

The background of the entire image is a deep purple. Overlaid on this are numerous vertical streaks of varying widths and shades of purple, ranging from dark indigo to light lavender. These streaks create a sense of depth and movement, resembling light reflecting off a textured surface or perhaps stylized rain or light rays.

“God Sees Beauty
in our Brokenness”

BLC
Lenten Devotions

2019

LENT AT BLC

Ash Wednesday, March 6th

8:00am - 11:00am Ashes Available at BLC

6:15pm Worship with Ashes and Communion

7:00pm Pizza served

Wednesdays During Lent, March 13th - April 10th

4:45pm Soup and Pizza Supper, Fellowship Hall
(dinner served until 6:00 pm)

5:30pm Bridge and Confirmation Class Time

6:15pm Simple Worship Service

6:45pm to 7:00pm Mentors and Confirmation
Students conversation Time

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday, April 14th

9:00am Worship with Procession of Palms and
Reading of Passion

Holy Week

April 18th @ 6:15pm Maundy Thursday worship at BLC

April 19th @ 12:00pm Good Friday Ecumenical Service at BLC

April 19th @ 6:15pm Good Friday Taize Service at BLC

Easter Sunday: The Day of the Lord's Resurrection

April 21st @ 7:00am & 9:00am Worship of the Lords'
Resurrection

Broken and Beautiful Together...

“When the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him.”

These words from Luke 15:20 offer us an important glimpse into the life of God. “*God Sees Beauty in our Brokenness*” is our theme for this season of Lent! Like the son we, too, often find ourselves broke and broken. But here’s the Good News: God comes running to us embracing all our imperfections, cracks and simply loves us! I am happy to offer you these reflections in our 3rd annual Lenten Devotional and am grateful to each writer for responding to the call to open God’s Word from the Bible and for their willingness to share their faith and experiences reflecting upon that Word!

At our midweek services during Lent we will listen to a song by Rascal Flatts called “**Bless the Broken Road.**” One of the verses really strikes me: “*I couldn’t see how every sign pointed straight to you; That every long lost dream lead me to where you are; Others who broke my heart, they were like northern stars pointing me on my way into your loving arms.*” While we listen to the song, folks will be invited to come forward and write something they are struggling with on the cross. We will then cover the cross with broken pieces of colored plates and unveil it at Easter. The image should not be lost on us- God takes and blesses our brokenness and leads us through it reminding us we are loved and beautiful.

As you read the reflections that follow, I pray you see and realize that all of our stories- achievements and broken dreams- come together in the story of Christ’s love for us. I want to especially thank Diane Schlimgen for her willingness to help with this project- from the sign-up board to putting together this finished booklet you now see. I thank you, *dear reader*, for joining BLC on this Lenten journey. Writing about one’s faith and sharing it is not easy, yet it is our baptismal call to be and share Christ’s Light to the World. You are broken. I am broken. We are broken. *But most importantly our brokenness makes us beautiful and loved!*

This Lent and always, may you know God sees beauty in your brokenness,

Pastor Jim

Your Daily Devotionals - Suggestions for Use

1. Read the day's Bible verse over several times. Reading aloud is also helpful.
2. Read the devotional and record your response in the space provided.
3. Pray for the writer of the day's devotional, thanking God for opening their lives and for sharing their faith with you.
4. Use your Bible to look up the verse and read the verses surrounding it for the context of the day's verses.
5. Let all that you have read be present with you throughout your day and activities.
6. Read the devotional as a family, at a meal, or with a prayer partner. Children can participate in reading aloud and discussing.
7. Give a copy of this devotional to a friend or relative.
8. Discuss the day's devotional with others, asking these questions:

How is God active in my life?

How were my actions and interactions influenced by my Faith?

What is God calling me to change?

**Devotionals are also available online:
www.barneveldlutheranchurch.org**

March 6 Ash Wednesday

Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39

Our Lenten Journey should lead us to embrace our knowledge and understanding of God's great love for us. We walk in the belief that Jesus Christ has paid the price for our redemption. Through His life, death, and resurrection He has claimed us and all of His creation and proclaimed it good. No longer are we separated from the life-giving love of God. No longer are we abandoned or stranded alone. Regardless of what we experience in life, God is with us and Jesus has claimed us as His own.

When we are baptized the Minister says, "My dear child, the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of His cross. I now trace the cross on your foreheads and invite your parents and godparents to do the same." Like the goldminers who staked out their claim and declared ownership on their valuable discovery, so at baptism, Jesus stakes His claim on us, and we now belong to Him. We become the treasure of Christ for whom Jesus shed his blood, because of His great love for us. Unlike claim jumpers for gold or diamond mines, no one can steal us from the love of Jesus Christ.

Let us walk in the knowledge and the promise that our Faith in Jesus Christ gives us. This is the promise of the Cross and the promise of His resurrection. Let us embrace the truth that God's love for us is greater than anything we can experience in this life no matter our doubts, anxieties, or insecurities.

This quote from Dieter F. Uchtdorf gives us a glimpse into the great love that God has for us.

"Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God's love encompasses us completely...God loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken."

Know - God loves you completely!

Prayer: *God of mercy and love, help me to understand your great love for me each and every day. Let me wallow in the joy and peace of your presence within me celebrating your life and grace in my soul. May I come to know you more deeply and share your love and mercy with others.*

Tim Springer is a Deacon, Husband, Father and Grandfather who lives in South Holland, Illinois and has known Pastor Jim his whole life.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 7 Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Colossians 3:23

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.”

“Believe It, Live It, Come to It” I pass this sign every time I enter the church entrance, but what does it mean? I think like many things we say and do in church it may mean different things to different people, especially the “Live It” part. Does “Living It” mean that I should be pure and pious and live without sin? If so well...I would like to think that “Living It” means to search out and recognize the reason that God has put me here. Did you ever see someone and say, that was what that person was meant to do? I have. I was lucky enough to teach with a man named Bob Larson in Mt. Horeb and when you think of everything a teacher should be this guy checked all of the boxes. He worked hard at knowing his subject matter, enthralled kids with his stories, and was well respected by students and staff alike. I’ve also seen this quality in my mother-in-law. I firmly believe that God has put her here to be a great mom and grandmother. She is a very giving and generous person who is always thinking of her kids and grandkids before herself.

I love my job. I too feel like I am doing what I am intended to do. One of the things I love about my job is that we go to great lengths to help kids discover their gifts. We expose kids to professions by having them take interest surveys, having professionals from the community come to school to discuss aspects of their jobs, and visiting local businesses to experience their working environment. Helping kids in this way may not be done with any overt religious overtones, but at its roots aren’t I helping students to find their calling, their purpose, the reason why God has put them here? This reminds me of a quote from the movie *Bull Durham* where a washed up baseball player played by Kevin Costner is talking with a young clueless pitcher. With a bit of jealousy, a bit of contempt, and a bit of disdain, Costner says “God has reached down and turned your right in arm into a thunderbolt” and then goes on to tell him not to waste his talents. Now to be true to the movie Costner was actually referring to ‘the baseball gods’, however the sentiment extends to my point, this young pitcher was given a gift and he is supposed to use it the way God intended. Isn’t that the same for you and me? Whatever our talent whether it’s being a good singer, a good youth coach, a good listener, a good neighbor, shouldn’t we use those gifts to honor God?

Gregg Guenther

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 8 Friday after Ash Wednesday

John 3:16

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Whosoever. For those who heard me speak on Father's Day they heard me share why this is my word. When you're 7 or 8 and trying to memorize John 3:16 to earn a ruler or something like that, it was a pretty big word. But perseverance and 4-5 days of practice I got it all out, with a big WHOSOEVER to boot. John 3:16 reads For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not parish but have everlasting life. What a powerful verse and statement. No wonder it was one of the first things they wanted you to learn and be able to recite at summer Bible school. I remember Bible school and learning the Bible verse, I do not remember that it was a lot for me to get out. That memory came from my Mom who shared the story and fond memory of that not long before she passed away a couple years ago. Her sharing that memory will stick with me I hope forever. I also believe it is a good word for anyone and everyone to focus on. John 3:16 tells us that we are saved and have the promise of everlasting life. Whosoever tells us that anyone and everyone is entitled to that. It doesn't matter your background, where you come from, what you have done or not done, you can receive that grace and promise. Couldn't and shouldn't all of us look to give grace, forgiveness, and aid to whosoever may seek or need it with a willing and joyful heart. I know I am trying to remember that each and every day in all aspects of my life and all those I touch or come into contact with.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please be with whosoever needs you today, whether it be for strength, guidance, help, or praise to you for great gifts, let us all acknowledge you and your love for us. Amen.*

Jeff Reese

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 9 Saturday after Ash Wednesday

1 Timothy 1:12

"I thank Christ Jesus Our Lord, who has strengthened me because He considered me faithful, putting me into service."

There are times in our lives where we may want 'more'. This could be to be more fit, more forgiving, to volunteer more, to save more money. More, more, more.

About 15 years ago, I wanted something more. I wanted a deeper spirituality in my life. I went to Church regularly and was a member of a women's group from Church. We would select a book with various Christian themes for discussion. We participated in a Lenten program every year. I was positively affected from these discussions. And yet I wanted 'more.' I asked God to challenge me. I prayed for Him to give me guidance on how I could deepen my spirituality and have an even stronger connection with Him.

Shortly after, I found out I was pregnant with our fourth son. We discovered our unborn baby had Down syndrome.. I wondered if this was God's way of granting my request to be challenged in my faith.

How would our life change? How would having a child with a disability affect the other children? Why did God think we would have the patience and fortitude to be the best parents this child deserved?

It was strange when we would hear the question, "Why did you choose to have this child?"

We didn't choose to have a child with a disability **BUT** we did choose to take responsibility for this beautiful child just as we did with our other children. There are challenges without a doubt but this child has taken us on a journey. He has taken us on a journey of love, appreciation, strength and joy.

Timothy's passage is significant to me. God did grant my wish. He challenged me to be a better parent not just with Charlie but our other children as well.

Christ died for us. He provided the 'more' for us and does so every day. We provide our version of 'more' in the way we honor Him.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for guiding us and giving us strength during challenges in our lives. Thank you for providing open arms and the comfort in knowing you will always be there for us. Amen.

Dona Gilbert:: Pastor Jim's sister. I have been married to my soul mate Mark for over 28 years. We have 5 beautiful children William (20), Luke (18), Thomas (16), Charlie (14) and Abigail (10). I am very blessed indeed.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 10 1st Sunday of Lent

1 Thessalonians 5:16

"Be joyful always; pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's Will for you in Christ Jesus. "

"Thank you for everything!" Those were the words that my mother would whisper in my ear every time I left her at Crestridge. Two years prior on a Sunday morning, Jim was notified that he was going to receive an award. I was elated and said, "Hey, I should call mom." Calling her in the morning was uncharacteristic because I usually called her on Sunday evenings. Something was telling me though to call her that morning instead. So I did. The minute she answered I knew what had happened. My mom was having a stroke. The first time I visited her in the hospital I hardly recognize her. Her frail body was slumped over and there was no response to the doctor's attempts in trying to get her to react or respond. The doctor told me perhaps I could sing to her because research had shown that music has powerful elements and maybe she could regain her speech. I said "Sure but what should I sing?" "Anything" was her response, "but make sure it is something she will know." I had absolutely no idea what that would be but something came over me immediately. I knew what I was going to sing. I started. "Mom, Matthew had a birthday a few weeks ago and I just feel like singing to him again. Sing with me." I started slowly. So slowly that I didn't think I would ever get to his name, in the song, but once I did her head gently and graciously rose up and she was trying to sing along with my encouragement. When it was over I realized she was trying. Mom was trying to come back to us and her brain waves were trying to reconnect.

For the next three weeks I went to visit her every night after school. Our roles were now different. I was now the teacher and she was the student. I would sing out people's names. She would repeat. I wasn't exactly in tune but it didn't matter. She was repeating my singing and the brain waves were reconnecting with people, places and things. I always ended the singing session with cards.....singing them of course so she would relearn her favorite card games. I began to drive her to Matthew's basketball games. When I would return her to Crestridge she would ALWAYS whisper, "Thank you for everything" in my ear along with our hugs. I didn't realize it immediately but driving home one night I began to think of that phrase differently. I think she really meant EVERYTHING....she couldn't say all of it and she didn't know exactly how to say it but she meant EVERYTHING. So, the next time we don't know how to say thanks or feel like you can't remember the exact words, just say "Thank you for EVERYTHING."

Rosann Myers: married to Jim. We have a son, Matthew. My mom gave me the love of teaching and to this day I continue to love to be called "teacher."

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 11 Monday of 1st Week of Lent

Matthew 7:14

“But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

Sometimes I'm lost. Sometimes I show up to parent-teacher conferences a week early. Sometimes Mark and I can't have a discussion that doesn't involve yelling. Some days the house is a disaster, or there isn't enough money in the bank account, or so many things go wrong that I have to laugh so I don't cry. Sometimes I do cry. Some days I question everything I do and I can't even understand myself. I don't have it all together and I don't have it all figured out, and I don't want to pretend that I do.

Sometimes I can see in Mark's eyes how much he loves me, and that all he really wants is me to love him back just as fiercely. And sometimes I remember to stay calm when Fin throws her 2-yr old tantrum, and I get down and look her in the eye and remind her to breathe and she senses my peace and something shifts. Sometimes when Gavin is misbehaving, it dawns on me that he needs something and maybe that something is just his mom to hold him for a little while. Some days I remember what it was like to be a fourth-grade girl and how growing up can be really hard, and I spend a little more time with Chelsea. Some days I remember to take a break when I need one, to slow down, to simplify. Sometimes I get my priorities all in the right order, and I know what's important; I can hear God telling me what to do and who He wants me to be. These times, when I put God first, and His will and His plan ahead of my own, is the small gate and the narrow road; this is the way to life and I will never stop trying to find it.

Even when I'm broken, He still loves me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please lead us to life! Speak to us. Your plans are better than ours; help us find Your way. Remind us even when we're broken that we are still Yours, always Yours. Amen.

Carissa Manteufel: Married to Mark; mom to Chelsea, Gavin & Finley Grace. Always searching for Jesus & peace of mind.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 12 Tuesday of 1st Week of Lent

Ephesians 4:1-8

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”

Our lives are so busy. Often within our hustle and bustle, we lack patience. A slow driver in front of us on our way to work, losing track of doctor or dentist appointments, frustrations of not getting to household chores. We forget the gifts God has given us: a job, health care, a home. As we scramble to check off our lengthy to-do lists, we miss more gifts. A door held by a stranger, a smile from a child, a hello or card from a friend.

Ephesians 4:1-8 reminds us all to stop and reflect on how we live our lives. There are so many pressures to be a “super parent.” I often forget it is not how much I do or get done, but rather how well I do it. Am I enjoying the beauty God has given me? Am I taking the time to contribute to His beauty? This is worth being on top of my to-do list. May we strive to make God our top priority during this sacred season and in doing so be reminded of our own beauty.

Prayer: Lord, during this season of Lent please help us take time each day to reflect on your many gifts. Let us live our lives being humble, gentle, patient and kind. Amen.

Erin Eslinger, Principal of Barneveld School.



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 13 Wednesday of 1st Week of Lent

Isiah 41:10

“Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be alarmed for I am your God. I give you strength, truly I help you, truly I hold you firm.”

Isaiah 41, according to the Bible app YouVersion, was the most bookmarked and highlighted verse of 2018. Hearing this statistic reminds me how millions of people all around the world turn to the Bible for hope and strength.

For me this verse is something I rely on often. I have always been a worrier. Not only do I worry about things like paying a bill on time, but larger worries, middle of the night worries about bad things happening to our house, to my family, to me. I can be filled with so much anxiety that I can feel my heart beating fast.

Towards the end of January 2018 I experienced a time where I was filled with so much anxiety. I didn't know it at the time but I went into a panic attack. It was scary. I had let my worry turn into great anxiety which then affected my body in a way I had never experienced. *I had forgotten the truth the Lord promises us.*

I knew something had to change in my life. It was during the 2018 Lenten devotional that I woke up before the kids and began opening my Bible. I would look up each scripture verse mentioned in the devotional for that day. I would sit in the quiet, read and pray. I wrote down the verses that gave me strength, peace and hope.

Even after the devotional ended, I have continued to open my Bible in the early mornings. These 15 minutes have changed my life. Do I still worry-yes, however my anxiety has greatly decreased. In the middle of the night when I lie wide awake with worry I repeat verses like Isaiah 41:10, reminding myself the Lord is my strength and holds me firm.

How does the Lord give you strength during times of stress or high anxiety?

Amy Hearne

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 14 Thursday of 1st Week of Lent

John 8:12

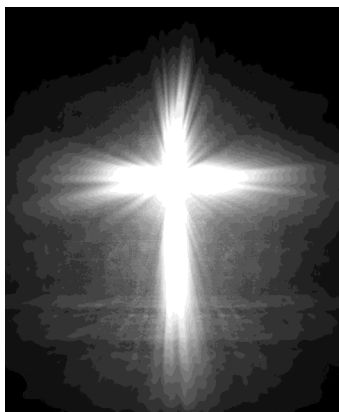
“When Jesus spoke again to people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

LIGHT...Growing up as a child, I did not like the dark of the night. I had to sleep with a night light on. Darkness in our lives can mean many different things. A failed marriage, a diagnoses of cancer, addiction, loss of a loved one. It can also be a dark hole of sin that we have fallen into.

God tells us I will turn darkness into LIGHT and make rough places smooth. I am the LIGHT in me there is no darkness at all. My LIGHT shines most brightly through believers who trust in me in the dark. Whoever lives by the truth comes into the LIGHT. We can take such comfort in his word!

Prayer: Christ be the LIGHT shine in our hearts, shine through our darkness. Amen.

Terry Nelson



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 15 Friday of 1st Week of Lent

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

“I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.”

My Word: FAMILY

I love BLC! That's quite a statement from the token Baptist. I grew up in the Baptist church - not the rolling in the aisles or Hallelujah yelling sect- but a moderate “get in your pew and sing the golden oldies” church where I developed a deep faith in God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. When Doug and I married, he introduced me to the Lutheran church - liturgy, stand up/sit down and songs that were too high for an alto. But the love of God was the same!

My invitation to BLC was a smile and a hug from our neighbor Leonard Swedlund. How could I turn that down! And thus began my love and respect for Millie and Leonard Swedlund, who embodied BLC. They quietly helped so many others, contributed countless hours to the church, and they loved God without reserve. Certainly not an example to be ignored.

The longer I've been a member of BLC, the more I've realized that this congregation is full of Len and Millie's! I love the way the younger generation quietly steps in to take the reins as we older members get tired or ill. I love the kids during worship - looking for JOY, toddling around, and their unbridled enthusiasm. I love the depth and excitement of PJ's homilies.

We are Barneveld Lutheran - the young, the old, and those in middle years. It's our smiles, our hugs, our concern for others that makes us a FAMILY, a caring family of God. It's our actions that speak the loudest and call others to join us, even Baptists!

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for bringing me to this Family of Faith at Barneveld Lutheran Church. Amen.*

Nancy Carden

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 16 Saturday of 1st Week of Lent
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 mind in Christ Jesus.”

I was anxious and afraid as I wondered if I would ever be able to have children after struggling for months. This was my biggest dream in life to be a mom and I wasn't sure it would ever happen. Then I found myself pregnant and believed that was the cure-all to my anxiety. In reality it was just the beginning. As a parent I found myself in a new situation every day where I was feeling anxious. Whether it was 8 months of caring for a 24/7 colicky baby or the 5th cold our family had over the winter months, it was always something. I was putting so much pressure on myself, always wondering what I was doing wrong in these instances. Instead of focusing on the stresses I encounter every day, I am trying really hard to refocus my mind to these two precious girls that call me mom. We are safe, healthy (usually), and happy. So many others struggle with infertility and/or pregnancy & infant loss and wish for exactly what I have. My college roommate passed away in October leaving his pregnant wife and unborn daughter behind. He didn't get the opportunity to meet his sweet daughter. My struggles are minor compared to those of many others. By turning to God and thanking him for my ***blessings*** in these hard times, I am able to find peace and ride the waves with much more contentment.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for our many blessings. Please help us to focus on the good that we have, allowing us peace, calmness, and contentment. Amen.

Kailey Langdon: Married to Jay we have two daughters: Mila (3) and Neva (1). We are both former elementary teachers. I currently stay home raising our daughters and Jay does quality assurance work for Epic.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 17 Second Sunday of Lent

Corinthians 6:19-20

“Or didn’t you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don’t you see that you can’t live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.”

When Pastor Jim asked if I would participate in the devotional booklet, I was hesitant. He plodded, begged and needled me until I said yes. I have battled weight my entire life. I was the “husky” or “big-boned” kid growing up. Slowly over time the pounds kept adding on and before I knew it, I had become someone I didn’t even recognize. After a while I could no longer purchase clothes at the regular stores. I was soon a regular customer at “Big & Tall” getting the bigger sizes that would fit me. Bigger pants, shirts, belts became the norm for me.

I hated my body. I despised seeing pictures of myself. I would see the magazine covers, movies and television shows promoting how people “should look” and I didn’t look anything like those people. I often wondered if they even ate. I was taught from an early age to eat everything on my plate and that not to finish it would be an insult to the cook. I was jealous of so many people who seemingly could eat anything and not gain one ounce. Why not me? Why was my metabolism slower than others? I’ve tried weight loss programs and have lost weight and then put it back on. I have tried to be more physically active knowing that there are health consequences to my weight.

I have come to realize that in the brokenness of battling weight, my body is a sacred place. We each come in different sizes, colors, heights, ethnicities, religions, orientations, political affiliations, etc. I try my best everyday to let people see God in my body. I, too, am trying to grow more comfortable in the skin of my body. God created all of us and saw that it was good. I will battle my weight for the rest of my life. It’s what makes me broken and beautiful at the same time. No matter what your body looks like, love it. It’s a one-of-a-kind, hand-made treasure from God himself. Our bodies are gifts. There is no perfect weight. There’s just perfect love and that’s God’s love for you and me.

Do you realize your body is a sacred place? How do you let people see God through your body?

Friend of BLC

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 18 Monday of 2nd Week of Lent

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”

“God Sees Beauty in our Brokenness” yet I feel anything but beautiful during these moments. Trusting God is something I’m working on. I fully trust my husband in all things, yet I have a hard time trusting God in times of struggle. Why is this happening? What am I supposed to do? Is something good going to come of this? I realize that I like to be in full control of everything and when I’m not, I worry! Worrying is a waste of energy, yet I find myself worrying about everything! I will do everything in my power to fix things - many of which are out of my control. I don’t like broken situations, broken hearts and more than anything - seeing family and friends hurting. We’ve all seen bad things happen to good people. I know in my heart that God has a plan for everything and we must trust that He has a plan for all of the broken roads we travel.

One thing that has helped me in my times of excessive worry is to mentally hook my “issue” on a fishing pole and cast it out into the vast sea pictured in my mind and I say, “God, I’m giving this to you, because I just can’t handle it. Please bring me peace and calm my soul.” Sometimes it works, and sometimes the issue just swims back to me. I do cherish the times when my heart is calm and content even if it just for a moment. During this Lenten season and beyond, I am working on giving full trust to the Lord. I know that it isn’t my will, but His that prevails in all things.

Prayer: *Good and Gracious Lord thank you for helping us through the struggles of our lives. Help us to trust You and remember that You are with us always. Amen.*

Jill Carmody: Married to my husband, Ed for almost 32 years. We have 4 adult children Kayla (Andrew) , Karlee (Kyle) , Cody and Carson. We also have 5 grandchildren – who are the best little things ever and bring smiles and laughter during the most stressful days!! (Ariana, Klayton, Kyson, Kooper and Kassy)

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 19 Tuesday of 2nd Week of Lent

Luke 15:18-19

"I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants."

I believe we all make bad choices from time to time, especially when we are young, testing the waters, trying to fit in with our peers. I remember several intentional bad choices I made when I was in junior high and high school. I shared a few of these inappropriate choices with our youth during a confirmation retreat a few years back. If you're one of these confirmands reading this passage, please remember our confidentiality motto, "What happens in confirmation stays in confirmation" is a lifetime motto 😊. Please, no elaborating to your parents or others on my misgivings as a youth. What I can share in this Lenten devotional is a common lack of good judgment thread that many of the people who grew up prior to the mid 80s lived with. I remember listening to and occasionally repeating racial, ethnic and sexual orientation jokes and comments with my friends. Looking back at my behavior, I don't remember actually *believing* in what these jokes and comments represented, but I do remember I didn't mind laughing at the context of them. As I matured and experienced life from the mid 80s forward, I began to realize that by laughing along with others and/or not expressing my discomfort that these jokes and comments were offensive to me, I was condoning them. As Pastor Jim mentioned in a recent sermon, by not speaking out, we are part of the problem.

The Prodigal Son parable reminds me that God loves me regardless of my transgressions. I pray daily for His strength and courage to speak out and stand up for people who are miss treated, for whatever reason. As a former confirmation small group leader, I chose the word COMPASSION. That word goes hand in hand with BE KIND. If you are on Facebook with me, you will notice my posts often reflect and support these words. Unfortunately, like most people, I'm no Saint. I need God's ongoing help. Sometimes, it's so much easier to stand quietly by the sidelines and say or do nothing even though, inside, I feel even more discomfort along with disappointment in myself, knowing I am weak and am afraid to speak up. Pastor Jim said it best, "*Silence in the face of evil is evil itself.*"

Prayer: Dear Lord, Please continue to guide my thoughts, actions and heart toward always doing the right thing. Amen.

Deb Piquette

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 20 Wednesday of 2nd Week of Lent
Matthew 21:22

“And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

Every confirmation class chooses a word around Christmas time. We hang those words up on the trees in the sanctuary each year. My word is BELIEVE.

As many of you know I am a dancer. As a dancer, believing in yourself is key to success. Before you go on stage, you have to BELIEVE. Before you try a new trick/dance move you have to BELIEVE.

If I ever find myself in a situation where I am doubting myself or just feeling down, I think of my word.

Blessed
Encourage
Love
Imagine
Empathy
Victorious
Ensure



Prayer: *Dear God, Please help us to BELIEVE that we can do whatever it is we are striving for. Show us the light to go on and be the best we can be as people and as followers of God. Amen.*

Evan Hathaway

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 21 Thursday of 2nd Week of Lent

Luke 12:25-26

“And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?”

My birthday is December 26 and I am a worrier so I included verse 25 to help explain.

About a year ago I heard the words that no one ever hopes to hear as the Doctor said to my husband “your cancer has returned and has spread to many parts of your body.” You are not a candidate for surgery, chemo, or more radiation.” To add to that my sister passed away the very next day. As I worked on accepting and adjusting to our “new normal”, and yes, worrying, I reread a small book that I had purchased earlier: I’m not too busy by Jodi Hills. Following is a quote from her book that says what I would like to say better than I could.

“It is a myth that time heals, or changes anything.

Time Heals Nothing...

It’s what we do with our time, the choices we make with our time and the people we choose to surround ourselves with.

The love in our hearts and the hope in our minds, at any time, can heal, create, inspire and change almost anything...you just have to

take the time to realize it...appreciate the present as a gift that is given... look at yourself, and the faces of others...stop to see all the possibilities, open yourself up to this life and say, **“I’m not too busy.”**

For my prayer I would like to offer the one that hangs over my bed and says how I feel most days.

Prayer: Dear God, so far for today I’VE DONE ALL RIGHT. I haven’t gossiped or lost my temper. I haven’t been grumpy, nasty or selfish and I’m really glad about that. But in a few minutes God, I’m going to GET OUT OF BED. From then on, I’m probably going to NEED A LOT OF HELP. Thank you and Amen.

Wanda Owens: Married to Jim for 56 years. We have been blessed with 2 sons, 2 daughters, 2 daughters by marriage, and 11 grandchildren ages 11 to 31.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 22 Friday of 2nd Week of Lent

Galatians 5:22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

I like to think that the same devotional Spirit that we rejoice in church and in God is also present in the library. I suppose it's everywhere, but there's something about being surrounded by books and quiet that inspires an internal monologue in me not unlike prayer. And I needed to feel that Spirit when I was starting at Barneveld Public Library. It was a new community and I had many things to learn and new professional responsibilities that I'd never had before. I was excited and determined, certainly, but I also had doubt. It can be easy for me to get wound up in my own anxiety in such situations, and I'm embarrassed to confess that I pray more in such times of personal stress. But it's also a reminder of the suffering and struggle that so many people experience each day.

I like this passage from the Bible, because each word connected to the Spirit feels like a handful of wisdom offered to you. God's help is self-help. The acknowledgment that there is no law against love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control is simple and profound. These feelings flow from a connection to the Spirit and to each other and through self-reflection.

And that self-reflection is like prayer, like the quiet I experience in the library and in church. I've stood quietly inside the library before we've opened, enjoying the peace before all the lights come on. In those times I think about how I can live up to the wisdom in this Bible verse. How can I connect to a higher Spirit from which so many positive things flow? Some days are easier than others. But I can say that getting to know the people in town and playing with the kids makes things a lot easier. They make me want to be the best man I can be and to make my family proud.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for another day. Please watch over my family and friends. Thank you! Amen.*

Alex LeClair: Married to Kamie we have a 4-year-old son Henry and two cats Sammie and Tuck. I have been the Director at the Barneveld Public Library since March 1, 2017.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 23 Saturday of 2nd Week of Lent

Hebrews 8:12

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

We are all broken and need God's forgiveness which he has given us through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. We have all experienced times in our life that were dark, knowing we have not lived according to the commandments that God gave to guide us through life. At some points in my life, I was on a journey that didn't include much about God; I was not living a life that nurtured my faith that I had grown up with. But because of God's incredible love for us, we don't have to go through life thinking about those past sins we have committed. I suffered through some hard knocks in my life that brought me back to my faith and trust in God. God is always there with his arms open waiting for our return, no matter how broken we are, or how much wandering off the path we have done.

My favorite Bible verse is John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life”. When we believe and trust this, then we have the peace of knowing our sins are forgiven. God's word in the Bible reassures us over and over again that we are his children whom he loves. If we keep feeling bad and remembering our past transgressions then we are acting like we don't believe that God has the power to forgive us. Because we are forgiven, we don't need to live in the past, dwelling on what we have done, we can live in the present and the future experiencing all the wonderful gifts he gives us each day. Because God loves us, we are to extend that love to others though our daily living each and every day.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I thank you for loving me and giving me forgiveness through your Son Jesus. Help me to live each day joyfully, loving others as you have loved me. Amen.

Marcia Thompson

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 24 3rd Sunday of Lent

Romans 12:1-2

We all like those special days: holidays, family gatherings, church celebrations, family trips, community events, etc. But, admittedly, most of our days would be classified as ordinary. These are the days we work hard to make the special days possible.

There's a Bible verse I have taped inside my bathroom cupboard that sheds a joyful light on our ordinary days. Romans 12:1-2 reads, ***"So here's what I (Paul) want you to do, God helping you. Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."***

Over the years, both an elementary principal and a Bible camp director have told me their greatest joy on ordinary days is to walk more slowly. Then they notice people who have been placed in their path that day for a reason. Perhaps, it's a person who needs a listening ear. Or perhaps, it's a person who is willing to be a listening ear. Many times it's a moment that brings a welcome smile. Too often we hurry through our ordinary days without noticing the joyful moments God has placed in our days.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, Thank you for placing people in our ordinary days to be a blessing in our lives. Please help us to pause and notice these moments of joy. Thank you for always walking with us. Amen*

Karen Erickson finds joyful moments as she teaches third graders and as she plays the piano. Most of these moments are unexpected.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 25 Monday of 3rd Week of Lent

“BELIEVE”

“Believe there is good in the world. Be the good.” I have a t-shirt with that printed on it. The word “Believe” is embroidered on a bag that I carry as a teacher to school every day. The word believe is used 51 times in the book of John alone. The word believe is also in the first scripture verse that I ever memorized, John 3:16 “... that whosoever shall believe in Him shall have everlasting life.” My own beliefs grew from that first verse that I learned way back in my pre-teen years. In Exodus 4, Moses had many doubts “suppose they will not believe me, or listen to my plea?” and “If you please, Lord, send someone else.” The Lord, replies “Go then! It is I who will assist you in speaking and will teach you what you are to say.” Sometimes I can feel like Moses and have doubts about what God wants me to do in life. When a decision is needed or something needs to be resolved, I tend to want things my way versus following God’s way and time. I find that when I stop and pray and ask God for help or simply sit with him in silence, the situation seems much clearer and always less stressful.

I also believe that there is good in the world and that I can be that good. I believe that everyone is doing the best that they can in any given moment. Everyone, including family, co-workers, students, strangers and yes, even ourselves. I believe that I am a good Christian, wife, parent, teacher, sister, daughter and friend. Am I perfect? No, but I believe that I am doing my best. I have to believe that others are doing their best as well. I believe that God loves me even in my brokenness. I believe that “everything shall take place in the time appointed for it. For I know and believe that whatever God has spoken will be accomplished.” (Tobit 14:4)

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I ask that you continue to help my belief in you continue to grow so that I may share your love with others, so they too may come to believe. Jesus, I believe and trust in you. Amen*

Sue Hearne: Pastor Jim’s sister-in-law married to Bill We will celebrate our 30th anniversary this year blessed with one adult son Matthew.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 26 Tuesday of 3rd Week of Lent

Job 33:31

“Give heed, O Job, listen to me: be silent and I will speak.”

My word is LISTEN. Webster’s dictionary gives this definition for the word listen: to give attention for the purpose of hearing; to heed; to obey.

There are many joys to be found just being quiet and listening. This past few days of the Polar Vortex invading our state brought a certain quiet to the countryside. As I look out my window at the snow and darkness, everything is still frozen. But there are sounds...just LISTEN.

The loud cracks of the wood in our houses contracting in the cold. The furnace running and bringing us warmth. The sound of the water running in the sink to assure us of no frozen pipes. The snowplow making us a safe path. The buzzing of snowmobiles speeding across the far hillside, providing a sound and light show for anyone being still enough to see and LISTEN.

As daylight comes I once again go out into the cold to fill the bird feeder. The chickadees, always happy and sweet, are chirping their thanks for the food. The jays and crows add their deeper voices to the song.

Be quiet, just listen. Listen to understand instead of listening to reply as Pastor Jim said in a recent sermon.

Our ears and hearing are a gift from God. How we use this gift...how we listen...is up to us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, We give you thanks for being able to hear so many things that bring joy and contentment. Help us to be quiet and to listen so that we might hear what you are saying to us. Amen.

Becky and George Stauffer live in a 100 year old farm house amid animals; dogs, cats, horses, donkeys, a mule and mini horse. Many sounds to listen to.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 27 Wednesday of 3rd Week of Lent

Isaiah 33:2

“LORD, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress.”

“STRENGTH” The last 2 years I have had to find strength and hope in my life, after losing my husband Jerry. We have had some trying times, but the strength and love of our family, friends and church family has gotten us through. Believing in ourselves moving forward and giving it our all. I read a lot of inspirational quotes, stay positive, look at the good in things. We all get upset over the littlest things and losing Jerry has brought me to realize we can't sweat the small stuff and things that are out of our control. At times we need to find Strength to not get wrapped up in our world of hate and complaining.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please give myself, my 2 boys, family and friends strength to get up every day and enjoy life one day at a time.*

Positivity quote: Train your mind to see the good in everything. Positivity is a choice. The happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts.

Carla Leuzinger: I live in Barneveld and have 2 sons, Dakota & Karsen. We enjoy spending time with family, camping, sporting events and taking family vacations to Canada.



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 28 Thursday of 3rd Week of Lent

Matthew 14:13-21

For the longest time, my favorite Bible story has been when Jesus feeds the crowd of 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21). Christ had withdrawn to a solitary place. People from area towns followed him. As evening approached, the disciples tell Jesus to send the people away so they could get something to eat. He says no and tells them to feed the people with what they have. But with only five loaves and two fish, they tell him they can't. Taking those loaves and fishes, Jesus raises his eyes to heaven in thanks and broke the bread. The disciples distributed the food.

This story shows the generosity of God and the mindset of putting others in front of ourselves. In the time of Christ, people would not have left home on a journey to a remote location without some provisions. (Think about how people today can't leave home without a water bottle!) A wife or mother would have made sure her husband had something with him in case he wasn't home as expected. Most people gathered in that remote location had some kind of provisions with them. But they were not willing to extend it to themselves or others until led by example.

The blessed loaves and fishes were offered to the people before any of the disciples took a morsel or even Jesus himself ate a speck. Upon seeing this generosity, the people in this crowd opened their sacks and took out what they had. Perhaps they noticed they had fruit and the people next to them didn't and offered fruit, bread, nuts or whatever else they had. All ate and were satisfied. There is satisfaction in giving. It's an innate response especially when food is involved.

As an elementary school teacher, when I see unsolicited generosity among my students (pens, pencils, helping with assignments/materials often times when they aren't even sure they have things they need), I say to them "we're having a loaves and fishes moment." With open hearts, they DO! With open hearts, they GIVE! Because it's innate. Because it feels good.

Karen Kelly: Parishioner at St James-Arlington Heights

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 29 Friday of 3rd Week of Lent
Matthew 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; about your body, or what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air: They do not reap or gather into barns—and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them.”

BOOM....BOOM....EXPLOSION! – It’s autumn, 1948 and something just went wrong! Premature dynamite explodes for Barneveld’s Watson Construction! A young worker, father of three, blown up by dynamite! He cried out for God’s help with unbearable pain to his legs! His clothes and shoes ripped off of his body... gravel embedded that would vacate for years! Leg amputation discussed! While lying in a hospital bed he reflected....there was the guilt from an accident while driving his family car and killing his father, the loss of a full term baby daughter and a premature son he always wanted. He witnessed 34 stranded hunters freezing to death in the 1940 upper Mississippi Duck Hunt - Indian summer dropped 50 degrees with an 80 mph blizzard. Challenges, yes, but God always had a plan of providing **Beacons of HOPE** and **Simplification**. This man knew how to simplify; after all, he grew up riding a covered wagon from Minnesota to Iowa where the Indians shared fishing secrets; fishing he would one day do with ***Bill Carden**. Now, his home would consist of a small 17 foot trailer in Barneveld, (current location - High Ridge apartments). His three high school girls shared a pull-out couch, a 3 foot closet and found joy(Sporting events were cheaper as cheerleaders!) A Prom Queen dress of daisies was made by ***Aletha Meyers**. Simplification: no money, no after-game malts, but quality family time with laughter! They would carry water, use an outhouse, and receive power from the ***Watson brother’s** Construction.
continued on next page...

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 30 Saturday of 3rd Week of Lent
Matthew 6:25-34

With no refrigerator, groceries were charged daily for several months from store owner ***Tony Kohl!** To give his daughters some privacy in their small abode, this man on crutches would hobble to the gas station. There, God introduced him to owner, ***Thane Myers**. Thane became the rock, the sanctuary he needed. Thane would eventually provide a 1950 Mercury for this employment seeking man to drive to Oscar Meyer's where he occupied a chair for days until they gave in and hired him - perseverance paid off! The girls married and everyone moved, but when severe Rheumatoid Arthritis disabled him again, Barneveld became home with one more surprise from God. Lloyd and Marilyn Ash were introduced to their next door neighbors, more Beacons.....good friends...* **Leonard and Millie Swedlund**. *For I know the plans I have for you, plans to give you a future full of HOPE".* – Jeremiah 29:11

Prayer: *Thank you Heavenly Father for sending your son of Hope into a broken world to encourage simplicity. Thank you for Beacons of HOPE in our community. Grandpa/Grandma Ash would be so happy to know that their heritage continues in Barneveld - their great granddaughter, Shayla married Thane and Alethea Myer's grandson, Mitch. God's plan of hope continues.....Amen.*

Cindy Reeson

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

March 31 4th Sunday of Lent

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

“Today the Church proclaims the Parable of the Prodigal Son from the fifteenth chapter of Luke’s Gospel (sometimes called the Gospel of Mercy). It sets a tone of joyful anticipation for Easter.”

In this famous parable let us imagine ourselves as one of the characters. First, we hear of a Father with two sons, one who is older and a younger son. We never hear names for any of the three persons portrayed in the parable. Maybe there’s a reason. We can insert our own names and imagine ourselves as one of the three characters in the parable, at different moments in our lives. At times, we may be like the older son. We feel like we have done everything that has been asked of us but no one appreciates or thanks us for what we have done. Perhaps we are like the younger son, spoiled beyond belief. We take advantage of people’s goodness and generosity. We think of ourselves and no one else. Finally, we may even imagine ourselves to be like the Father. We are willing to forgive, even when someone has taken us for a ride. We are merciful and forgiving when someone wrongs us. We shower unconditional love on those who are in most need of mercy, forgiveness and peace in their lives. *Which character might you feel like today?*

Prayer: *O God, your joy, mercy and love are endless. You are extravagant in love, forgiveness and grace. Bless us and our relationships today and always. Amen.*

Fr. Jim Presta was the Rector-President of the College Seminary in Chicago where Pastor Jim attended 1998-2001 and has continued to be one of his mentors. He now serves as Pastor of St. Emily Catholic Church in Mount Prospect, Illinois.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 1 Monday of 4th Week of Lent

Luke 15:20

“When the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him and kissed him.”

When I reflect on this verse, what strikes me is the unconditional love that the father shows his son. That no matter what happens, no matter what he does, his father loves him and welcomes him. For me, it reminds me how fortunate I am to be part of a family that has shown me this kind of love and support.

I grew up as the youngest of seven children with a 22 year age difference between oldest to youngest with my mom being my sole care-giving parent. At every single juncture of my life I have felt overwhelming love from my mom and my brothers and sisters. God provided my mom with the strength to move forward despite many hardships. I never felt the potential detrimental impact of the absence of a father because I always had an abundance of family in my life that was willing to step in to provide love, encouragement and a soft place to land. This support did not waiver depending on my actions, thoughts, or other people's opinion of me. It was always there, unfailingly. It was especially critical during my early adolescent years when it seemed that the whole world was rejecting every aspect of who I was as a person; my interests, my ideas, my clothes, my decisions. At school I felt judged, rejected, disconnected. My family was school's counterpoint. I found validation and confidence through their unconditional love. From this, I was able to move forward and grow as a person who hopefully shows other people this type of unconditional positive regard. I try to implement this daily through my work professionally, my personal relationships and most importantly with my family. I pray daily for the same type of strength and patience others have given me so freely.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the unconditional love you provide me every day. Thank you for my family for they are my strength, my joy, my love. Please give me strength and patience so I can be a support to others in need. Amen.

Sateash Kittleson

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 2 Tuesday of 4th Week of Lent

1 Corinthians 16:14

“Let all you do be done in Love.”

About five years ago it became apparent after two trips to the emergency room and a call from the police department that my mother could no longer live by herself. Dementia runs in our family and she needed more care now than my sisters or I could give her. My sisters and I do not live close to where mom was living and the only choice we had was to move our mom to a nursing home/assisted living center.

We worked together to get mom settled into what would now be her new home. I gave mom two days before returning to visit and see how things were going. Mom looked at me like she did not know who I was. I asked her if she knew who I was and she replied “Yes, you are the witch who put me in this rat hole.” WOW! I had to step out of the room to compose myself and wipe away the tears that had gathered in my eyes. When I went back into the room I asked if she needed anything, she said “no.” It was then that I knew I had to leave and I did.

On a very rough ride home, I prayed to God to ease her soul and mine. I knew this was the dementia talking and not my mother, and what we had done was necessary to keep her safe but I still felt like I had just condemned her to death.

This was and probably always will be one of the worst days I have every had.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please look over all caregivers and patients in their care. Grant them the peace to understand the situation and the knowledge to make the right choices no matter how wrong or tough they seem.

Dawn Baumann

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 3 Wednesday of 4th Week of Lent

Psalm 133:1

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity.”

Family! Do you ever feel like God is sending you a message? As of late, I’ve felt that God is trying to remind me of one of life’s most important treasures...family. Family comes in many shapes and forms. I have my immediate family, my extended family, my friends’ family, my church family, my ski family and my human family.

Over the course of the past year I’ve seen personal tragedy and tragedy for so many others, both close to me and across our world. But what I have also seen during these times is groups and communities coming together, supporting and loving each other.

Thank you, Barneveld Lutheran Church, for your strong sense of community and family spirit. You the people, the church, Pastor Jim and God lift me up and lift each other up. I’m very proud and happy to be a part of your family.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for all your blessings to me and my family. For the strength you give me each day and for all the people around me who make life more meaningful. Amen.*

Karen Heitke



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 4 Thursday of 4th Week of Lent

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

PRAISE HIM...THANK HIM....HIS WILL BE DONE

Ever wonder why things happen to us the way they do? There is no question, it is all part of God's plan for us. Back in High School, I was recruited to play baseball by 2 colleges. I had signed to play at Long Island Univ. in Brooklyn, NY. However, I was torn, as I always wanted to attend and play at St. John's Univ. I hoped and prayed they would extend me an offer. Two weeks prior to classes starting at LIU, I received a call from the SJU coach. The catcher they recruited, broke his hand and they now needed another catcher. I told the coach I already committed to attending LIU on a full scholarship. However, that scholarship did not include books/fees and a living stipend. The SJU coach said he would include those if I came to SJU. I accepted, and to this day I know God was behind all of this, as it changed my entire life. Not only did I meet my beloved future wife there, but the classes I took there catapulted me into my pro sports career, as the same classes were not offered at LIU. The degree I obtained from SJU gave us the opportunity to move to Chicago in 1983. I often think back to how God changed his plan for me at the last minute. We have raised 4 wonderful sons and have met some of the best friends anyone could ask for in the world. So now, whenever things change at the last minute, I know it was God who had his hand in the change. It is always God's will that shows he has a plan for us, loves and cares for us. His plan for us is a Blessing that we can only thank Him for, especially during this Lenten season.

Prayer for God's Protection – *The Light of God surrounds me. The Love of God enfolds me. The Power of God protects me. The Presence of God watches over me. Wherever I am, God is. Amen.*

Bob Grim and his wife Susanne live in Arlington Heights, IL where they have raised four sons. They have one granddaughter, and are expecting their 2nd granddaughter in April. Bob works for the Chicago White Sox.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 5 Friday of 4th Week of Lent

Titus 1:2

“In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.”

For my devotion this year I chose to write about my word, hope. I found this verse and it spoke to me. Since I retired I think about my mortality more than I used to. I'm not old, but my first 62 years are gone in the blink of an eye! I hope to have 25 or 30 more great years ahead. That too will go quickly. It's not all gloom and doom because God promised us eternal life before the ages began. There is some comfort and peace in knowing that when my earthly journey comes to an end, I will see my parents, grandparents and especially Drew again. That my friends is called hope!

Prayer: *Good and gracious God, We come before you today in need of hope. For times when we feel helpless and weak, we pray for hope. We all need hope for a better future, a better life and for love and kindness. Help us to walk in your light and live my life in faith and glory. In your name I pray. Amen.*

Joann Manteufel



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 6 Saturday of 4th Week of Lent

Luke 10:5

“Whenever you enter a home, give it your blessing. If it is worthy of the blessing, the blessing will stand; if not, the blessing will return to you.”

I love this verse. It has taken me years to learn it & live it. I mean mostly live it, I'm only human for crying out loud. But when I do, the rewards are incredible. I don't know about you, but I've seen someone in need and said "Well, I'd give to them and help them out, but they'd probably just spend it on something I consider inappropriate." I'm not proud to admit that, but it's the truth of how I've sometimes judged in the past. One day for whatever reason, most likely the Holy Spirit working in me, I decided that someone needed help and I was going to be the person that helped them. It did briefly cross my mind that they may not use my gift as I would want them to. Then I said to myself, "It's a gift from my heart, how they choose to use this gift is none of my business." I'm giving with my whole heart and I'm sure only good will come of it." When we leave the judgement out of it, beautiful things are bound to happen.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Please bless me with the right attitude so I can continue to do God's work with my whole heart. Amen.*

Tammie Thronson married to Lowell for 33 fun loving years and have two sons, Levi & Jacob.



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 7 Fifth Sunday of Lent

Hebrew 12:2

"Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus."

This is one of my favorite bible passages. It holds great significance for me not only as I try and deepen my personal relationship with Jesus but also because it helps me to pursue His major dream. It is Jesus who looks on our broken world and sees incredible beauty and potential as the place where we make the reign of God a reality.

Every day I try and work at my personal relationship with Him knowing that I not only want to believe that He is Lord, Savior, Son of God and Messiah but I want so much to try and follow Him. But how do I best follow Jesus today as a contemporary Christian?

Four attitudes I focus on, fix on and look closely at every day are - gratitude, courage compassion and vision. Working at these qualities in my life I believe help me to follow Him today. Gratitude - if you look closely at Jesus' life you can see how grateful to the Father He was for everything He had. Each day I begin my time with Him thinking about all that God has given to me. Usually I review the previous day's experiences and reflect on how grateful I am for so many things - from the simple fact that I can get up on my own, take care of myself, to enjoying the company and friendship of so many people in my life. Courage - while looking at Jesus' story in the scriptures I see the incredible courage He had to have to deal with his critics and contemporaries. He was not afraid to stand up and let others know how he felt and what He stood for in regards to mercy and forgiveness. Compassion - again and again Jesus models this attitude for me as I look at His story. I try as best as I can to learn from Him about the value, worth, and dignity of all God's people. And Vision - the final focus I fix on as I look at Jesus and think about my relationship with Him is His vision - making the reign of God, the kingdom of God a reality now. For me this challenge requires solid reflection on the previous three. While I reflect on the gratitude I need in my heart for all that I have it motivates me to enhance my compassion and courage for all my brothers and sisters. This is how I follow Jesus and fulfill His dream. Making the reign of God a reality right now is my goal and challenge and can make some of the brokenness we experience in our world - beautiful. "Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus".

Prayer: *"Gracious God I thank you for the many blessings I have received. Let these gifts be a source of compassion and courage for me so that I may make your reign, your kingdom come. Help me to extend care, mercy, and forgiveness to all the people I will meet this day and let me see your presence on all whom I will meet as I try and keep my eyes ever fixed on you. Amen"*

Fr. Bill Zavaski retired pastor in Arlington Heights Illinois. Associate and friend of Pastor Jim.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 8 Monday of 5th Week of Lent

1 Corinthians 13:13

“And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.”

My sister Pat was a humble, strong, and compassionate woman. She lived on the same street for 80 years, and she worked at the same job for 35 years. She lived for her kids. Pat fell away from her Catholic faith many years ago. But it was during the last 1-1/2 years of Pat's life that she taught me what faith, hope, and love were by living out these virtues.

When Pat's husband died seven years ago, her sorrow consumed her; but because she loved her kids and grandkids so much, she always tried to appear hopeful and strong. Although her heart was heavy, she wanted to help her kids through their grief.

Pat's health deteriorated rapidly. It was during this time that I started to visit Pat regularly, whether she was home or in the hospital. Our thirteen year age difference seemed to melt away as we would share our deepest doubts, fears, and hopes.

It was during one of her numerous hospital stays that Pat's son, Donnie, was diagnosed with liver cancer. Pat and Donnie often fought about his drinking, but her love and support for him never wavered.

As Donnie lay dying in hospice in one hospital, Pat was struggling with her own health issues in another hospital. Ironically the two hospitals were just a mile apart. I believe it was God's abundant compassion and mercy that guided Pat through her helplessness. Accompanied by a nurse and on oxygen, Pat made the one-mile journey to Donnie's bedside. As she was wheeled in to say her final farewell, I was reminded of the deeply intense pain and sorrow that Mary felt at the foot of the cross. Donnie died the next day. Although her heart was breaking, Pat put all her strength and energy into getting well because she knew her kids needed her. Her love for them knew no bounds.

On January 6th, 2018, the gates of heaven were opened for one of God's good and faithful servants. I pray to Pat often. She has strengthened my faith, increased my hope, and deepened my love for all those in my life.

A Prayer: Merciful God-

Help me to believe in you when my faith is weak and doubting,

Help me to trust in you when hope seems distant and I am in despair,

Help me to believe that you love me- a sinner. Amen.

Lee Springer has known Pastor Jim since he was a tot. She is a good friend of the Hearne family besides being wife, mom and grandma.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 9 Tuesday of 5th Week of Lent

Psalm 27:8

"When You said, "Seek My face", my heart said to You, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."

*In the morning when I rise,
Give me Jesus!
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus,
you may have all the rest,
Give me Jesus!*

We sing these lyrics during morning worship on Sundays. But don't the words apply every day and everywhere?

One cold frigid morning, while driving east on 18/151, the sun slowly pushed itself up from the eastern horizon. Magnificent colors of purple, pink and fuchsia beams poured through the clouds. It was truly a heavenly sight! "Give me Jesus!" I sang.

God's face appears subtly every day and everywhere. Open your ears and eyes. Allow your senses to feel your Spiritual surrounding. Did you hear a song that touched your heart while you were driving home from work? What about the person you bumped into at Walmart? You thought about them that morning and then you practically ran your car into them passing through the frozen food aisle. Did you feel the goosebumps forming on the back of your neck, while walking down to the beautiful lake on a warm and humid morning with your kayak? Was it the Spirit telling you to pay attention to that song you heard, that person you seen, those goosebumps you felt? "

I've learned these last couple years to have Jesus in my back-pocket. I hear, see and feel his presence especially while composing and arranging sacred music. I've learned to open my heart up to Faith. "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek"

Prayer: *By the power of Jesus, God and Grace, Open our ears and eyes. Help us to feel your unique spiritual presence every day and everywhere. Continue to surround us with your divine white light of everlasting love.*

Linda Seeley

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 10 Wednesday of 5th Week of Lent

Luke 15:20

-So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Music Reflection: Casting Crowns - "Just Be Held"

Losing someone from a death is a very difficult thing to learn to deal with. Our lives feel broken, and we are unsure of how to move forward. After my mom died, it was difficult to understand why a woman who was 57 years old, a new grandma, would be gone too soon. 9 years later, my husband Jeremy died suddenly, at the age of 39. Questions arise of why does this happen? I was left alone to parent our 4 young children. (3 years through 12 years old). Many widows I met, moved in with their parents. Some weren't believers of faith, and often wondered how I did it. Well, first, it is hard to avoid 4 children in your house. I had to get up and keep going, one day at a time. Keeping things the same was critical, we already had one big change losing their dad/my husband. I surrounded myself with my family, church family, friends in our community and new young widow friends. Some would say, where is God in this hard time. He was everywhere. He was in each person who came to help us. We received meals, help with school photos they missed, financial gifts, drivers and babysitters, to name a few things. Every night, I journaled as a way to speak with God my frustrations. I have learned that God never stopped providing for us. After 2 ½ years of working through our grief, our lives changed, because of two - 5 year olds. My daughter, who was 5, met a boy at school, and then saw him at church on Ash Wednesday. Because of them meeting, I met the boys father, and one year later, John & I were married. We are now blessed with 6 children that we share, and are so thankful that we have each other. Having faith in God, and of course patience, is comforting, knowing that God is always there with His open arms to hold us close.

Prayer: *So many times in our lives, we experience brokenness. Please guide us each day, utilize those around us, to help us have the faith to continue on each day of our earthly lives. Amen.*

Brenda Martin: Youth Director, ELC in Mount Horeb (besides a loving wife and mother.)

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 11 Thursday of 5th Week of Lent
Philippians 4:13

My favorite bible verse comes from Philippians 4:13 ***“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*** I always seem to find strength through Jesus when I am lost and in pain. I lost my brother, Ray to cancer when I was 26 years old. And I lost my father and best friend, Raymond 7 years ago to cancer as well. It was in these times that I questioned my faith. When I am in my darkest hours and searching for answers from God, He always seems to send me signs. I might not always get the answer I am looking for, but it always seems to strengthen my faith.

My word has always been LOVE. I always find strength in knowing how much Christ loves me and how much love I can share with others. I feel that in times of your life, it is normal to question your faith because it's at those difficult times, where Christ shows himself to you.

When my brother passed and I was driving home from his funeral with my family, I was young and at the darkest point in my life and I questioned the existence of God. As I looked into the sky on that dark night, I saw a magnificent crucifix brightly shining in the sky. Rays of light go to a point, but this crucifix had squared edges. My wife and I pulled over to gaze upon it with amazement. As I wept, I also felt peace and reassurance that I so desperately needed of God's existence for the first time.

When my dad was dying and the cancer was taking over his body, I was the last of my 3 remaining siblings to arrive at the hospice clinic on his last day here on earth. My sister, Teri told me that he was unable to speak and he had not spoken a word all day. She leaned over my father's bedside and whispered, "Jon is here." My father then opened his mouth and cried out, "JON!" Everyone was in amazement that he was able to speak and my name and it was the last word he spoke before he passed away. And again, I was at peace knowing that both my brother and my father were together with the Lord. This is why this verse means so much to me because I CAN do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Always keep your eyes open because it is a beautiful gift to receive a wink from Christ.

Prayer: *O Lord, Be mindful of us and have mercy on us while we struggle to comprehend life's hardships. Keep us ever in your watch, til we can walk again with light hearts and renewed spirits. Amen.*

Jon Trainor

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 12 Friday of 5th Week of Lent

Isaiah 40:8

“The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord stands forever.”

I enjoy this verse for many reasons, but I think I'm particularly drawn to it as it relates to nature. I envision the transition from summer to fall and winter, when the flowers are no longer blooming, the grass is turning brown, the leaves begin to change from vibrant green to a dull color and even the air begins to smell different. I often feel gloomy and sad during this transition knowing the days are getting shorter, time spent outside becomes more limited and winter looms around the corner. However, once the first snow fall hits, I often feel excited. The glitter of the snowflakes on the trees almost becomes magical, the once brown dead grass it now covered bright white, and the once quite neighborhood becomes filled again with the laughter of kids as they play out in the snow.

I can't help but think of how this relates to life. One moment things are going great, life is grand and vibrant, but in the blink of an eye life changes. It's so easy for us to focus on the negative feelings we get with change that it gets difficult to see all the good in our lives. God is always blessing us, even when we don't see it; sometimes it's just a matter of taking off the blinders and looking around. God is with us to guide us and give us hope in all situations, never leaving our side.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Please help us to always see your blessings, in good times and bad. Remind us that you are forever with us, guiding us and giving us hope. May we always find joy, love, and peace through you. Amen*

Liz Taylor: Married to Ben, we have two daughters Hadley and Everly. I am delighted to have the opportunity to be an active member of BLC. I serve on the church council and I assist in teaching Bridge class.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 13 Saturday of 5th Week of Lent

2 Corinthians 1:23

“I call God as my witness—he knows my heart!”

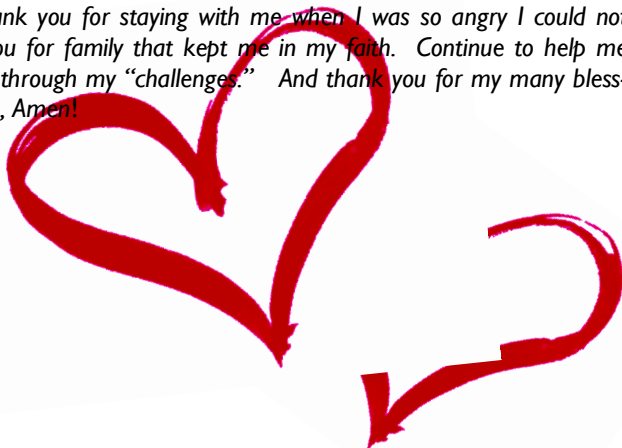
It's a verse that can be comforting and scary. When I reflect back on all the challenges our family has had, I'm rather overwhelmed. We talk about our problems but I once read we are to consider them as challenges. And life is full of them, repeatedly. I've had two people very close to me who were “challenging.” One became so angry along with dementia that there was no pleasing. It was very difficult but I could not and did not give up.

The second person caused so much harm and heartache, I stopped praying. God seemingly wasn't answering them anyhow. I wanted nothing to do with this person. Then I read I must pray for this person which helps take my anger away. So I tried it and yes it did work! The answers we needed happened for all of our family. I'm not saying a thunderbolt hit everyone at once but we have all been sent answers and we have all been blessed.

Along with challenges there have been so many blessings. It's the blessings I sometimes forget. God knows this about us. So I think “*He knows my heart*” is comforting and scary because I'm so imperfect.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for staying with me when I was so angry I could not pray. And thank you for family that kept me in my faith. Continue to help me trust you to get me through my “challenges.” And thank you for my many blessings. In Jesus' name, Amen!*

Friend of BLC



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 14 Palm Sunday
Samuel 16:7

The Lord said to Samuel, “Take no notice of his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him; God does not see as human beings see; they look at appearances but God looks at the heart.”

Having my own four children and running an in home daycare for many years I would always preach “Treat others how you want to be treated.” “If you don’t have anything nice to say then don’t say anything at all” and then there was “Don’t judge.” To many people open their mouths and say hurtful things instead of just listening and keeping thoughts to self. I try very hard to live by these three key quotes and instill them in my children. It starts with the adults and children learn from the adults. We have no idea what is going through that other persons mind. They may have been just diagnosed with a life threatening illness, lost a loved one or lost their job. I feel like our society today needs to look for the good or at the heart of every human being. Reach out and talk to someone who appears distraught or in need. Find 3 things good about the person and not allow yourself to think negative.

We all have “brokenness” however together in our faith may we somehow overcome judging anyone.

Prayer: Heavenly Father please continue to guide us to love one another and not judge. Thank you for loving us through our brokenness. Thank you for helping us to find peace.. Amen.

Rachel Doescher: Married to Leo, we have four children Alyssa, Lucas, Macy and Reece. We enjoy the outdoors, family meals and volunteering for our local EMS.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 15 Monday of Holy Week

Helpless. No going forward, no going back, and so I cried out for help, and just cried. I couldn't have been more than two years old, but I can remember the feeling. Like many other days I had followed my sisters across the back yard and into the alley behind the house. We often visited our neighbor, Helge, who always had a smile, and kept a stash of orange circus peanuts to share. But on the way home this day the rain was falling, and the dirt and the North Dakota clay in the alley had turned to mud. That red clay mud closed in around my rain boots until I could not take another step.

My sisters, being three and five years old, thought that was hilarious and hurried on home without me. Through my panic and my tears, I could see the back door open and my dad come running through the wet lawn. His strong arms pulled me up into a big hug, leaving the boots stuck in the mud. He carried me, and comforted me, and brought me home.

It's been a long time since Dad could pick me up and carry me, but more than once when I felt stuck, or lost, I knew I could still call on him for a hand, or a word, or a hug. But even more powerful was the promise he shared with me over and over throughout those years. That promise is that there no matter where I found myself, no matter how helpless I felt, no matter what muddy patch was threatening to suck me in, I could call out to the God who loves me. Whenever I am in need of help, the Father is watching, listening, and ready to once again come running out the back door to set me free. The gospel story of Jesus is all about God's rescue mission for you and me, no matter how helpless we are.

Two years ago, we laid my dad to rest in the West Blue Mounds Cemetery, not into the cold dark clay, but into the arms of the Father who has all along been watching and waiting, ready to welcome him home.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for your patient, persistent, and powerful love in Christ. That love which reaches out to us in our helplessness, and brings us back to you. Amen.*

John Twiton Pastor at Evangelical Lutheran Church Mt. Horeb.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 16 Tuesday of Holy Week

Luke 15:11-32

I have always liked the story of the Prodigal Son. Who doesn't appreciate the image of a father lonely for his offspring, overcome by the joyous reunion? How wonderful that God loves us like that!

Yet the story raises some questions which aren't easily answered. What happens to the elder brother? The one jealous of his sibling who is welcomed home so lavishly? Does he finally join the party or does he spend the rest of the day pouting? Does he hang on to his resentment for the rest of his life or does he let it go and rejoice because his brother is restored to the family and safely home? Then there is the biggest question—I am not like the jealous brother am I? Have I avoided the temptation to pout and point to my own virtues when someone else is welcomed into God's fold? Sometimes I need rescuing from being wayward and sometimes from being self-righteous!

There is another question I always think about when I read this story. What happens the next day? When the celebration is over, the fatted calf eaten, the wine finished, the guests gone home? How does the Prodigal Son respond to being home then? The son received his inheritance and squandered it—can he expect more or is he forever broke? Does he reach out to make amends with his angry brother? How does he adjust to the orderly life of his father's household?

The truth is, some of us return to God and leave over and over. We turn away and sin, we repent and turn back. It may take quite a few tries before the turning back takes hold and becomes permanent. Like an alcoholic who slips and drinks before finally getting sober, it isn't always enough to let go of sin just once. Sometimes it is a lifelong effort. Yet God's mercy is like a bottomless well. We are forgiven again and again.

Blessed God, thank you for rejoicing when I return to you, even if I have turned away 100 times. Thank you for your welcome home to your heart. When I am like the jealous brother, help me to rejoice at another's returning—make me forgiving and happy that your beloved has returned. Keep me with you. Prevent me from leaving your blessed way. Amen.

Carolyn Kennedy: Pastor at Barneveld UCC Church.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 17 Wednesday of Holy Week

1 Thessalonians 5:15-18

“See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Sometimes the most amazing thoughts and comments come through children. Just before Christmas I asked Jacob (7) if he wanted to go caroling with the church. He said “Yes.” Jacob had also told his teacher Mrs. Fingerson that he wanted to “Spread Joy at Christmas. Jacob told me that “maybe I could spread Joy by going caroling.” I am so Grateful for him and who he is becoming.

My word is **Grateful**. Every day take a few moments to thank God for all the good you have. You have earned the Goodness in your life. Share your gratefulness with others by helping those who need “Joy” in their life and reminders of what they have.

A challenge to you is this: For the next week take some time each day to be grateful. It can be done any time of the day, but I find the best times are when you are waking up and just as you are falling asleep.

When you are waking up and thinking about your day, remind yourself what you have to be Grateful for so you can plan for a wonderful day. At the end of the day, celebrate the amazing moments. If necessary, release any stress and worries that have come up throughout the day. Remind yourself of the good in your life and that you have gotten through situations worse than what came up during the day. Be grateful for an opportunity to rest so you can think clearly the next day about whatever worries you may have. A clear mind will help you come to a reasonable solution that is good for you and others.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for the gifts in my life. I appreciate each of the experiences I had today because they make me a better person. I pray for strength to continue focusing on things to be grateful for instead of getting wrapped up in the difficulties of life. Amen.*

Shelly Sandry

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 18 Holy Thursday

Psalm 23:4-5

“Show me your ways, Lord teach your paths Guide me in your truth and teach me for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”

It was an unfamiliar area for me traveling to a night class off the square in Madison. I was uncomfortable knowing that when class ended it would be dark and I would have to find my way home. When leaving my class darkness did indeed greet me along with a very dense fog. Fog so thick that I couldn't read the street signs. I peered out my window trying to find my street. It wasn't long when flashing red lights appeared in my rear view mirror. The officer came to my window and very politely asked me "Do you know why you have been pulled over?" I had no idea. The officer informed that I had just went through a red light. I with a scared and surprised and said "I did?" He asked why I was up on the square? I told him "I went to a banking class." "What street are you looking for?" he asked. I replied, "West Washington Street." He said, "You just went past it!" The officer told me that he didn't know why but he was not going to give me a ticket. "Take the next street and follow it to John Nolen Drive" he said. I pulled away and turned down the next street. Unfortunately the street came to a Y and I turned. I saw the flashing red lights again and over the speaker the officer said "Diane, you went the wrong way." I want you to follow me and I will take you to John Nolen Drive and from there you should be able to get home. I did as he said. I was on the correct road and on my way home.

The good souled Officer guided me out of Madison just as God guides us through difficult times. I pray that we listen as he says to us "Follow Me."

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for being with me in my life challenges and joys. Let me continue to hear your word as life moves forward. Amen.

Diane Hefty

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 19 Good Friday

Philippians 4:13

“For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”

The “Grief Share” ministry offered by our church is a true measure of what this verse represents. I, along with three others, were asked to lead the first offering of the program; 13 weekly sessions of videos and small group discussions. I wondered, “Why would Pastor Jim ask me?” There are many other members of our congregation more qualified, I thought! Maybe because Pastor Jim figured I would not say “no.” After a great amount of time considering, I am grateful to have been a part of this wonderful ministry. I benefited from what the program offers and from what the participants offered. Over the last three years, I have lost my Dad, my Mother-in-Law and one of my best friends. So participating in the program made sense. The participants shared challenges and difficulties of dealing with their losses. I became more comfortable in sharing my own experiences and witnessed the power of God working within every one of us. Our small group discussions began by discussing what we saw in the video but soon our discussions went “off course.” This is when the discussions became more meaningful and, I believe, more beneficial to each of our small group participants. We grew more comfortable talking about difficulties in dealing with losing a loved one. Personal hardships, shedding of tears and comforting words shared with one another was a true testament to the workings of God in our lives. Regardless of who was sharing, listening or offering comforting words or support, God was truly present working with us and giving us strength. We gathered for one more time following the completion of the video series. This gathering offered a short memorial service with each of us lighting candles in memory of our lost loved ones. We then shared a wonderful meal of favorite foods in remembrance of those we lost. The fellowship shared was proof God was at work and gave us renewed spirit walking out the door after completion of our time together.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for giving us strength to carry on. Provide us with guidance and a purpose to follow your light. Amen.

Bob Johnson

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 20 Easter Vigil

Psalms 34:18

***"If your heart is broken, you'll find GOD right there;
if you're kicked in the gut, he'll help you catch your breath."***

Sometimes God breaks us to bless us. No one enjoys the pain of brokenness. Normally it calls for a letting go of something near and dear to us. At the time, it doesn't make any sense. And yet, that brokenness leads to an unexpected good.

After I left the priesthood in June 2011, I moved back in with my dad in the house I grew up. Talk about being humbled. Dad had been used to living on his own with his routines and rituals. Initially Dad was sad about me leaving the priesthood. Now don't get me wrong- Dad loved Amy but I know deep down he hurt because I left something I had thought about doing my whole life. I was living back home and at that point I had no job and no clear path for work. I was depressed. I spent a lot of time in bed during the week. Seeing Amy on the weekends lifted my spirits temporarily but the trip back home to Dad's was filled with a heavy sadness. *I was broken.*

The song "Bless the Broken Road" by Rascal Flatts has a wonderful verse that goes: "I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you; that every long lost dream lead me to where you are; others who broke my heart, they were like northern stars; pointing me on my way into your loving arms; this much I know is true; that God has blessed the broken road, that led me straight to you."

God lifted me out of that bed and out of depression through others like my brother Bill. He constantly encouraged me to send out my resume everywhere. I did. My broken road included stints as a security guard working overnight shifts at Midway Airport in Chicago and other inner-city locations. Then I landed a job with the commuter railroad Metra in Chicago. God was blessing my broken road. Amy and I found a worshipping community that welcomed us and our story. The pastor encouraged me to think about ministering in the ELCA. I met various people at the security job, Metra and new church family who were touched and inspired by my story. *I had been blessed.*

I can look back today and see how broken the road was that I traveled. There were times I thought it was a tragic dead end. And yet God was there the entire time blessing me. God blessed the broken road that led me to Amy, Anna and Peter. God blessed the broken road that led me back to ministry. God blessed the broken road that led me straight to you. **Sometimes, God breaks us to bless us.** And when God does, we find our true selves.

Question: *Who did God send to you when your road was broken?*

Pastor Jim

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 21 Easter Sunday

Matthew 21:22

"If you BELIEVE, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

For as long as I can remember, my word has been "believe"; I don't remember why I chose it, but I have always felt a pull towards this word. In general, I try to be a positive person and have a positive outlook on life. "Believe" fits right into this positive lifestyle and I have found that it can be applied to almost any situation. As a student, when I walked into a test and believed that I would do well, I almost certainly would do much better than if I had walked into the same test with a different attitude.. As a parent I have watched my children achieve countless "firsts" only after they believe in themselves. As a sports fan, I have seen teams who believe in themselves beat teams who were probably better... and teams that didn't believe in themselves lose to teams who probably weren't as good as them. We hear stories all the time about people who are sick overcoming unbelievable odds because they truly believe that they will get better. Why is this? It makes sense that working with God to accomplish something is going to work in our favor more often than using a negative attitude to work against God. I think that believing in something instead of focusing on the negative is how Jesus lived; not only is this how he wants us to live, but it also leads us to live our best lives.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Please help me to clear the negative from my life today. Help me to find the good in each situation and each person. Most importantly, help me to truly BELIEVE that you will help me through any obstacles so that I can be the best possible person and live my best life.*

Danielle Moyer

Believe

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 22 Monday in the Octave of Easter

Philippians 3:13

“No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.”

Regrets can consume us with all sorts of emotions. Dad didn't have much time left. He was in the VA Hospital diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. Dad was 62 years old and had just received his first Social Security check. I was 25 years old and losing my dad was pretty scary. It was Sunday, August 18, 1985, and I really wanted to make that long trip to Madison and see him and talk to him and tell him that I loved him. My sisters were all busy and convinced me that we would all go together on Monday after we were done work. Well, Monday came and just minutes before I was to leave home a car pulled in the driveway....it was my sisters. You can imagine how I felt because I knew at that moment that it was too late to see dad. He was gone. Why wasn't I brave enough to make that trip to Madison by myself? I couldn't tell dad I loved him, I couldn't hug him one more time, I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't.

I have never forgotten that day but with my Faith I have resolved my regret. Dad left us when he did to save us all...we were all broken and I am sure this broke him. I talked to dad and told him everything I planned on telling him that Sunday night. I know he heard me. God doesn't want regrets to take away our joy, self-confidence, hope or even our Faith in God. We must forgive ourselves to be forgiven. Let your Regrets be washed away so that you can focus on life as it is today.

As I remember my dad I also remember my mom because this day is her birthday..."Happy Birthday Mom."

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for paying the price for our past, present and future. Help us to remember not to look back with regret, but rather look forward so we can serve You. Amen.

Diane Schlimgen

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 23 Tuesday in the Octave of Easter

Psalm 4:6

“God is my strength and refuge in the time of need.”

I grew up in Sparks, WI a little town of 14 houses and no churches. Sparks was surrounded by 20,000 acres of potatoes. The potatoes were dug up by a tractor and diggers. Once dug up they laid on top of the soil in the fields. My mother and I would then move down the rows filling our 2 wire bushel containers. We would then empty our containers into gunny sacks. The gunny sacks were picked up by all different kinds of people including World War 2 German Prisoners Jamaicans. The sacks of potatoes were stored in four warehouses along the Soo Line Railroad tracks.

They were shipped by railroad to the southern states. The WWII German prisoners were housed at Camp McNaughton which was located by Sparks. The Jamaican's were housed in railroad cabooses that were no longer on the tracks.

One day along came a traveling Missionary, whose name was Reverend Weyland. There were six children in our family. Reverend Weyland asked my mother if he could confirm and baptize everyone in the Missouri Lutheran Church. Mother said “yes” and so I began to study in a little town hall that had little wooden benches. This town hall was also where a dance would be held on Saturday nights. This is where I was baptized and confirmed. I then went into the service during the Korean War. Reverend Weyland would send me Bible Devotions. This continued until I moved to Rhinelander. This was my path to Faith in God and Jesus.

I never attended a church, but I did however become involved in sports and I was outstanding in baseball and basketball. God had given me the ability to participate in all sports but it was baseball where I received many accolades. Sports carried me through in life and I owe it all to Jesus Christ our Lord. I served in the Military Medics from 1951-1955. I then took advantage of the GI Bill and became a business teacher in Barneveld.

Jim Nelson

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 24 Wednesday in the Octave of Easter
1 Thessalonians

“ Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Acceptance of things is not easy for me. I have never been a fan of change. As a little girl my parents divorced, we moved out of our home into an apartment. I no longer lived with my dad and older brother and sister. Life changed. My mom and dad both remarried life was different. After I graduated from college my parents moved out of state. Mom moved to Florida and Dad retired to California. Life changed again. It wasn’t what I thought it would be. I didn’t understand why family did not want to be together. I often wondered what was God’s plan?

I married Chuck and we started a family. During my first pregnancy I miscarried twins at twenty weeks. We were devastated. We did not understand God’s plan. I struggled . . . life changed.

We were blessed with three children Amy, Kate, and Tom all of whom have grown into loving faithful people. Chuck and I could not be prouder. Yet two of the three have moved away. Life changed again. I still struggle to understand why family doesn’t want to be together. What I wanted most of all was to be close to all my children and be apart of their lives. God must have a plan and I must learn to accept whatever comes my way.

Three practices that I find help me with **acceptance** come from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, **Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**

First, I must always try to be joyful for God is in control. He is my strength. Second, I must be faithful to prayer, to pray without ceasing. Third, I must be grateful for all that He has given me.

Prayer: *Lord, help me to accept the changes in my life. Amen.*

Kathy Lucas

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 25 Thursday in the Octave of Easter

Romans 15:13

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

I have hoped for many things in my life, as I am sure many of us have. I have hoped for material things, monetary things and just unrealistic things. I have even hoped beyond words that a life would change.

What I was not doing is putting my faith in God's hands and allowing him to show me the hope that I needed.

In the last couple of years I have been able to once again open my heart to God and allow his hope to enter. And I do know that he has something very wonderful in store for me.

Dear Lord,
Where does my hope come from?
When I wait on you.
Yes, hope flies in with wings of truth
And changes life anew.
For love has risen up with Christ,
It reigns for all to see.
And more than this I know your life
And Spirit work through me.
Amen.

Pam Trainor, Forever grateful to our Community. A member of the UCC Congregation.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 26 Friday in the Octave of Easter

1 John 5:14

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

My husband was a hockey player and coach when we met and for years, I followed him and his teams everywhere they played, literally attending hundreds of games and hockey parties. One night while getting ready to attend another hockey party with him, I became conflicted. Of course, it was winter, and the night air was so cold that when it hit your face it hurt and took your breath away. As I stood in front of my closet, I asked, “Do I really have to go out in this? I just want to stay home in my flannels, with a bowl of popcorn and watch my favorite Christmas movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life.” I knew my husband would be disappointed if I didn’t go. I wondered what our marriage would look like if only 4 years in, I started a practice of excusing myself from supporting my husband.

I realized I was conflicted and couldn’t answer this question on my own, so I sat on the edge of the bed to have a conversation with God. “God, help me to know the right thing to do. Give me the will to make my husband happy more than I want to please myself.” I actually sat still to listen, and in doing so was able to hear God clearly say, “Go. Go and make your husband happy. You will be happier for it.” So, I got dressed and ready to go.

We arrived at the restaurant and walked into the party room and saw all the parents gathered. As the crowd started moving toward the buffet line, there, in the corner of the room, I saw it...a big screen TV. And then as the image came into focus, I realized that there on the TV was George Bailey saying to Mr. Gower, “I wish I had a million dollars! Hot dog!” I couldn’t believe, it...my favorite Christmas movie, “A Wonderful Life” was playing! The reality of the moment set in.

I was no longer cold. I felt God’s presence fill the room and a warmth come over me. I heard God saying to me, “See, you are happier for it! If you had not had that conversation with me, this moment would be only a mere coincidence. But now it is an answered prayer to take your broken spirit, your moment of selfishness and turn it into a victory for you and for me. Tell this story and you will be a blessing to me.” After that, I didn’t even watch the movie during the party. I was so overwhelmed with the way that God had answered my prayer that no life at that moment would have been more wonderful than mine.

Prayer: *Dear God, Help us to know we can always lean on you and that you are the answer to our every dilemma, big or small. Help us to be still so that we can hear you. Amen.*

Deacon Vicki Hanrahan: *Assistant to the Bishop for Synodical Life. South –Central Synod of Wisconsin, ELCA. Wife of Steve mother of Nick and Clare.*

April 27 Saturday in the Octave of Easter

Luke 18:16-17

As the cold winter winds blow through our Midwest, I often wonder what I'm doing in this climate?

I was warmly comforted however, by a verse which spoke to me from Luke 18:16-17.

Jesus said to his disciples to ***“let the children come to me and never send them away.”*** He later, in this same verse requests that we have the faith of children to get within the Kingdom's gates. The disciples were about to send the children away but Jesus intervened and demonstrated his love for children. According to the Bible Gateway, the word children is mentioned over 500 times in the Bible!

For me, I am reminded of the treasured moments with my own children as they were growing up and now even as they are adults. I realize how precious the time is that I have spent and will spend with them. The same holds true for my darling grandchildren as I continually see Jesus in them through their questions, their joy of life, their growth, their sweetness and the wonder that they have for pretty much everything. They are playful and always forgiving to any small hurts. Why can't I show the same forgiveness that they display?

It's hard as I deal with my “important” daily tasks to sometimes make time for these “Little Ones” but Jesus calls me to do so. Jesus was in the middle of saving the world but didn't want the children shooed away.

Through my children and grandchildren I see the beauty of God's creation over and over again.

As I prepare for Lent, I am also preparing to attend a family birthday party of a beautiful one year old special needs child our great nephew. It is through him and all children that I continue to see Jesus and his call to innocence. I hope that we continue to make time for children in our hearts and that we as a country value the sanctity of our lives and especially the little ones. Birth rates are going down and abortions are still a plague in this country.

Prayer: *Lord, I ask you to pray for this country and bring them back to your words from Luke to let the Children Come to us always!*

Chuck Lucas: Amy's Dad, Jim's Father in law and Grandpa (Papa) to Anna and Peter

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 28 The 2nd Sunday of Easter

John 15:9-11

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now, remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

If you haven’t guessed, my word is Love. Joy is a close second! John’s gospel telling of the Lord’s Supper is packed with Jesus’ directions for us, his disciples.

I have been blessed to have known some times in my life when I knew one thing with more certainty than anything else- not just knew it, but felt it- that GOD LOVES ME. The peace and fearlessness that this peak experience brought me was real and beyond measure. Choosing love as my word, I choose to surrender my fears and embrace God’s ever flowing love.

We don’t have to look far in this world to see hate and fear. It seems hate and fear are standard practice instead of love and trust. I have been troubled by the plight of the many Central American families seeking asylum at our southern border. Must our response be rooted in hatred and fear? Suppose the ELCA created a framework through which churches could sponsor a family seeking asylum. The workers would be welcome, and I see no better way to integrate immigrants into our society. Perhaps best of all, what a great way to demonstrate the power of Christ’s love for the whole world. Something to ponder.

Prayer: Heavenly Father! Thank you for the love you gave us in the form of Jesus Christ and continue to pour upon us. Open our hearts to receive your love and be your vessels.

Earlene Laudin

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 29 Monday of the 2nd Week of Easter

Proverbs 3:6

I want to pray for everyone finding their path. Whether it be career-wise, building their future, or any personal obstacles one is trying to overcome. God is with you throughout all the ups and downs that you will encounter; never lose sight of that. Proverbs 3:6 **states “seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take”.**

As many of you know, I’m very attached to my dog. So when reading this verse, I can’t help but think of her on our walks. We’ll head down the bike trail and she’ll be as far in front of me as possible, pulling me along behind her. She’s confident about our direction and is determined to go at her pace while I try to keep up.

But then something funny happens. When no one is around and it’s a nice day, I’ll take off her leash. (Mind you she is a very good girl and listens well). She’ll get all excited and run around me to celebrate her freedom, and then we’ll continue down the path. However, without the leash, she ends up walking behind me. She’s right at my heels, swerving back and fourth behind me. Sometimes, even running into my feet. We’re walking the same pace, down the same clear path, but now she’s frantic to follow me so she knows what to do. I’ve always found it to be such a silly thing.

I can’t help but see this same silly habit in our relationship with God. When we feel His presence directing our lives right, we’re constantly trying to pick up the pace and drag him behind us by the arm. We do this with the mentality that we can do this on our own. We know what to do and where to go and feel as if we don’t need his “leash.” So when God lets go of our hand, similar to how I let my dog Remi off her leash, we feel that guidance disappear and panic. We can no longer see the obvious path in front of us and we don’t know what to do and things start to go wrong so we frantically look for God to follow.

The path doesn’t change, God’s presence doesn’t change. It may feel like it at times but he never leaves us. So when those days come where you don’t see what’s in front of you and don’t feel like he’s guiding you, seek His will in all you do. Follow close behind him and he will show you the way to go.

Corrie Lease

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

April 30 Tuesday of the 2nd Week of Easter

Isaiah 40:31

“But they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint.”

Over my lifetime, I have had some amazing moments while encountering eagles! Way back in my Confirmation years, at Barneveld Lutheran Church, I chose this Bible verse from Isaiah 40:31 as a life verse. The verse is a reminder to me of God's love, strength, hope and promise in my life journey with God. It is a reminder to me, that even when times are challenging and difficult, that God never leaves us on our journey! It is a reminder to me of God's love, hope, joy and grace in our lives through his Son Jesus!

Over the years, while growing up on a dairy farm between Barneveld and Blue Mounds State Park, we had many eagles that passed over or stopped by near the farm. Mostly Bald eagles, both young and mature. On a few occasions a golden eagle has passed through! The strength, power and grace in how they fly and soar, is nothing short of amazing! God created eagles with beauty and majesty in mind!

In the Bible, eagles are used many times as a metaphor for God's power, strength, protection. I looked it up; and was surprised to learn that the Bible makes mention of eagles 34 times in scripture. God must have had a special purpose in this, as eagles are shared in the Bible, it can remind and inspire us of God's amazing presence in our lives!

So, the next time you cheer for the Barneveld Golden Eagles, or spot a soaring eagle overhead; take time to remember Isaiah 40:31 or another Bible verse that mentions eagles. Take time and give thanks to God for the gift of the day and the amazing grace we are given as one of God's children called and claimed into the family of God!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of eagles, and for all of your good creation that inspires us! Thank you Lord for this Lenten journey, and daily loving and claiming us as a child in your family!*

Jim Ranney: Son of Neil and Pat Ranney.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

May 01 Wednesday of 2nd Week of Easter

Luke 19:40

“I tell you, if these do become silent, even the very stones will cry out.”

When I feel broken, and can't find my words, I worry I won't be understood. I worry that my children and children's children will not learn of the healing places I have found, whether in nature, arts, friendship, service or in Scripture.

In our Time for Us camp we have often constructed Inukshuks. Inuit people of Canada's Arctic had stacked rocks to create Inukshuk, a guidepost that provided direction across the vast horizons of the North.

Our written words, photos, trails and modeling can be like Inukshuks.

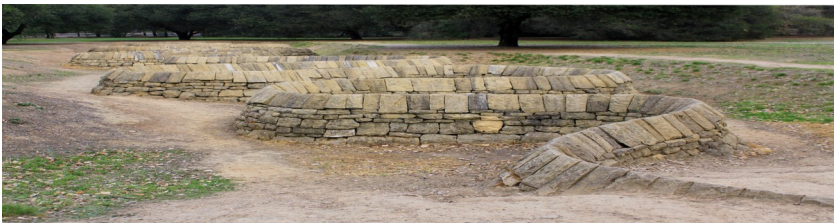
We mark what works well for us. We show how to communicate without words. We share how to mediate in nature. We learn to understand a loved one's facial expressions.

We mark the paths we explored. We mark lanes to follow and some hazards to avoid.

As I wrote years ago, “If someday we do become mute, the stones will still stand in for us, marking the healing places for our children's children.”

Prayer: *Dear Spirit of hope and trust, remind us that you understand and love us beyond our imaginations. Amen.*

Mary Kay Baum



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Now What? By Amy and PJ Hearne

“God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.” -Ephesians 3:20 (Msg)

Our hope is that this devotional has been a tool that God has used to move you deeply and gently. We pray that you have grown closer in your relationship with Jesus on this Lenten and now Easter journey. We also pray that you truly believe God really will do more than you can every imagine or ask in your life! The Easter promise reminds us that no matter the suffering or challenges we face here on Earth, that there will be a beautiful and wonderful time ahead when we are wrapped in His glory!

Perhaps you are wondering what do I do now? This devotional book might be ending, but that doesn't mean your prayer or focus time must end. There are so many great resources that sometimes it can be overwhelming making us unsure of where to begin. Amy and I have put together a few of our favorite resources to help you continue spending time in God's word.

Online Bible: <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/Message-MSG-Bible/>

Devotionals you can Purchase:

- ◆ Jesus Calling Devotionals by Sarah Young
- ◆ Daily Power 365 Days of Fuel for Your Soul by Craig Groeschel
- ◆ The One Year Love Language Devotional (for couples)
by Gary Chapman

Online Devotional Resources:

- ◆ Daily Moravian Texts: <https://www.moravian.org/2018/11/the-2019-moravian-daily-texts-are-here/>
- ◆ Our Daily Bread Devotional: <https://odb.org/>
- ◆ Lutheran Hour Ministries: <https://www.lhm.org/default.asp>
- ◆ Daily Devotions from Max Lucado: <https://maxlucado.com/category/daily/>
- ◆ Daily Living for Seniors: <https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/seniors/>
- ◆ She Reads Truth & He Reads Truth <https://shereadstruth.com/plans/>
or <http://hereadstruth.com/plans/>
You can follow along with current plans and reflections. They also have beautiful resources you can purchase.

Lutheran-Related Sites:

- ♦ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): <https://www.elca.org/>
- ♦ Thrivent: <https://www.thrivent.com/>
- ♦ The Living Lutheran: <https://www.livinglutheran.org/>

Christian Radio Stations and Music-Related Links:

- ♦ Life 102.5FM Local Area Station <http://life1025.com/> You can listen online or on their app.
- ♦ The Moody Bible Institute Radio Station: <https://www.moodyradio.org/>
- ♦ K Love: <http://www.klove.com/> You can listen online or on their app.
- ♦ Let's Sing It! Is a helpful web site where you can find the lyrics to your favorite songs, including contemporary Christian songs:
<https://www.letssingit.com/>

Family Ideas:

- ♦ Use our "Taking Faith Home" bulletin insert throughout the week.
- ♦ There are a list of ways to implement prayer and faith conversation with your family!
- ♦ Read a Bible story as your kids are eating breakfast or dinner.

Spiritual Exercises:

- ♦ Dwelling in the Word: <https://www.elca.org/Future-Directions/The-Process/Dwelling>
- ♦ Lectio Divina: <https://www.conceptionabbey.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/lectio-divina-card.pdf>

Other activities you can do to help your prayer time:

- ♦ Silence, Lighting a Candle, Listening to Music, Taking a Walk, Visiting other Churches, Journaling, Coloring/Painting

faith



Gratitude

JOY

blessed

PEACE

LOVE

BLO



BELIEVE

inspiring

trust

HOPE

strength

inspiring

forgive

wonderful

family

GOD

GLORY

kindness