

Our Savior's Lutheran Church



Lenten Devotional 2024
Ash Wednesday To Palm Sunday

Dear OSLC members and friends,

As we enter into the season of Lent, I encourage you to grow deeper in your faith walk. Our theme this year is timely: “Extravagant Love.” We are living in an era when love feels absent. In a world fractured by divisive politics, plague and violence, Jesus shows us a more excellent way—Love.

There are three major ways to encounter Christ’s love this Lenten season at OSLC:

1. Worship services will focus on Gospel stories of people who encountered Jesus’ transformative love for them. Note that each Sunday and Wednesday, a new sermon will be preached based on a different person meeting Jesus. You may consider attending both Sundays and Wednesdays for a fuller Lenten journey. The Lenten schedule is also found in the back of this devotional booklet.
2. My published book, “Extravagant Love,” dwells on the Epistle Letters and stories from my own life on how God’s love is made tangible today. They are available to purchase at our church office for \$12.
3. This Devotional booklet comprises 40 stories from various members of Our Savior’s and how each of us are changed by God’s love. Jesus’ love for you and the whole world is Extravagant. May we embody this grace in our world today. The world is hungry for the Good News of God’s great love.

Faithfully,
Pastor Karna Moskalik

“Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23)

These verses are a beautiful reminder that God’s love is with us forever. I have also read the scripture to say his mercies never cease. The song “Great is Thy Faithfulness” {which can be found in our hymnal} is often used at funerals because it expresses the thankfulness for a life of one who was in communion with our heavenly father.

The song contains the words, “morning by morning new mercies I see” followed by “all I have needed thy hand has provided.” In other words, each day is a gift and a realization that He will provide. Our reaction should be one of praise and thanksgiving despite our unworthiness. The promises expressed in the scripture are given for everyone regardless of who we are. The all powerful creator of the universe and who keeps everything working in perfect harmony cares for each and every one of us.

Beginning with our baptism we became a child of God. Like so many folks in my age group we look back at our life and remember how He was with us in the times of great joy and also when we were in despair. He was there in our youth when our faith journey had just begun and his mercies followed us through adulthood, parenting and careers. Many older adults find more challenges and perhaps experience the added challenges of being caregivers but God always provides. Through his compassion he provides other people who walk with us on our faith journey. I am especially thankful for pastors, teachers, friends and family who have by example helped me grow in my faith. Many of those are fellow believers in my community of faith here at Our Saviors.

During the Lenten season when we look inwardly and focus on the gift of redemption that was given to all sinners when Jesus went to the cross, we are reminded that God’s mercies continue through all generations. The song says it so well with the words “pardon for sin with strength and hope for the future”. Great is thy faithfulness!

Prayer: God of compassion we are in awe of the abundance of Your love. Help us to respond with thankfulness and to grow in our faith so that our faithfulness will enable others to experience that same love. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Jean Schad

**“Who is like You among the gods, LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness,
Awesome in praises, working wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)**

Wonder is one of my favorite words. It can be defined as a noun, such as when we are struck with awe at something beautiful, surprising and new; however, Wonder can also be a verb, as in to be curious or uncertain about something. I am frequently wonderstruck when experiencing a piece of Art such as a great play, piece of music, poetry or a beautiful picture. Artists have a way of opening us up to new experiences and helping us to see in a different way.

The well-known author J.R.R. Tolkien viewed creating something new as a writer and artist to be an act of worship (see his essay “On Fairy Stories”). Since we are all created by God, it is natural that we should be creative and use our talents to make beautiful things. Creating beauty can be done formally through a typically recognized artistic practice but can also be done through making a nice meal for someone or some other act of kindness.

Experiencing wonder can happen in an art gallery, museum and concert hall but it can also happen while on a walk in the woods watching the sunset in the distance or seeing the Northern Lights across a lake. Wonder is the natural reaction to experiencing beauty that falls at the edge of our comprehension. It is a glimpse of Heaven, right here on Earth.

Wonder also helps us live with the questions and the uncertainties of life. We want to have all of the answers. We would prefer our lives to be neat and tidy but life is messy and full of unanswerable questions and uncertainties. Even if we can explain the natural physical laws that go into making a sunset or the Northern Lights, the scientific description does not explain what makes it beautiful. A healthy dose of wonder helps us realize there is so much more going on in the world than we can ever possibly explain or comprehend. Knowing that stars are giant balls of gas burning millions and billions of miles away doesn't diminish the wonder of the experience and also does not diminish the beauty of the heavens.

Prayer: Lord God, may we all be a little more aware of the wonder of the world you have created and grow in our comfort with knowing we don't have all the answers. Amen.

Brad Kruse

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me. Don’t keep them away. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like them.’” (Matthew 19:14)

For the past five years, I have served as a Faith Formation teacher for our preschool and kindergarten students. In this time period, I have faced many struggles, from the daily stressors of high school to battling mental illness. The world has gone through a global pandemic and seen horrifying amounts of violence and hate. It is easy for me to get lost scrolling on my phone and become overwhelmed by the darkness in the world.

Some days, it feels like the further I scroll, the further I get from God. I lose sight of Him in endless posts of hate and negativity, like a boat drifting in the water. The children of our church have been my rock. Each Sunday that I teach, I see God in his fullest form. They are full of innocence and unbridled energy and enthusiasm. They are open to learning and most importantly, purely loving. They have not been corrupted by the chaos of the world and because of this, are closest to God. Although I have the title of their teacher, I feel that I learn just as much from them as they do from me. As I read them Bible stories, they remind me of the love and light in the world. They ground me in our Lord and each week when I am not in class, I look forward to Sunday to share God’s message with them. Yes, the children are the future, but I believe that the children are the most important members of our church today. Like Jesus said in Matthew, the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, and just as Jesus welcomed the children to him, we should welcome them into our lives. They have taught me who our God is, and I believe that they can teach the world.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of children. Please help us to listen to them and learn from their love so that we may grow closer to you and your eternal kingdom. Amen

Mallory Otsuka

**“Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”
(John 8:12)**

When I was 17, I took my motorcycle on a trip down the Mississippi by myself. I don’t know what my folks were thinking to let me do that, though I believe my parents had more faith and trust in God than in their 17-year-old son with a 500cc Honda, a pocket of cash, and an army duffle bag full of clothes. My Mom always said, “God be with you” in a way that made me feel she trusted God would guide me along life’s trials as I made my way in the world. In a fashion, the Church was my salvation on that trip. I soon learned that rural churches across the Midwest all had graveyards behind them and were busy only Sunday mornings. They harbored a safe and secure place for to me to rest, refresh, and sleep at. The church was a familiar place for me and provided me ‘shelter’ as a youth on the road.

While I no longer camp in rural graveyards, if I am traveling, I still stop and take naps and find restoration there. I still think of my Mom saying “God be with you” as I travel. God is always walking beside us, lighting our way whether we know it or not - and in a way we don’t fully understand. If we are quiet in our minds and listen, God will help guide us to a path that he knows is a brighter, more in tandem walk with him, we just need to listen. I listened to that little voice in my head as a 17-year-old traveling from church to church, knowing that God would help keep me safe on my journey. We are all presented with various paths and choices in life, some big and some mundane. With all the noise of the world buzzing around, is hard to determine which one is best, which one will be beneficial in the long run. We should strive to listen to God, and pick the path which God would want us to travel on with him.

Prayer: Lord, help us to listen to your voice which leads us to the light of life which you provide. Amen.

Clark Schroeder

**“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper,
that He may be with you forever.” (John 14:16)**

I don't know if you have ever thought about the Holy Trinity...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...as being somewhat like triplets. Each member of the Trinity has its own distinct personality and each member is equal to the other two. And each member has the exact same DNA. Three in One! Biblical scholars write papers trying to explain how this could be, and ministers try to illustrate the concept by talking about water manifesting itself in three forms...liquid, ice, and vapor. Three in One, with each member of the Trinity supposedly being equal to the others.

However, have you ever noticed that, in the Church, we hear a lot about God the Father as Creator; about Jesus, Son of God and our Savior, but not much about the often ignored triplet, the Holy Spirit? Do we remember that it is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that we can believe that Jesus is God incarnate? It is the Holy Spirit who walks alongside of us to comfort us, be our advocate, and guide and teach us! It is God's Holy Spirit among us that draws us together into the body of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit's inner calling that motivates us to become the hands and feet of Christ to others. And it is the Holy Spirit that convicts us of our sinful nature and drives us to seek a Savior who is one of the other triplets...Jesus! The Holy Spirit is always there, working behind-the-scenes, calling us to be who God has created us to be. The Holy Spirit...equal to God and to Jesus, (the other triplets)...an equal member of the Trinity and the one whom we will try not ignore in the future!

Prayer: Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your presence in my life. God the Father has given you to all of us to be our Helper. Please help me to realize that, without you, I could not believe in Jesus, the son of our loving Creator. Amen

Marilyn Meier

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight all your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

I am big into sports and especially the Vikings, and one day I was scrolling on TikTok and I came upon a video of Vikings Quarterback Kirk Cousins talking about his faith journey and referenced this verse that his dad read to him during a time of uncertainty in his life.

After seeing this video, I took a little while to reflect on this verse and realized that this verse can really apply to everyone and has quickly become one of my favorite bible verses.

I personally am in a time of uncertainty myself as I am in college and really trying to figure out what to do with my life now that I am out of high school and in a new chapter of my life so this verse just reminds me to put my faith in the lord and he will help lead me to success in my future and to trust him in this time of uncertainty.

I think this verse can apply to all of us, whether you are going through a big change in your life, a small change, or a time of uncertainty that we need to turn to God and let him help guide us through what it may be that we are going through. This verse can also be used when you're going through something good or happy in your life as well as to keep trusting in the Lord that good things will continue to come your way and that he knows what's next for you and you do not. So whether we are going through something good in our life or something bad I really think that this verse can be applied to it as a symbol of trust in the lord.

Prayer: Dear God, we pray that you will help guide and lead us through whatever it is we may be going through in our life, whether its good or bad we just pray to you lord that we can put our trust in you that you will lead us through it, Amen

Sam Olson

“Now in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with ^[o]groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8: 26-27)

When I was a sophomore in college, I dealt with persistent overwhelm, due to my music commitments, growing academic load, challenges with some important friendships, and trying to stay healthy and rested. I leaned into my prayer life, asking God for strength and wisdom and ability to sleep despite having a roommate with a late-night social life. But my prayers seemed to hit a glass ceiling, like I was speaking into a void and not sure that the Lord really heard me. This disconnect was deeply troubling for me in my spirit, and I asked a few of my prayer warrior friends to pray specifically for me during this season.

One particularly sad evening during this time, I went to the small prayer chapel on campus, and invited one of my friends to come with me. He sat with me and prayed, while I also prayed, seeking Jesus and any inspiration and understanding He might grant me. To be honest, I was feeling rather desperate after so many weeks of this ‘spiritual desert’. It was during this special prayer encounter that when I finally prayed, “I truly surrender to You, Lord...” that my heart became warm in my chest, and both my friend and I saw a bright, warm light in the chapel. The Holy Spirit came with a gift of grace that night and, through my deep sighs of relief, restored my heart and connection with the Lord.

Prayer: I’ve never understood why this season of life started for me, only that the Lord used it to give the gift of trust and release and to remind me that He is always near, even when we don’t have the right words or any words at all. Amen.

Emily D.H. Olson

“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:2)

When I was almost 11 years old, my 6 year old sister, Kathleen, died due to an inoperative brain tumor. She and I often played together in our small farmhouse where we lived with our parents, an older brother, and older sister, our grandfather, and an uncle. We were all very sad when she died. I loved my little sister and I was heartbroken.

I recall that Pastor Kemp came to our house to meet with our parents to plan the funeral service for Kathleen and he noticed that I was sobbing. He came to me to comfort me and shared that I could be happy for Kathleen because she was now in heaven with Jesus. Remember, he said, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the bible tells me so and Jesus promises us that when we die he has a room all ready for each of us.” Pastor Kemp’s comments were what I needed to hear at that time and are still reassuring to me today.

The promises of God that we find in the Bible are very comforting because He told us so! The older we get His promises seem even more relevant than when we first heard them. The scriptures tell us that Jesus lived a life free of sin and died on the cross to free us from our sins. I believe His words and we can all be assured that Jesus has a place in Heaven for us to live with Him and our loved ones forever.

So as my wife, also Kathleen, and I grow old we count the blessings we have each enjoyed for over 85 years. We now look forward to the time when Jesus calls us to be at our new home that he has ready for us. We trust that it will truly be a celebration as we meet Jesus and begin a new life in Paradise.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for your promises that we find in the Bible. Help us to believe that Your promises are true. All this we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Orv Johnson

“Do not be conformed to this world. But be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God; what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

I just recently took a class to “Find your Word” for the year. We thought about significant events and what was important to us. We looked at ourselves physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. This was the beginning for me to reflect, to embrace, to recognize, to renew, to revive and to “TRANSFORM.” I have experienced a lot of changes this last year. Change is inevitable, but transformation is a choice. Transformation is my word. Nothing gets transformed in your life until your mind is transformed. Incorporating God in what we think, what we do, how we react and how we evolve will guide our path.

Transformation is a process, a journey and a discovery. It’s not about being perfect, but about effort and to keep going with God’s guidance. Even in our brokenness we are given rebirth to transform. Transformation involves the community. We need each other to help us grow, to support us and to cheer us on. My family, friends and church community are so very important. Every day the clock resets. That’s grace! What will I do to transform? What steps might I take? Maybe it’s going on a retreat, reading something new, meditating, immersing myself in God’s nature, serving others or starting a new ritual. I am refocusing my mind, body, and spirit.

Dwight Moody says, “The Bible was not given for our information but for our transformation.” What better way to learn from our Master Sculptor?

Author LeeAnn Taylor states, “We are all butterflies. Earth is our chrysalis.”

I love that quote! You don’t just wake up and become a butterfly. We first must learn about being the caterpillar. It takes time. Then we can learn to spread our wings.

Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu states, “The journey of a thousand miles begins within a single step.” With God I continue my steps today to grow. It’s not about becoming something that I am not, but it’s about becoming a better version of myself.

Prayer: Transformation may be hard. I may feel frightened. I may fall. I may want to stop. But God will help me through each day. Amen

Lori Olson

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

Have you ever done something and thought you knew how it was going to end, only to have it end differently than expected? I'm guessing it has happened to you, probably more than once. 15 years ago, I met someone very special, my wife Jackie. After we had been dating for a while, she mentioned she was going to go to church (OSLC) the following Sunday and asked if I wanted to come with her. I was baptized Catholic, but lost touch with church after leaving Catholic school and attending the public school system around 4th grade. When she asked me to come with her, I felt a little nervous. But like everything she does, she handled it with grace and made sure I was comfortable with it. A short time later we were married and started attending on a more regular basis. This is where my story begins. When I first started going to OSLC I thought it was going to be a good learning opportunity.

Being naïve, my expectations of attending OSLC were, well, somewhat low. What I didn't realize was it was going to change my perspective in ways I didn't expect because I think God had a plan for me. Fast forward a few more years and we started volunteering in various ways at OSLC. With regular attendance and volunteering, I started to feel a change inside me. It's hard to explain, but in simple terms I felt more at peace. I've had some very stressful situations the last 10 years, but attending church and volunteering at OSLC helps me find inner peace when faced with adversities. This is not at all what I expected and is a pleasant surprise.

I will admit, there are still times when I am very uneasy, but more and more often I am able to find comfort and I believe with prayers and hard work things will be ok. Jackie is my rock and together we will continue to attend and volunteer, and I now believe that as time goes on I will continue to be able to sleep better and feel better because of our actions. Not what I was expecting at all, but Amen, what a great surprise!

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to remember that you are always with me and have a plan for my life. I know your plans are better than those that I have for myself. Plans with a future and hope. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen

Jason Munson

“Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.” (Psalms 4:1)

David, in the book of Psalms, prays for relief from his distress. Yet there are many other Bible verses about prayer. A quick google search pops up “41 Bible Verses About Prayer” from Bible Study Tools. Many of those verses are familiar pieces of scripture. It seems so simple, yet even the disciples had to ask “how to pray”. Matthew 6:9 says “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” The Lord’s Prayer. A Sunday service would not be complete without reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

During the dark, cold days of winter, and especially in this season of sorrows, my memories are a few lines from the hymn “What a Friend we have in Jesus”. The hymn was written by Joseph Medlicott Scriven in 1855. The first verse ends with “O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in Prayer”. We try to be strong. We try to do it on our own. This hymn comforts and guides us to “Take it to the Lord in prayer”.

While that hymn is familiar to those who go to the 8:00 service, the song that plays on my car radio each day is “Need a Favor”. The opening line of the chorus is “I only talk to God when I need a favor / And I only pray when I ain’t got a prayer” and ends with “But God, I need a favor.” Jelly Roll, “Need a Favor”, TasteofCountry.com. In Jelly Roll’s song in 2023, but with contemporary music, we are reminded that in times of grief and struggles, prayer is still the answer.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Help me to be in more frequent communication with you. Thank you for the gift of time, time to pause, reflect and pray. May we use this Lenten season to learn to pray at all times, not just when we need a favor. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

Susan Oberman Smith

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” (Colossians 2:6-7)

As I approach the age of seventy, I consider myself ‘well-seasoned’, and have experienced quite a few of the phases/decades that life offers. I can remember a good share of my early life – elementary, junior high, senior high, and graduation. I remember the various decades by impactful events; e.g., the assassination of JFK when I was sitting in my 2nd grade classroom; watching the moon landing the summer my family had just moved from Maplewood to Stillwater; my first part-time job; starting full-time at Andersen Windows; marriage; raising a family - the list goes on.

As I write this and reflect on these phases of life, there have definitely been highs and lows. Getting married over forty years ago and raising two boys to adulthood were highs for Barb and me. Losing my mom in 1989 at age 60 from a brain tumor, my dad 14 years ago, my father-in-law a few years ago were impactful lows. I could site many examples of each, but the common thread throughout my life journey has been the *faith I have in our Lord, and the presence of people in my life – church family - who share that faith*. This has sustained me through the low points, and helped me share in the joy of the high points.

As much as I am annoyed by most ads on TV, from time to time I catch Mac Hammond on local television. He does a quick (60 second) segment called ‘Winner’s Minute’. I happened to catch it a couple days ago, and his message supports my thoughts. He said a Redwood tree grows to be the tallest in the world, reaching heights of 300+ feet. One would assume its root system must be accordingly deep, right? Actually, it’s not – the root system reaches only around 10 feet into the ground. However, the interesting thing is that the tree integrates its roots with other nearby trees – they’re *interconnected*. This provides stability, and allows the tree to reach great heights. He uses these facts in an analogy: “a life that is integrated well with other people will be able to reach great heights. Relationships with quality people enable us to grow”. That, my friends, describes our faith-filled church family!

Prayer: As we go through life’s ups and downs, give us the wisdom to know that our church family and friends are there to help us through all of it, and you are the tap root of our faith journey. In your name Lord we pray, trusting in your grace through our Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen

Joe Rosell

**“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”
(Hebrews 11:1)**

I had no idea what our infertility journey was going to look like. I marvel now at how in the beginning I thought it would just take a simple medication to get my system on track and that would be it. That’s how it had been for my grandmas so I assumed the same “easy fix” for me. Ten years later after numerous procedures, numerous (even experimental) medications, traveling a multitude of times to four different clinics spanning from Minnesota to Illinois to California, and a GIANT list of what feels like one million other things we tried, here we were at our last embryo. This was it.

On paper my chances of success looked awful. I had an extensive trail of painful negative pregnancy tests and a heart-breaking miscarriage behind me that had shaken my confidence. Yet God continued to give me just enough to keep going, even something as small as a California license plate the day before the last embryo transfer that said, “YUGOGOD” to shore up my faith.

On the day of the transfer, I worked out to Toby Mac’s Eye On It and the lyrics “I’ve got my eyes on the prize, I’ve got my eye on it” were on repeat in my head trying to calm my nerves. At the clinic, I found myself standing in a bathroom stall, of all places, with my arms lifted to the ceiling in prayer. Then suddenly, I felt as if Heaven was reaching down to me.

For a split second, I saw arms reaching down to touch my uplifted hands. I did not know how our infertility journey would end, but there in that bathroom stall God was reaching down to hold me up. There were untold moments during my infertility journey when I thought, “I have no idea what I’m doing or what to do next,” but through this process God helped me see I needed to focus my faith on the fact that He knew what he was doing and He knew what to do next. He knew that our last shot would lead us to our miracle – our beautiful daughter.

**Prayer: Thank you, God for providing enough to keep us going when we cannot see.
Strengthen our faith in you and your direction for our lives. Amen.**

Jennifer Schuldt

**“Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.”
(Proverbs 19:21)**

What is my purpose in life? I think that’s a question that gnaws at many of us. A line from the song “Why Georgia” by the popular musician John Mayer has always struck a chord with me: “Am I living it right?” St. Ignatius tells us through his Principle and Foundation that we are “created to praise, reverence, and serve God,” and all things on Earth are given to us so that they help in achieving this purpose. Praise is the acknowledgment of all that is right and good in God’s world. To revere is to dwell in the beauty around us, to ponder and take in. When we do this, we’re moved to share and to serve others in loving action. THIS is living it right!

Some years ago, at a Silent Retreat where retreatants are led through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the Jesuit priest that was leading the exercises explained you are fully alive when you are achieving your purpose. Like the legendary racehorse Seabiscuit who was born to run and inspired millions at a dark time in our history (the 1930’s) when many were looking for purpose. The Holy Spirit is there to encourage us in our pursuit of purpose. But, we must be on guard, because the Evil One is deceptive and can lure us with things of this world that can also at the surface, make us feel alive, full of pride, and powerful. But all things of this world, apart from God, are empty and can never satisfy.

This is why we must always pray and ask for God’s continuous help in the discernment of these spirits. Is the source of the movements and stirring in my soul those of good or evil? When we ask God, the good wins every time. When we don’t, the unholy trappings of this world can dominate.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me recognize, praise, and revere all that is right in the world; your Holy Creation. Everything put here on earth that helps me in this pursuit is good. Help me recognize when a pursuit is not for good and help me deny all things, people, or activities that may lead me down an unholy path. Amen.

Ray Valley

**“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power,
and of love and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)**

This Bible verse is a part of a letter Paul wrote to Timothy. What Paul is telling Timothy is not to fear or be timid of your faith in God. But rather, God wants us to use all our power, our love, and our self-control to be good stewards of the word of God and what is expected of us as Christians; to be forthright with our teachings and to take risks when it comes to sharing our love of God with the world.

The passage above, makes me think about how instinctual it is to be fearful of doing anything that is not within our comfort zone. Many people have a fear of public speaking, fear of saying or doing the wrong thing in public for fear of making a fool of themselves. I believe this fear comes from our feelings of not being good enough or having enough confidence in ourselves. Sometimes we forget that God sees us as beautiful, powerful, knowledgeable, and important people. So, we can and should take risks, and do things outside of our comfort zone.

At Our Saviors, we are encouraged to participate in the workings of the Church. Whether it's serving on a committee, on the Church Council, teaching faith formation classes or just helping with taking down chairs. I love this because I have forced myself to go out of my comfort zone in so many ways through my involvement at Our Saviors. Teaching faith formation classes, confirmation classes, and going on mission trips have been some of the best experiences. But when I was first approached about teaching Sunday School many years ago, I was surprised and thought, “Who, me?” I did not feel worthy or smart enough; but it was important to me to raise Sam in the church, so I agreed. It turns out that facing my fears was an amazing choice, which has led to so many positive experiences and relationships along the way. Our youth inspire me all the time. They are insightful and thoughtful and have strong feelings about God and their place in the world. It is a wonderful thing to see and hear.

Two years ago, Pastor Karna approached me about being on the church board. Even though I knew nothing of what it takes to run the church, I agreed and started serving on the council. Now, I am about to start my year as President of the Church Council. It's a bit scary to be in a position you are not familiar with and don't know much about; but I have faith it will work out. With help from others in the congregation and with God's love and guidance, I will get through this year and come out of it with more confidence in myself and more aware of what it takes to run a healthy church.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for giving me the courage to use my gifts and talents and to serve You and others. Amen.

Terri Anderson

“Submit yourselves then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (James 4:7)”

As I’ve made my way through the youth program at Our Saviors, my faith in God has come a long way. I have been blessed with experiences and triumphs that I know I did not accomplish alone. I’ve met so many amazing people and learned so many life-changing things. More recently, my eyes have been opened to the fact that just as much as God is right here with us, the devil is as well.

While God serves to love and guide us, the devil aims to tempt us. To make us feel guilty for giving into that temptation, and to make us feel like we are not worthy of God’s love.

In my life, anxiety is the tool that the devil has used to strain my relationship with God. I’ve since learned to live with my anxiety, but when I was younger I battled with it every day. Imagine a 5th grader skipping meals so that he wouldn’t have anything in his stomach to throw up when he got nervous. Hot flashes, sweaty hands, heart pounding out of my chest, intense nausea, always wondering why I can’t just feel normal. This turned into me constantly comparing myself to everyone around me. I hated who I saw in the mirror. I felt like I had nowhere to go, no one to talk to. I felt so stuck, and so hopeless. I was alone in my struggle, the devil was successful in isolating me from God.

Little did I know, I was never alone. God was with me every step of the way, waiting for me to just give up, and let him handle it. The devil is only as strong as you allow him to be, and I let myself be consumed by his evil. When I finally came to God and laid down all of my anxieties, sorrows, and doubts at his feet, he took all of those burdens in an instant.

God is constantly pursuing you, but he’s only half of it. It’s up to you to turn around and fall into his arms. God offers us eternal life and free grace. He does not demand that we follow him, however, he asks that when we are ready, we do so wholeheartedly. If you are ever feeling tempted, know that it is not God doing so. Be weary of the devil, for he is out there, but I promise that if you look for God in your life, you will find him.

Prayer: Dear God, I ask that you help us to always remember how worthy we are of your love, stir up in us the courage to drop all of our burdens at your feet, and remind us of your presence in our lives. Amen.

Noah Kyndberg

**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.”
(Mark 12: 30-31)**

Little did I know that someday I would be driving down a mountain in Jamaica with a woman in labor for hour and a half ride to the hospital with only a pail of water and her friend. God had taken me up the mountain to a village with 10 volunteers to teach children. He had given me a gift to love others and the real life practice of being face-to-face with people who needed love, tangible love. They didn't need my advice or judgment, just a ride down a mountain or maybe an encouraging word. In volunteering, I always felt like I got more than I gave.

God took me on a journey that I didn't know, at the time, that I was on. Starting with my parents exposing me to another culture. My mom and dad taught me, as a little girl, by their example, to enjoy being with people that were different from us. My father befriended a Native American man up by Walker Minnesota. They would fish together. Our family joined them and their community for a celebration. This was back in like 1945. We were the only white people there, we sat on a log. The chief came up and took my hand to take me to dance around the fire with his people. I was only five or six but I have never forgotten the feeling of joy in dancing, chanting, and jumping around with them. My parents, also, welcomed people for picnics, at our home, which included fellow employees from all different races so for me as a kid it was being around people with different skin colors. What fun we had!

Loving your neighbor: After raising my children, God brought me to challenges that I never thought I could handle, in foreign countries. On a trip to Guatemala, we were there to help. We slept in bunkbeds in a church with no water, no toilet, and no shower. It was really out of my comfort zone, since I had camped only once in my life. We put up a portable toilet and made a shower which was a bag hung in a tree to let the sun heat it; then surround it with plastic sheeting to create privacy. I was there for two weeks and loved every minute of working side-by-side with local people. After volunteer trips to Mississippi, I was asked to be a trip team leader in Poland with teachers to teach English. I said, “no way!” I had no skills in speaking other languages, exchanging money or leading meetings. But I found out that leading was using other people's skills and jumping in, with God by my side, to love others for His sake.

Prayer: Dear God, Help us to use your love to love one another and just jump in. Amen.

Merry lea Slomkowski

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13)

We all have dreams about how our life should be; what we should experience. If we're lucky, some or one of those dreams will come true. But in reality, just as life can be beautiful and fulfilling...life can be stressful, difficult and even painful. Life throws curveballs. Just when it seems like everything is going your way, something happens to remind us how fragile we are as human beings. God invites us to walk to the cross and lay issues down in front of him asking him for help.

When you are experiencing a layoff, an incurable illness, a major surgery, a death of a family member, loneliness, financial woes, health concerns remember the message in one of my favorite poems Footprints.

The last paragraph in this poem says, “The Lord replied, My precious, precious child. I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you only saw one set of footprints in the sand, it was then that I was carrying you.”

Remember, God is always with you. Even when life happens and curve balls are thrown your way. You might not get answers from him directly, but you just know he is walking with you or even at times carrying you. Never lose focus in him, be strong, have faith, feel his presence, and communicate openly with him. Remember Jesus is with you during good times and during bad times. Talk to him as you would talk to your friend. Give him thanks and praise, ask him for help, and pray for others. He will be there for you as he has been with me, my wife, and our sons.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, be with me today. Make me strong and allow me to be a good person. Be with me on those days that are not so easy and allow me to feel your presence. I love you Lord and I appreciate you carrying me through turbulent times in my life. Thank you for giving your life for me so that I can have my sins forgiven and have promise of everlasting life. I love you Lord Jesus. In your name I pray. Amen.

Dan Stoffer

“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2)

As I reflect on these last two weeks post-surgery, I am reminded again and again that it is OK to ask for help. I will typically just "do it myself" because I know whatever task will get done on my timeline or the way I want it done. I often don't ask for help as I don't want to burden others. It seems that we all live such busy lives these days.

However, after my recent surgery, I have needed help with some tasks I used to find "simple" or "easy". Day-to-day life has been much slower and I am finding myself asking others for help more often, whether it be my children, husband, mom, friends, etc.

I know as I heal, I will get stronger, and my "simple" and "easy" tasks will become second nature again. My "post-surgery stage" is only temporary. There are some people who might always feel like burdens on others. I hope I can be a helping hand to someone in need by dropping off meals, folding laundry, doing dishes, picking up groceries, etc. You never know, maybe just showing up to someone on our prayer list and having fellowship might be the best medicine.

Prayer: God, I want to thank you for the life you have given us. Thank you to those who have surrounded us in our times of need and healing. Thank you for always being the one we can rely on and ask for help. We are blessed. Amen

Alyssa Mena

“When the angel opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” (Revelations 8:1)

Revelations is a book of the Bible that has puzzled Christians for centuries. Written by either the apostle John or one of his followers, people say it foretells God’s plans for the end of the world. Perhaps! But it might be something else. The opening of the seventh seal by the angel is similar to the story in Genesis. “On the seventh day, God rested.” Was the writer using similarities to help the readers understand the message of Revelations? God was, and still is, in control.

It was written at a time the Roman soldiers were attacking Christians for their new belief in a god that was not Ceasar. Christians lived in terror that they might be thrown in jail, starved, stoned, or killed in more severe methods that I do not care to write. Was John writing to tell them that no matter what happened to them, Jesus would be there to help them through the cruelty and violence?

It is a book of hope, written at a time of the most severe stress points of their faiths. Today, we have many countries where people struggle to hold their faith in the midst of wars. God’s promise is that he sent His Son to die for us, and be with us, even at the end. Whether we are involved in wars, sickness, car accidents, or other things that might make us wonder if there is a God protecting us or not, the answer is – there is. The Holy Spirit is with all of us whether we know it or not. God’s promise is to be with us, we do not need to be in severe crisis. All we need is the faith to believe.

His only command – Love one another. Have you ever had a stranger stop what they are doing to help you? It creates a wonderful feeling. That’s what Jesus asks us to do – love your neighbor. No badges or credits for us in the hidden book of life. Just a feeling of satisfaction in your mind as well as in God’s mind, as Jesus smiles and says, “I knew they would get it right someday.” So, in the midst of all the problems in the world, be that spark in someone’s life that lets them know – I care.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me be in the right place and right time to be a light in someone’s life. Amen.

David Fabio

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16)

Many recognize Jesus’ words in this verse as the inspiration for the song “This Little Light of Mine.” I would say that for most of my life, I envisioned this light to be very bright, sparkling and for everyone to see. For me, this light would be like a light house beacon or the Star of Bethlehem leading people through darkness to reach safety and comfort.

Lately, I have been considering a different metaphor for letting your light shine. This winter, I started exploring the meaning and purpose of the Nordic word “hygge” (pronounced hyoo -ga). It comes from Denmark and Norway but its meaning is understood among all of the Scandinavian countries. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the *noun* hygge as “a cozy quality that makes a person feel content and comfortable.” It can also be defined as an *adjective*: “invoking or fostering a sense of coziness, contentment and well-being.” This concept started being talked about in the U.S. a few years ago. You can now find references to it in writings about home decorating, food, community-building, outdoor spaces, nature, etc. There’s even an essential oil mix called “Hygge” to give you the instant scent of it in your life. People are interested in and willing to spend money on things that make us feel cozy and comfortable.

One of the common themes of creating hygge in your life is the use of light. Not brilliant and bright lights to light your space; but little, glowing lights that brighten a dark area. Now I picture votive candles, lava lamps, Himalayan salt lamps, or clear strings of lights on the Christmas tree. Use of these lights are meant to bring comfort, coziness and a sense of well-being to our lives. Let’s consider using the light that Jesus gives us to not just shine big and brightly; but, more importantly, to be His light in bringing comfort, love and peace to those who may be in a dark place. And it’s free because he already paid for it.

To quickly acquire that hygge feeling, I only need to envision our annual Christmas Eve service. The overhead lights are turned off and we sing “Silent Night” by only candle light. A cozy, quiet, comforting and loving place to be.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to use your light in me to bring comfort, love and joy to others who may be sitting in a dark place. May they find your light in their lives so they too can shine for others. Amen.

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.”

(Romans 8:1-6)

Do you remember a time in your life where you did something and felt a large amount of guilt? What is it like to sit with guilt? Do we try to shove it under the rug and forget about it? Or, is the burden so great that isolation seems to be the only solution? Do we feel like the spotlight is on us and judgement is a looming dark cloud preventing the warm rays of the sun from shining through? I'm sure many of us have dealt with these feelings at some point and maybe even in this very moment. The truth is, none of us are perfect. We may have personal expectations of our own self-perfection but we have never been absolutely flawless. No matter how much we try to cover up our brokenness, it has a tendency to show itself in many different areas of our life. As a result, we can be left with feelings of remorse and unworthiness as we perceive others casting judgment on our faults. But...God.

As we read in the text above, God has something to say about what results in our brokenness. The judgement may be surprising and seem almost illogical. Even as we stand guilty, we DO NOT have to sit in that guilt. God's action as a result of our fault, has been spoken through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. There is no condemnation! Did you hear that? No condemnation! This kind of grace is not based of our merit but rather by what Jesus has already done. So, as our flesh is weak and our brokenness continues to be shown, we need to remember we are free from condemnation and we can let go of the guilt that weighs us down. May we look to God's spirit when we fall and in turn remember to get up and walk according to that same Spirit!

Prayer: God, I confess that I need you. In those times where my brokenness seems to overpower your love for me and guilt weighs on me, help me to understand your saving grace knowing that freedom is waiting for me. Help me to consistently set my mind on your spirit at work in my life and for developing a passion for seeking you in both my hardships and joy. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen, may it be so.

Chad Larson

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)

The Tale of The Starfish - A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement. She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, “Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can’t save all these starfish. You can’t begin to make a difference!” The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, “Well, I made a difference for that one!” The old man looked at the girl inquisitively and thought about what she had done and said. Inspired, he joined the little girl in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and all the starfish were saved. Adapted from "The Star Thrower" by Loren C. Eiseley

Having led a very purposeful-driven career as an occupational therapist, my transition into retirement was accompanied by questions about what was next. Sure, I looked forward to flexibility and freedom with time for new and different choices and opportunities. But I also had feelings of uncertainty and a diminished sense of purpose and value to humanity.

Over time I became involved in a variety of activities and organizations, such as Our Saviors Son-Shine Club card ministry and Women’s Ministry Team. I even stretched outside of my medical-related comfort zone and jumped in to learn about aquatic invasive species to educate and hopefully prevent the spread to our lake up north and preserve our precious natural resources.

Like the starfish in this story, we frequently don’t know what kind of influence we may have. Sometimes it comes back to us as a written thank you note, a personal acknowledgment, or not at all. I think we can rest assured that whatever kindness we share in the world does make a difference, just like it did for that one starfish, and as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your wise guidance and help me to do your good works. Amen.

Cindy Gackle

“Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me 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.” (Psalm 25:2-5)

God’s way is love, truth, compassion, and service. As I learn about and imitate these attributes, I fulfill my purpose and promote His will and purpose. To love and serve God, I need to love and serve others. This is my purpose and goal. Is this something I have accomplished? No, but it is something I strive to accomplish with the help and strength of God’s spirit living within me. Help us Lord, to love and serve others those who look and think like us and those who look and think differently. Help us include, rather than divide and to love rather than hate.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to be united in love, harmony, and peace. Through Your spirit and Your will. Amen

Fred Grimsrud

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him , and he in God. And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way God’s love is perfected in us, so that we may have boldness on the Day of Judgement, because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. Whoever fears is not perfect in love.” (1 John 4:15-18)

Have you ever been tormented by fear? Fear of sickness or fear of a sickness coming back on you? Fear of poverty or lack? Fear of changes in your life? Fear of losing a loved one or fear of death? According to a survey conducted by the American Bible Society “fear not” appears in the Bible 365 times. God commands us to fear not. God gives us a clear path to victory over fear. He tells us there is no fear in love. He tells us perfect love casts out fear. Accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior brings this perfect love of God to reside IN us. In receiving Jesus we are acknowledging God’s love to us and receiving that love to dwell in us. God is love. His love perfected in us casts out fear. Fear has torment. To walk within God’s love and fellowship causes fear to be run out. Fear is not given a place . We can be bold in our trust and confidence in our walk with God. Love is the flow where the mind is peaceful.

I have experienced the torment of fear. Several years ago I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Just the word -cancer- can bring fear with it. To fear not became almost a daily battle. I went to war with fear. Worry, depression, oppression, panic, anxiety and other feelings had to be fought back. Praise God! He gives us the answer the remedy the victory over fear. He tells us to be made perfect in love. How do we do that? Fill up with God’s love. Romans 5:5 tells us that hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. This gift of the Holy Spirit pours God’s love into us. We only need to yield to this love. Choose love. Jesus chose love. He gave His life for us. He took on our punishment our torment our fear and gave us perfect love. You are perfectly loved. Make it a daily goal to know and believe the love God has for you. Kick fear out!

Prayer: Father God we receive your love poured out to us through your precious Holy Spirit. We stand in faith knowing and believing the love you have for us. Our hearts are open to the flow of your perfect love that we may be refuse fear in our lives and be instruments to show others your perfect love. Amen.

Karen Warrings

"When men strive together. . . If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Exodus: 22-25)

This old testament guide for justice encourages a culture of taking offense, revenge, and retribution. A pattern that is often marked by escalating responses.

We have seen this in the Middle-East as factions impose small hardships, which lead to stone throwing, which cause harsh police responses, which are answered by rocket attacks, which lead to harsher restrictions, which lead to cross-border attacks and open warfare. These escalating offenses and revenge lead only to fear and death.

Closer to home, you drive the speed limit, and an impatient driver is annoyed, zips past, and cuts you off. This risks an accident for both of you.

A statement of an opinion offends a relative who responds carelessly. Mutual annoyance leads to silence and festering resentment. Communication stops and relationships shrivel.

In Matthew 5:44-45, Jesus guides us to a different path. He says, "You have heard that it is said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven . . ."

Jesus is telling us to love everyone, even those who may offend us.

I struggle myself to not hold grudges and to forgive offenses. But I have learned that remembering slights and harboring anger only serve to poison my own life. They also remove the opportunity for reconciliation and understanding. Following Jesus' guidance, we all do better.

Prayer: Let us pray; Lord help me to see the best in other people. Let me be slow to judge others and quick to have understanding and compassion for their circumstances. Amen.

Dale Newton

“Jesus turned and looked at Peter.” (Luke 22:61)

When I was in second grade, I skinned my knee while playing at recess. The school nurse tended to my wound. She seemed to genuinely care about me. As I wiped the tears from my face, she handed me a sticker and a lollipop. Then she said something to me that stuck with me my whole life: “you have kind eyes.” At the time, I thought she meant that my eyes were wide and expressive like a cartoon character princess. Jesus once said that “the eyes are the lamp of the body.” (Matthew 6:22.) You can tell a lot from someone by the expression in their eyes. Are your eyes filled with tears? Do you feel sleep deprived with bloodshot eyes? Do you make eye contact with others easily? Are your eyes filled with wonder?

When I met my husband Brian, he would be the first to tell you that I had to do a double take. I initially met him in a time of deep sorrow in my life. I couldn't see clearly through my tears. Two years and four months later, we reconnected, and we made eye contact. I could see the incredible kindness in his eyes. He cared deeply about my wellbeing. Brian was so approachable and caring. I knew that my heart was safe. I had never felt more known, loved and understood than looking into Brian's kind eyes.

Right after Peter denied Jesus three times, Christ looked at him. I wholeheartedly believe that Jesus looked at Peter with deep compassion. There was kindness in Jesus' eyes. This is how Jesus sees all of us. We are known. We are safe. We are loved. No matter how great our sins and our sorrows, Jesus' eyes continually look at us with love.

Prayer: Precious Jesus, helps us to see the world as you see it. May we reflect the kindness in your eyes to a world longing for love. Thank you for seeing us with eyes of grace. Amen.

Pastor Karna Moskalik

“When the Lord saw that Moses was coming closer, He called him from the middle of the Bush and said, ‘Moses! Moses!’ He answered, ‘Yes, here I am.’” (Exodus 3:4)

Moses was out in the wilderness tending to sheep for his father-in-law when he noticed a Bush on fire. The Bush spoke to him and asked him to come closer. A voice called out his name. He was probably shocked but responded that he was there. The voice of God warned him that he was standing in a holy, sacred, place and Moses covered his face as he heard the voice of God directing him. To lead God's people out of the oppression and affliction of Egypt. This incredible encounter changed the direction of Moses's life.

When our youngest son attended Augsburg College, we were given a tour of the campus as part of parental orientation. I was astonished by the sculpture in the middle of campus of flames coming out of a burning Bush. What a creative and ever-present message to the Augsburg students that God is present in this place. That God is calling each of them to a special purpose and a mission in life. That is God's message to each of us in the most unimaginable places and ways God calls each of us to a renewed purpose and mission. I often thought of creating a sculpture or a picture of the burning Bush to remind me that God is in this place. Then again, God has given us the gift of His presence with us in Jesus, his Son. God is with us, shown in the cross and empty tomb. God is calling each of us by name. Maybe respond like Moses. Yes, here I am.

Prayer: Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart. Amen.

Pastor Keith Lentz

“We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. ⁵ It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. ⁶ He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant.” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

In my office I have a sign reminding me that I am good enough. It says God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. The sign was a gift from my husband to remind me that God can use me even when I don't feel like I am qualified. God has given me many signs throughout the years and called me to things I didn't think I could do. He has equipped me and given me strength. He has provided others to support me and give encouragement when I needed it. God has allowed experiences in my life so that I could learn and understand how to show His love to others. I never dreamed that as a teenager, He would call me to be a labor and delivery coach for my pregnant friend and that He was preparing me to be at the births of 7 other babies. He gave me a heart for teen moms and asked me to be the Director of YoungLives, a ministry for young parents and their children.

In Matthew 25:14-40 we are told that when we treat others with compassion it is as though we are doing it for the Lord. I saw this modeled by my parents as they were involved in prison ministry, and we often invited the inmates to join us for a meal at our home. We also provided a safe home for abused women and their children. These moments taught me that we are called to love and serve everyone.

Twelve years ago, I saw in the church bulletin a need for a Preschool Ministry Director. I never thought I would use my Early Childhood degree, but 30 years later God called me to work at the church I had attended since I was a teenager. Even though I didn't feel worthy, He brought others around me to show me the way.

Jesus' disciples were a group of people you wouldn't expect to do God's work, but they were called for a reason. God is calling you for a reason-watch for the signs - you are worthy, and He will show you the way!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and others. Keep me aware of signs as you lead me to do your work in the world. Give me eyes to see and a willing heart to follow your path. Amen.

Darla Goble

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

My first significant job was working as a crew chief on an ICBM in the US Air Force. These were large missiles housed in underground silos and used to deliver a nuclear weapon to a targeted city.

After four years of trying my best to make sure these machines of the apocalypse would work on our last day, I left the Air Force. However, I felt like I had a dark cloud hanging over my head. I didn't think we on earth were going to survive.

My next job was at a large corporation. My first supervisor, Bud, was a Catholic priest in his previous job. Bud became the most spiritually positive influence in my life. Bud and I had lunch together a few times a week. We talked a lot about religion and when I told Bud my doubts regarding the future, Bud said my dark cloud was not at all what God wanted for me. Bud said that God had a plan for us to live beautiful, meaningful, and happy lives.

He encouraged me to start by identifying who I was. Why did God put me here and what did he want for my life? Bud told me to write down the reasons why I think that God put me here and examine those items frequently. He said I would eventually know if what I put on the list was a true or false goal. At first, it was hard for me to believe that I could figure out what God intended for me.

I started with things like 'Be a good husband' and 'Be a good father'. They sounded good but the deeper I looked; God was telling me something different. I needed to listen to God rather than guess what I thought He wanted. God was telling me to enjoy my life and that felt like it had the ring of truth. The dark clouds started to lift. The next four things on the list came over time and prayer. Here's my list so far: enjoy your life, have personal integrity, be as honest as you can be especially, to yourself. Learn as much as you can about the world around you; love all others and start with yourself and love Jesus. I believe they do help me to be a better husband, father, Christian, and what God intended. Thank you, Bud.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing me spiritual guides who show me your truth and lighting my path to the joy you planned for me. Help me hear and follow your guidance and to never stop listening, learning, and appreciating the innumerable gifts you have blessed me with. Amen

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Everyone jokingly tells you to sleep while you can before having a baby, but I felt like I was ready. I’ve always been a night owl, preferring to stay up late to getting up early. I can function well on very little sleep. My husband on the other hand is the opposite. He is an early riser, and he doesn’t function well when he is low on sleep.

When our daughter was born we knew at least for a time sleep would be in short supply. I was determined this was a burden I could carry myself. However, the sleeplessness that a baby brings is like running a marathon not a sprint, and the lack of rest began to eat away at me. Night after night I said nothing and silently resented the sound of my husband snoring while I tried to comfort our daughter. This continued until one night my spouse woke to the sounds of my own tears. He told me I should have woken him and that I shouldn’t carry the burden of the night shift alone. Relief washed over me as he took the baby and I went to finally get some sleep. Sharing the burden made it feel lighter to carry.

Too often we try to carry our burdens in life by ourselves. We feel that we should be stronger, smarter, better equipped to handle our problems on our own. Maybe we think our troubles are too small for us to ask God for help with, but that is not for us to judge. God wants us to reach out, to pray. He does not intend for us to carry our troubles alone, no matter how big or small.

Prayer: Lord, help us learn to confide in you. Help us to be a gentle and humble support to one another so that we can find peace amid the trials of this life. Let your love wash over us to ease our hearts and bring rest to our souls. Amen.

Jen Seckora

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ Jesus lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Gal 2:20)

When do you suppose Jesus first became aware of the inevitability of His “Friday when He realized where His amazing journey would ultimately lead? The date isn’t important, but what is important is that at some point in His public ministry, the rest of the story became obvious and He kept on going anyway! Jesus knew His Friday was approaching fast and He knew it wouldn’t be pretty! He also knew it was His most important task. After all, He’d spent thirty-three years getting ready! His love for us was so much more important than His own pain and suffering and even death is almost beyond comprehension.

Where does a love like that come from? How many prayers will we have to say, how many works will we have to perform to be deserving of that kind of love? Scripture tells us not even one that there’s nothing we can do to make Jesus love us more and nothing to make Him love us less! He just plain loves us; how amazing is that! Was He nervous? No doubt. Was He afraid? Probably. Yet He had no option to turn and run! Because if the people He so loved were to finally be free...God’s will simply had to be done! Jesus faced His Friday straight-up and head-on a Friday so much more significant and painful than anything we could ever be asked to endure! And because of His amazing, selfless act... on that third day, God showed Him the door that led to His “Sunday!”

There exists, for each of us, our own inevitable “Fridays”... those times when we come up against seemingly insurmountable obstacles...when we’re faced with life-altering decisions. Jesus knew what the rest of His story was, and He’s hoping and praying that we’ll call on Him and ask Him to help us write the rest of ours...to help us face our Fridays with the courage, strength, and faith found only in a relationship with Him! Only then will we find the way to our “Sunday!”

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for writing “The Rest of Your Story!” Please help us write the rest of ours, that we may face our Fridays, savor the promise of our “Sunday” and glorify Your name in all that we do! Amen.

Dave Shaw

“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will act.” (Psalm 37:5)

I've always been extremely goal oriented and a planner. Since I was a young girl in High School, I planned my future and laid out timelines to meet various milestones. I felt very in control over my life. God was good to me.

Granted, I worked hard to meet my self-defined deadlines and was often a risk taker to ensure those goals were met. Of course, things didn't always work out exactly as planned, but for the most part, my life seemed on track. Whether the goal small or large, I felt I could make it happen. When I wanted to lose 15 pounds, I set out a plan and achieved it. When I decided to run a half-marathon at age 50, I researched a training schedule and ultimately ran a good race. My goal time to run the race – achieved. Larger goals like my family and career fell into place as well – in timelines I created.

And so, my planned life went until just a few years ago. That's when I decided to leave my job of 13 years to accept a role in a new company. At the time, I knew for certain I was making the right career move. However, it became clear to me after only a few months that my new work environment was incredibly toxic. The negative and mean-spirited work culture began to have a major effect on my mental health.

At the same time, two very close family members were diagnosed with cancer. This was far more devastating. My brother ultimately passed away and although my other family member was making improvements, I felt my life was unraveling. I was actually very angry with God.

At a time when I should have been praying more, I stopped praying completely. How did this happen? I was so not in control of anything. That's when I found a great friend at Our Savior's who really helped me see and understand the larger picture. I'm not in control and never was. I needed to trust in God regardless of the circumstances. I realized God is truly the orchestrator of my life. He gives me tools to help guide me, but if I quit using them, I will only flounder. The Bible and prayer are part of that tool set. I began praying once again. I also made a job change and never take time spent with family or friends for granted.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we ask that when we feel completely out of control and things don't go as we had planned or hoped, that you remind us to read the Bible and pray. Let us be comforted knowing you are in control and you have the plan for us. Let us hold fast that trust in you, Amen.

“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

(2 Corinthians 12: 9-10)

This verse speaks to the fact that God’s grace and love isn't only there for us in our times of strength, but in fact, He is there for us especially in our times of weakness and struggle. Us being weak is not an obstacle in our relationship with God, but rather an opportunity for us to connect with Him. By acknowledging, and furthermore embracing our hardships, our struggles, and our failures, we can fully allow his transformative powers to work. I came across this verse towards the end of my first semester at college. Finals were around the corner, I had countless things to prepare for, and I felt very overwhelmed. My grades weren’t in a spot that I was proud of, and I felt guilty knowing I could be doing better. I knew that my final exams would make or break my semester, and as I prepared for them, I began to feel like it was hopeless that I could produce what I wanted to on each of them.

After a night of studying calculus, and feeling a bit of dread, I decided to start doing some simple devotionals through an app I had, and when I began the first devotional on that night, it was based around this same verse. It talked about embracing your struggles, and turning to God in your times of need. It talked about how feeling weak and helpless isn’t a liability, but it is a foundation for growth. As I sat there and read this, it felt as if this random devotional I came across was meant specifically for me. I understood that I was meant to see this, and that God was with me through everything I had been worrying about. This verse teaches us to surrender to God’s will, and find strength in weakness. It invites us to trust in Him, even when we may feel like things aren’t going as planned. Through this trust, our doubts, our hardships, and our weakness becomes strength.

Prayer: In the midst of our weakness and struggles, we come before you, O God. Your word reminds us of your strength, and helps us to embrace our hardships, as they bring us closer to you. May our weakness become opportunities for strength, and help us to face each day with confidence, knowing you are with us every step of the way. In your name we pray, Amen.

Matthew Fjestad

“Pray about everything; worry about nothing.” (Philippians 4:6)

When I saw this letter arrive in the mail from Our Savior’s personally addressed to me, my curiosity arose. I excitedly opened this envelope and started to read pastor John’s note. As I read further and further down the page, I could feel my stomach start to turn and a feeling of anxiety come over me. My first reaction was what? Pastor John wants me to write a devotional that everyone will read. Who gave him my name? I took a few minutes and thought about this, I could put this letter back in the envelope and pretend I never received it or, I could meet this challenge head on and accomplish something I’ve never done before. Obviously, I decided on the latter. I knew what I wanted to write about; I was just scared to revisit the last couple of years.

As I started writing, I continually prayed to God to get me through this and to not worry about what others would think of my writing. My family and I experienced significant unexpected loss in nine months. Loss is never really planned. My mother suddenly passed away on May 7, 2022. On September 10, 2022, I lost my father and on February 7, 2023, I lost my dad’s brother and the last living relative on my father’s side. All the sudden, I felt like an orphan. To say that I did not understand any of this or God’s plan is an understatement. So, what did I do? I prayed and prayed and prayed for answers. I wanted these answers all at a once. As I have been finding out, grieving is a process, and there are no rules for grieving or timelines. So, when I came across the above bible verse, it reminded me that everything is in God’s hands and to not worry, he’s got this.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us through these unsettling times as we try to find new ways to bring us back together as one. The peace you cast upon us truly helps us “to worry about nothing”. And all God’s people said, “Amen”.

Vicky Grove

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you.” (Joshua 1:9)

Throughout our lives a constant we deal with is change, and with that comes challenges. No matter what we face, another constant is that God is with us, offering strength and support. Coming from a Christian, church-centered background has helped me. I had been trained in church doctrine, but didn't really apply it until secondary school years when I became more aware and sensitive to my own relationships, my developing philosophy about the things taking place in the world, and facing personal changes and challenges. Going from the fun activities in “Luther League” in a rural community to the Philosophy of Religion class at a Lutheran college was an eye-opener! Exposure to many viewpoints strengthened my own faith and commitment to my Lutheran heritage. Making the decision to leave the small college and transfer to the University of Minnesota certainly presented moments of fright and dismay as I faced a campus of thousands of students in an urban setting. There were so many changes and so much anxiety. God was there.

In a few weeks I found Hope Lutheran Church, just blocks from my apartment. This large church was staffed with inspiring and talented clergy who helped me feel God's presence and reassured me that I could meet these new challenges. Following graduation from college came the career search, marriage, a new location, and parenthood— all significant life adjustments, and all with God by my side. I was offered a teaching position in Stillwater and soon afterward moved to the community where we again sought out the support of a church connection and found Our Savior's Lutheran. Our family appreciated the strong education programs at Our Savior's. We could grow in our faith as our children established a foundation for their faith journey through the youth programs at our church and through their connection to the Young Life gatherings in Stillwater. God was surely with us, guiding us, giving us strength and courage through life's changes and challenges. I have matured into a retired senior citizen grandfather of five. Blessings, changes and challenges present themselves—the constants. I meet them with the same “Constant” that has always been with me, God.

Prayer: Dear God, Keep us mindful that you are with us every day of our lives on this earth, and that we can turn to you in prayer, seeking strength and support throughout our journey. Amen.

Paul Renslo

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.” (Romans 8:26-27)

During my junior year of college my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. I moved home to spend more time with my family. I transferred schools, worked, and spent time with my dad until class started in the fall. During my dad's illness I struggled to find words when I spoke with God.

One of my jobs was doing home care for a wonderful woman of faith. I often attended church with her on Sundays. Often after the service one of the volunteers would pray over her. Once a volunteer asked if he could pray for me too. I shared that I had just moved home to be with my dad who was sick. He prayed for my dad, and he passionately and specifically prayed that I would be blessed with community.

16 months after his diagnosis my dad passed away. Even then God was at work. I was blessed to be placed at Gillette Children's for school and later work, where I was welcomed into a community (even before I realized the importance of it). I went on to meet my husband while working there and some of my closest friends to this day. Time passed. I went through my own cancer diagnosis and treatment, and life got very tough again. I was reminded of the man's prayer, and I started praying it for myself, for my family. For years I have asked God for community.

God is still answering that stranger's prayer from 2009. It eventually led me to OSLC, and to all of you in 2020 where I was so welcomed as your "Faith COMMUNITY Nurse." This is one of the greatest communities I have known. I still pray for the communities I am part of; I pray that my family and my children will always grow and live in community; I pray for all of you.

Prayer is just the best, isn't it? As we pray, even for strangers, we can't fully know what impact we might have on their lives. May the Spirit give you just the right words to pray for someone.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for each person in this community and thank you for the prayers they pray. Please continue to bless us with your Spirit which intercedes as we pray and fellowship together. Amen.

Rachel Issac Sass

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. ³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophecy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” (Romans 12: Vs. 1-8)

This Letter from Paul to the Romans has resonated with me for many years. In particular, the underlined passages, have served as a guide to how I ought to live my life. Thankfully, it calls me to be a living and not a dying sacrifice. And to do so, I must be transformed and renewed in mind and heart, rather than to all the earthly wants and desires we are presented with each day. How easy it would be to spend all my money and talents on things that would serve me, make me more comfortable and more “enriched” with things. Yet how contrary that is to the call to “humble service”.

In Christ “we though many, form one body” called upon to use our talents in service to others. And in doing so, we are all enriched, not with tangible things that quickly lose their value, but with lasting gifts that serve the broader “body”, the broader community of all and those who come after us. We do not make a better world when we serve ourselves, we make a better world when we serve others.

Prayer: And so in prayer, we thank you God for giving us Jesus as a living human example of how we are to live our lives in humble service to others, especially those in need. Through your promise to give us what we need, you enable us to be gifts of service to others. Help us to recognize where there is need and how we may use the talents you bestowed on us.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Don Schuld

“Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

This verse has been translated to mean many things and to apply to many different situations. For instance, it could apply to one night and one morning, 12 hours, during which some difficult problem gets resolved. It could apply to an experience of spiritual darkness over a long time, an experience that is followed by some kind of spiritual awakening when one’s faith is born or somehow renewed. It could apply to the experience of major loss when one is weeping, bereft, feeling hopeless, and lost. Joy in the morning could be the regaining of one’s footing, the return of a certain zest for life, and a new sense of purpose. This verse could even be applied to the experience of surgery for a new hip, a new knee, or some other restorative surgery that when the pain passes, allows one to walk, dance, and do the things they formerly enjoyed.

This verse could represent the weeping that occurred at the time of Christ’s crucifixion and the joy that was felt by the women at the tomb and the disciples when Jesus appeared to them. Within our church worship life, this verse could represent the darkness felt in lent, the coldness of winter followed by the joy of Easter and Spring.

This verse had meaning for me when we did an alcohol intervention with our 24-year-old daughter and brought her to Hazelden for treatment. It was the day of my husband, Leonard’s, ordination, June the fifth, 1983. Our daughter had come to his celebration from Florida. We saw her presence here in Minnesota as our only chance to do an intervention, to save her from the dangerous path she was on. Len was ordained in the morning. He baptized our second grandchild in the afternoon as his first pastoral act. That night we confronted our daughter with our concerns and expressions of love. After hours of argument, crying, and leaving the room she agreed to go to Hazelden “just to prove we were wrong.” We had the help of a C. D. counselor who was on the staff of Len’s church and with whom we had carefully planned. The intervention was long and painful. We all cried. There are few things in my life as painful as that night. Yet, within a few days, our daughter had found the courage to face her problem and accept help. We gloried in her progress and felt such joy.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust that in times of weeping there will be joy in the morning. Help us to remember that when you seem so very far away you are so very close. Help us to remember that in our dark times of fear, sadness, pain, loneliness, loss, and doubt joy will return. Help us remember that we are a community of believers and that we can support each other through the dark times, that we are indeed God’s hands. Amen.

**“I am always thankful to God for what the gift of his grace in Jesus Christ has meant to you. For, as the Christian message has become established among you, he has enriched your whole lives, from the words on your lips, to the understanding in your hearts.”
(I Corinthians 1:4-6)**

I believe much of being a person of faith has to do with having an attitude of thanks and appreciation. Coming in close contact with the Living God draws out this perspective of life. We have been blessed in so many ways and have so much to be thankful for, whether we realize it or not!

I’ve noticed in reading through the Epistles of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, Paul was always thanking God, or someone, throughout his writings. To be a spiritual person compels us to view life as “chock full” of gifts and grace....things we don’t really deserve, yet we receive them.

The Lenten Season has always been a time for me to concentrate on saying “thank you”. Thank you to God, and thank you to so many other men and women (younger and older) who have helped shape my life and faith in large and small ways. Some of these people are close to me as friends and family. Others are only acquaintances, or even strangers (and some public figures.) Yet they all have had an impact on who I am when I look back.

Interestingly, most of them have no idea of their impact or significance to me. So Lent is an opportunity for me to call or write them to say “thank you”. I try to do one per day, to let them know how God has used them, and His light has certainly shined through them.

Our human lives really do connect, reverberate, and influence one another. Thank you (whoever you are reading this) for the way YOU will demonstrate the life, the light, and the love of Christ through your words, actions, and attitude today! Remember, someone will be stronger, braver, forgiven, empowered, and kinder today because of you! Don’t forget to let your light shine in all you do!

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for those men, women, boys, and girls, who have made a difference in our lives because they were intentional in allowing your influence on them to touch others. May we do the same today. Amen.

Pastor John Lestock

Wednesday Schedule: February 14th-March 20th (Ash Wednesday is Valentine's Day)

Worship at 11 am in the sanctuary

Meal from 5 pm – 6:15 pm (Soup Suppers)

Worship 6:30 pm in the CLC (**Online available*)

Ash Wednesday is February 14th, Traditional Worship

Holden Evening Prayer begins on Wednesday February 21st

Sunday Schedule: 8 AM Traditional in the Sanctuary, 9:15 Faith Formation Hour, 10:30 AM

Contemporary in the CLC

Lenten Weekly Themes and Stories:

Ash Wednesday February 14th: "Extravagant Love"

Sunday, February 18th: "Jesus Baptism and Temptation"

Wednesday, February 21st: "Nicodemus"

Sunday, February 25th: "Woman at the Well"

Wednesday, February 28th: "Man at the Pool of Siloam"

Sunday, March 3rd: "Boy with a Meal"

Wednesday, March 6th: "Calming the Storm"

Sunday, March 10th: "Blindman Healed"

Wednesday, March 13th: "Jesus heals a Leper"

Sunday, March 17th: "Jesus calls Levi"

Wednesday, March 20th: "Lazarus, Mary and Martha"

Holy Week Schedule:

Palm Sunday, March 24th 8 am and 10:30 am worship

Maundy Thursday, March 28th 11 am and 6:30 pm worship

Good Friday, March 29th: 6:30 pm worship

Easter Sunday, March 31st: 8 am and 10:30 am both in the CLC