name, Amen.

February 28, 2019
author: Mary Geissler

FOR MISSION

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

When I was a child, our church would occasionally have missionaries visit and share their pictures and experiences. I was inspired! I wanted to become a nurse and someday go to Africa as a missionary.

Well, as I grew up, my life choices changed. After I graduated from high school, I got married and became a mother. I forgot the desire for missions that the Holy Spirit had put in my heart, but my early spiritual experiences stayed with me and I found my way to Central Lutheran Church soon after I moved to Chippewa Falls. This was by the Holy Spirit's leading and by a visit and invitation from a saint of the church, Irene Hunt.

Years past, life happened, I completed my career as a speech therapist and retired. In 2007, a plan was made to send a mission group from our church to provide eye care to the people of Malawi Africa who had a need for it. The time was right for me and after attending a meeting about the trip, I went home and told my husband that I wanted to do it. He surprised me by saying, "I think I do too."

When I read Ephesians 2:10 for the first time the memory of my childhood faith and hope came rushing back to me. And the goodness and faithfulness of God overwhelmed me, that God would hear my prayer and answer it in the best way and time in my life!

Dear Lord, I thank you for your great faithfulness, for working out all the things that happened in my life for the good and for your purpose. Amen



FOR MISSION

March 1, 2019
author: Cindy Solberg

Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interest of the others.

I have a friend who very often says, "Humble pie kids, have some humble pie!" That's usually her attempt at an attitude adjustment to her current teenagers. I get that we are to follow Jesus' example in actions. But attitude too?

This verse reminds us that we get to follow his example in HIS thoughts and HIS attitudes. Jesus was sinless. He was sinless in ALL actions, ALL thoughts and ALL attitudes. This is amazing to me... to go a whole lifetime without once having a cranky, sour attitude. Wow, I sometimes ask hourly for a sweeter attitude.

Jesus also was full of joy as he carried out his mission and his light into the world. So, based on results, having a focus on others will bring joy to ourselves.

The Bible also says ask and you shall receive. So, I ask! Dear God, please elevate me to do what's right in this moment. I love this word elevate, to raise to a higher, more impressive level. We get to reach up and grasp on tight to Jesus's thinking, focus and joy.

I heard once that, strong Christians are not created by sermons but by personal encounters with scripture. Please invite this scripture into your soul today. I like how Paul was very clear with us here while he carried out his mission as a traveling pastor. He tells us what to do and also what NOT to do. Boundaries from a friend! Paul is serving up a healthy serving of humble pie!

Dear Lord Jesus,
Help me to love my family and friends like you loved yours. Always laying down your life and having their good and your Father's glory in mind. I pray for my church family members to discover and walk out their missions which you have designed specifically for them. Today let's let our little lights shine all over this world and pull down more heaven and pull up less hell.
AMEN.

March 2, 2019

author: Mayce Couey (Age 12)

FOR MISSION

2 Thessalonians 3:5 (NIV)

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

There was a time in my life when I knew that I had a difficult conversation coming soon. I had a lot of anxiety about it, mixed with frustration, anger, and lots of tears. I called a friend, and she pointed me in the right direction. She taught me a few things about God, and the one thing that really stood out to me was when she told me, God is there for me no matter what, and he is on my team. I know that God loves me and he will try and try and won't stop, just for me. He is my Savior, Redeemer, and he washed my sins away. He carried them and bore them. Jesus was happy to do this for us. He gave us a new life. I now know that God allows everything to happen for a reason, even if it doesn't make sense to us, he has a plan. God wants us to teach about him, and learn about him, serve him and others, even ourselves. Go out into the community and do something to teach and serve. The possibilities are endless. Go serve Christ, serve others, and help.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving us the friends we have, and the good things they do. Please show us how to be that loving friend, and show us how we can serve and teach in our community. Please let us be open with you and learn about you through others and our mission. Amen.

Luke 6:38 (NRSV)

"...give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Does this sound like "spiritual investment" advice? "In order to get something, you have to give something." That's how the world works, right? "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." Taken out of context, that seems to be what Jesus advises. But just a paragraph earlier, Jesus scolds us for doing something good for someone only if we expect to get something back. How do we resolve what seems to be contradictory advice? By letting God's actions toward us guide our actions toward others.

Most relationships are "transactional." When we're asked to do anything for the community, we tend to ask, "What's in it for me?" The law of the world says that a contract, in order to be a contract, requires three elements: 1) offer, 2) acceptance, 3) an exchange of value. God's "contract of relationship" with us is different. God doesn't "offer" us a relationship. God says we already have one, "I am the Lord, your God." No offer, no demand for acceptance, no expectation of receiving anything from us. Everything God urges us to do for the world arises out of the relationship we already have with God.

Jesus shows us what sort of God, God is: loving, merciful, generous, and forgiving. Jesus encourages us to have that kind of relationship with others. It's action with a purpose: that the world might come to know and trust in God as God's disciples do. Jesus urges us to act lovingly, mercifully, generously not in order to avoid God's judgement, but to proclaim God's promise of relationship with all of God's creation.

Lord, you have always been merciful, generous and forgiving in your relationship with us. Open us to your Spirit that we may trust in you to guide us where you want us to go. Help us to truly be a loving people of a loving God. Amen.

