

Northminster Daily Devotions

November 1-31, 2008

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Northminster Devotionals

May these devotionals be a blessing to you as we are guided through the daily bible readings from *The One Year Bible*.

This resource has come to you because people from NPC have offered their gifts, to be a blessing to the entire Northminster community, to Tucson and beyond. Don't forget ... this entire resource is on our website at www.godmorning.org. So tell your friends!

If you would like to use your God-given talent to become a part of the devotional writing team, call the church at 520-327-7121 and talk to Publications Editor, Jim Peck. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, November 30, 2008.

Cover image: Church and house in Emmental, Switzerland

The grey boxes that appear on every page direct you to pray for a particular church, organization or group each day. These come from the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s 2008 Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 1:1-3:15

Hebrews 3:1-19

Psalms 104:1-23

Proverbs 26:24-25

Eat My Words

by Andy Ross

Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel. -Ezekiel 3:1

Picture this: an infant being offered chocolate pudding on a spoon and stubbornly refusing it with a closed mouth! I know ... for me too, it is an imponderable thought, but it happens. Children often just don't know what's good for them! And yes, I have heard that vegetables are reportedly good for us as well. But this was the kind of situation facing Israel as the children of God; they were stubbornly refusing to find nutrition and guidance from God's diet of Word, worship and faithful obedience. They needed someone to speak again to them the revelation of God.

Hebrews has a similar message for us: "fix your thoughts on Jesus."

What is the steady diet of information, reflection and observation that you are taking in each day? How do you spend time regularly opening the "mouth" of your mind and inner-soul? And, most importantly, is God's Holy Word a part of your regular nutritional intake?

Ezekiel tasted God's Word and it was sweet to his taste. Even though it contained some bitter challenges to his people, God's Word was still sweet, all in all.

Are we savoring the Word of God in our daily living? I mean, really savoring it, like the best hot fudge sundae, which is truly good for you?!

Youth: What do you like about reading the Bible? What do you find difficult to swallow?

Adults: What kinds of Bible reading and reflecting have helped you in life?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for caring enough about us to offer us guidance for living. Help us to keep reading your Word-and especially to be living it. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of San Diego (California)

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 3:16-6:14

Hebrews 4:1-16

Psalm 104:24-35

Proverbs 26:26-27

Ye Must Be Born Again

by John McKee

Will it make a big difference
When our lives here have ended
Whether we were wealthy or not?

Will our social standing matter
At the gates to the Kingdom
Or the flowery accolades that we got?

Must we take an IQ test
Before entering Heaven
To see if we have *'the right stuff?'*

Is a *'black belt'* in karate
An admittance requirement
To prove that we're tough enough?

None of the things mentioned
Will get us through that gate
Regardless how hard we may plead.

No ... to gain entrance into Heaven
To claim our reward
There's but one precondition we need

That's to confess before men
Christ is the Son of God
Who died as expiation for sin.

We must heed the Lord's words
To Nicodemus one night
He said, "***... e must be born again.***"

For if you are born only *once*,
Then you shall die twice
A physical death as well as spiritual

However, if you are born *twice*
Then you die but ONCE
It's a choice up to each individual.

For our first birth is **PHYSICAL**.
We are born into sin
And in desperate need of salvation.

But when we accept Jesus as Savior
We're reborn of the **SPIRIT**
Which is the crux of his revelation.

Let us join in prayer for:
Mission: Christian and Citizen

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 7:1-9:11

Hebrews 5:1-14

Psalms 105:1-5

Proverbs 26:28

Our High Priest

by Jennifer Monroe

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. -Hebrews 5:7

Have you ever had to do something that you just absolutely did not want to do, but you knew that there was really no getting around it? For days and maybe even weeks ahead of time, you might have felt a sense of dread and fear, and you knew that if there were any way out or any way of avoiding your responsibility (or getting someone else to do it for you), you would have done it?

When Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, he once again shows that, while he might have been fully divine, he was still fully human at the same time. Matthew says that he "began to be sorrowful and troubled" and said to his disciples "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matthew 26:37-38). The prospect of his death on the cross was not something he anticipated with the confidence and bravado of a superhero, but rather with an honest sense of sorrow and perhaps even dread. He even prays that his Father take away the coming suffering, if it is at all possible.

The writer of Hebrews reminds his readers that though Jesus underwent those very human emotions in the Garden, he was ultimately heard and rescued - through his resurrection from the grave. Isn't it comforting to know that we have a savior who not only was the divine God triumphant over death on the cross, but that he was a man who triumphed over fear as well? In fact, it is because of Jesus' great suffering that he is able to be the new high priest, or go-between, between people and God. When he intercedes on our behalf, he really knows what he's talking about!

Youth: Have you ever known that you were going to have to do something that you really wanted to avoid? How did you feel?

Adults: What does it mean to you that Jesus is our high priest?

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for taking our sins upon yourself on the cross, and thank you for continuing to intercede on our behalf, as our ultimate high priest. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of San Fernando (California)

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 10:1-11:25

Hebrews 6:1-20

Psalms 105:16-36

Proverbs 27:1-2

Whose Horn Do You Toot?

by Dick Leon

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips. -Proverbs 27:2

I have friends who always seem to be “full of themselves.” That is, they cannot refrain from telling their story or boasting of their deeds. That gets stale pretty quick! It makes me ask “who are they trying to impress?”

Most of us take that self-centered talk from others with a grain of salt. It is far more “impressive” if the good things said about us come from someone else’s lips!

Last summer, I went to play golf alone, as a “walk on.” They put me with a threesome, a father and two sons. But when I approached the first tee there were four people there. It turns out the fourth was the wife and mother who just wanted to walk along with her husband and sons. Along the way I asked why she wasn’t playing. She simply told me that “swimming was her sport.” I was not bright enough to ask her to tell me more about that. I wish I had, because later I learned from someone else that she had won two gold medals in the 1968 Olympics and then coached Stanford to two national championships! I know now that I think a lot more of this woman because she didn’t toot her own horn!

Whose horn do you toot? If it is yours, you are wasting your toot! Let others praise you ... and if they don’t, so what! It is the Lord we should want to impress and he already knows us completely.

Youth: What do you think of the people you know who cannot stop talking about how great they are?

Adults: Does this word of wisdom help restrain your bragging about yourself?

Prayer: Great Lord, you are our most important witness. You know us through and through without our having to parade our achievements to you in prayer. Help us to relax in knowing this and to give attention to others more than to ourselves so that we may be a better witness to the winsome and wholesome life you have given us in Jesus Christ. Amen!

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of San Gabriel (California)

We Live Among Rebellious People!

by Frank Shallenberger

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people. -Ezekiel 12:1-2

As soon as these words touched my eyes I felt they were being spoken to every one of us who dares to call ourselves after our Lord and Savior. When I see how the atheists and many of the ordinary citizens of this great nation in which we live react to the witnessing of the living Christ, celebrating his birthday as a **religious event**, the mention of his name in the classrooms of this great nation, the selection of very few teachers who hold dear the faith of our fathers (I could go on and on but shall not). I realize that we too are living amongst "a rebellious people."

Christian children can be exposed to Moslem theology, Buddhism and other far Eastern cults but they dare not be exposed to Christianity. Our government, our secular schools and the attitude of a large number of parents of children attending public schools makes the distribution of Bibles by the Gideons an extremely difficult task at the very best.

At Christmas time, children believe this is a holiday for Santa Claus. At Easter time, instead of the Risen Christ, they think this is a holiday for the Easter Bunny. Now all of this is not to be attributed to the faithless. When I was a boy, there was not a store in the city of Baltimore that did not have a nativity scene in one of its windows. Sure we had Santa Claus but we also had Christ. We have lost that.

Youth: Do you make an effort to be a Christian witness with your speech and actions?

Adults: In the near future, we will be voting for men and women to govern us for the next two to six years. Are you going to take your Christian values into consideration when you select those who will, in turn, act for you?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, keep us mindful that there are things in this life that are yours and yours alone and other things in this life that belong to our government. What better place to remember this Lord, than in the voting booths. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Santa Barbara (California)

Individual Responsibility

by Marshall Worden

Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men-Noah, Daniel and Job-were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord. Or if I send a plague into that land and pour out my wrath upon it through bloodshed, killing its men and their animals, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they could save neither son nor daughter. They would save only themselves by their righteousness.

-Ezekiel 14:13-14, 19-20

“Oh, God wouldn’t do that!” We’ve all heard that exclamation, often followed by the further refrain that “God is a loving God and he wouldn’t do that.” Here in Ezekiel, we confront the soft-hearted idea that God does not punish. So many people desperately cling to that misguided belief. In fact, if he chooses, God may well punish a whole country, a city or a people because of their sin and unfaithfulness.

In Genesis, we learn that God would have saved Sodom if ten righteous people could be found. Now in Jerusalem, not even the presence of three righteous men - a pantheon of godliness-could save the place. “They would save only themselves by their righteousness.” How convenient it would be if the righteousness of a parent, a spouse, a friend or even a church covered our individual sins. While we may be able to bask in the good reputation of our parents, family, associations or church, we need to own up to our individual responsibility for sin. It seems foolish to count on someone else’s righteousness to substitute for our own sin failures. But, of course, it’s not foolish. We know that is exactly what happens for those who claim Jesus as Savior and Lord. We are saved because of his righteousness not our own.

Youth: Do you know how to talk to God about sin? Ask a parent, friend or pastor if you need some help.

Adults: Do you have a friend who is at risk because they haven’t taken responsibility for their own sin? Talk to them about Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for being the one who has loved me and saved me from my sin. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Synod of the Southwest (Arizona and New Mexico)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 16:42-17:24

Hebrews 8:1-13

Psalm 106:13-31

Proverbs 27-7-9

Friends Support Each Other

by Judy Williams

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. -Proverbs 27:9

Solomon's wise words ring true as I think back over years of deep friendships. Certainly the pleasure these memories recall come from conversations in which I have received sincere and loving advice.

And at other times when advice has not been requested, true friends have simply listened and offered support. That, too, has been meaningful and has strengthened the friendships.

When advice is NOT asked for, it is usually not well received. Silent support, coupled with prayer, has often allowed me to hear God's whisper of encouragement which gives my heart peace.

As I re-read this proverb, I recalled other times when instead of seeking advice, I have been asked to offer my opinion or suggestion to a friend.

To be trusted by a friend to give a Godly response is indeed a gratifying experience. I think of our pastors and of how often we seek advice from them. Because we can trust their responses to be based on prayer, we can accept their earnest counsel. That truly brings joy to the heart!

Youth: Has a friend ever asked you for advice about a problem? How were you able to help that person?

Adults: Can you remember times when friends helped you by offering earnest counsel? And are you available to listen and understand when friends ask for your advice? Do you pray with your friend?

Prayer: Dear Father, be with us as we seek to help one another in love. Help us know when to offer advice and when to listen and give silent support. Thank you for your guidance when we come to you in prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery de Cristo (Arizona and New Mexico)

Beyond Duct Tape

by Scott Coverdale

Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. -Ezekiel 18:31

I am a fix-it man in my professional life for a non-profit agency that does emergency home repair for low income homeowners in Tucson and Pima County. We get calls from people whose gas lines are hissing, water lines are spouting, and sewer lines are clogging. Our staff and volunteers go out and dig up the pipes or tear into the furnace or repair the roof. We come across some rather perplexing examples of ineffectual home repairs. Masking tape and plastic grocery bags cannot repair a rusted out water pipe. A garden hose does not make a very good gas line. Garbage bags and duct tape do not constitute a durable roof repair.

Ezekiel explains that God's ways are just, and that God is right to require justice from us. Ezekiel's audience has this tendency to botch their relationship with God by crazy behaviors, lack of faith and blunt apathy. God would send in some neighboring army to turn over their apple cart, then they would cry to God again, and he would deliver them. Then they would try to patch up their relationship with God, using duct tape and plastic bags, and be surprised to hear a prophet predicting another round of misery. God is not so impressed with our do-it-yourself attempts to patch up our broken lives. The prophet tells us to "get a new heart and a new spirit," and stop trying to tweak and adjust what really needs to be torn out and replaced. Fortunately for us, God is in the business of giving out new hearts to those who come to him, the master builder. When we are renovated by God, we can quit our futile patch jobs. We will have other work to do.

Youth: Ever try to fix something in your life only to have it fail again?

Adults: Are there some pipes in your life that are leaking through your do-it-yourself repairs? How could you give that over to God?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for your patient love and real wisdom. Please give us new hearts and new spirits with which we can truly live. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Grand Canyon

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 20:1-49

Hebrews 9:11-28

Psalms 107:1-43

Proverbs 27:11

Go ... and Make Disciples ...

by John McKee

My God and my King
To me is everything
I will do all for him that I can

For the Father's given to me
The clear vision to see
That for everyone he has a plan.

That's why each day when I pray
I ask he show the way
To the path other Christians have trod.

For I know deep in my soul
That my ultimate goal
Is to emulate them for my God.

My love for him I won't hide
By his Word I'll abide.
I will do for him as we've been told.

He expects you and me
To evangelize, you see
Help guide his lost sheep to the fold

It was Christ's last command
That by him we stand
Share with others our Christian views.

He commands we go to each nation
To preach of Salvation
That the lost may learn of the 'Good News'

So many souls have been won
So much good has been done
By those who have left hearth and home

To travel the world everywhere,
Demonstrating they care
But those called cannot do it alone.

Of course, there just is no way
We can *all* leave today
For the villages, mountains and prairies

But great strides can be made
By digging deep to give aid
In support of worldwide missionaries.

It is a ministry in need
And for it to succeed
It's incumbent upon us to take part

Working together in concert
If we make just one convert
I think that's great... well at least it's a start!

Let us join in prayer for:

Mission: Stewardship

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 21:1-22:31

Hebrews 10:1-17

Psalms 108:1-13

Proverbs 27:12

Christ is Sufficient for Salvation

by Karen Foss

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." -Hebrew 10:12-17

This letter was written to Hebrew Christians probably before 70 AD. They were relatively new to the faith and following Jesus' teachings were hard for them to accept. Jesus had not returned to establish his kingdom and they were being persecuted by Jews and Romans alike. They were used to worshipping in traditional forms and were tempted to fall back into Judaism. They needed assurance that Jesus was the Messiah. The old plan was not working. No matter how many sacrifices were made it didn't change anything. It never added up to a complete solution. Instead of removing awareness of sin, animal sacrifices repeated over and over actually heightened awareness and guilt.

The message of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is supreme and all we need for salvation. He surpasses any Jewish leader. Jews believed that the high priest represented them before God, but Jesus Christ does that for us. There is no other way to reach God. God's greatest promise is that we can be saved through Jesus. When we are saved by Jesus, we need to nurture our faith and grow in our relationship with him. Our faith enables us to face trials in this life but we need to stay true to God. Character is built by endurance and leads to victory.

Youth: How are you building your relationship with Christ? Are you making wise decisions and good choices?

Adults: What are you doing to nurture your faith in Jesus? Are you willing to take time to read the Bible every day? Are you participating in any small study groups?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for your saving grace and strive to live our lives in you. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Santa Fe (New Mexico)

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 23:1-49

Hebrews 10:18-39

Psalms 109:1-31

Proverbs 27:13

WOW!

by Jerry Smith

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. -Hebrews 10:19-23

I'm not sure we Gentiles understand the significance of this portion of Scripture as the Jewish population would. First of all, the Most Holy Place is where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and on the Ark between the two angels was the Atonement Cover, or another name, the Mercy Seat (where the presence of God resided). The only person allowed in this space behind the purple veil was the Chief Priest, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. First he would sprinkle blood on the horns of the Mercy Seat for his sins. If God accepted his sacrifice then he sprinkled blood for the sins of the congregation. I don't remember where I heard it but I've been told that they tie a rope around the waist of the Chief Priest so that if his sacrifice was not acceptable and God struck him dead they could pull him out. Sounds reasonable. "So, friends, we can now, without hesitation, walk right up to God, into the Holy Place" (*Hebrews 10:19 Petersen*). Because of our atonement through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have access to God every moment of every day.

(This devotion is continued on page 30, Tuesday, November 25, 2008.)

Youth: Do you take advantage of your access to God?

Adults: Are you wandering through a desert of your own making?

Prayer: Jesus, we are eternally grateful that you were willing to give up every thing so that we who believe can have every thing through God our creator. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Sierra Blanca (New Mexico)

Morning Blessing

by Anne Price

If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning: it will be taken as a curse. -Proverbs 27:14

It is not easy for me to imagine my neighbor's blessing early in the morning. Rather than being angry, I would be surprised, in that our homes are quite far apart here in the Tucson Mountains. As I open our doors to enjoy the fresh air of dawn I hear birds singing and dogs gaily barking. Nature sounds are very pleasant to me.

The silence of the previous night prepares my inner soul to greet the morning and to keep company with my Heavenly Father. I find that by taking dawn for devotional study and prayer I go into the day fresh and available for whatever challenges come to me and to my loved ones.

If a man is loudly blessing another early in the morning, he may just want to be heard by someone. If my heart is at rest I will not hear it as a curse but as one who is crying out for love. May I be open to the cries of another and not to take offence.

Youth: Do you take a few minutes each morning to love God and others?

Adults: How do we prepare for the day by taking time for God to send us his love to us and to share with others?

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for giving us the joy that arises with your Son. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Middle East

Are You Quarrelsome?

by Frank Shallenberger

A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand. Proverbs 27:15

I guess Solomon should know a lot about quarrelsome wives-he had literally, hundreds of them. Poor man! If he was so wise, why did he do such stupid things? This is a real opportunity for each one of us who is blessed with a faithful, loving and devoted spouse to appreciate the blessing God has bestowed upon each one of us.

Perhaps quarrelsome wives have a reason for being quarrelsome. I've got a hunch that Solomon, with his running around and his accumulation of concubines, did not make for a happy marital situation. A lot of us probably should look at ourselves if we feel that our mates are quarrelsome. I have taken a little liberty here and restructured Solomon's comments: "a quarrelsome mate" - "restraining him or her."

Our gender has nothing to do with it. If you or I can look in the mirror and honestly evaluate ourselves and discover we are quarrelsome, we need to take these verses to heart. What could be worse for a marital partner than a mate who never ceases complaining about everything that happens in life whether at home, in the office, grocery store, church, school - drip, drip, drip - never-ending, never ceasing discontent. Those exposed to these can no more stop than restrain the wind. How emotionally and physically and mentally exhausting such a situation is.

Youth: We start out being quarrelsome when we are young. Are you taking that path now?

Adults: Take a good look at yourself. Was Solomon talking about you?

Prayer: Father God, help me to look at myself and be certain that Solomon was not actually thinking of me when, with your inspiration, he wrote these words. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Middle East

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 29:1-30:26

Hebrews 11:32-12:13

Psalms 112:1-10

Proverbs 27:17

Iron Sharpens Iron

by Jennifer Hager

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. -Psalm 27:17

I was very fortunate when I was a young girl to find friends who were like me. In his loving grace, the Lord put me in a homeroom with two girls who have been my friends ever since. In October, these two girls and two other junior high friends came to Tucson for a long weekend to catch up and for a time of fellowship.

In 1968, in seventh grade homeroom, Peg and Sue were smart and we competed academically. They had budding leadership qualities and we eagerly became involved in student council. Peg liked to sing and she and I joined the choir. Sue enjoyed sports and we later played on a field hockey team.

Sue turned her life over to Christ at a Young Life camp in ninth grade. Over the forty years I have known her, she has brought glory to our God by unflinchingly relating to me what Christ has done in her life. Her witness brought me to the Lord in 1998. Peg has been born again in Christ since early womanhood also.

The writer of Proverbs tells us "iron sharpens iron." These two junior high girlfriends and their love of God and lives lived in the way of Christ have been iron to me.

Youth: Are you helping your classmates by being a good friend and showing them Jesus' love?

Adults: Who can we be an "iron" to in our lives?

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for putting strong friends in our lives. Friends who sharpen us and bring us closer to you. Please help us to be strong, Christ-like people to others. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Turkey

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 31:1-32:32

Hebrews 12:14-29

Psalms 113:1-114:8

Proverbs 27:18-20

Let This Fire Burn!

by Dick Leon

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. -Hebrews 12:28-29

Not all fires are bad. The devastation of the summer fires around our nation are scary and destructive. They are bad! But, I remember when I was growing up and we went camping as a family that the campfire at night was wonderful. It burned up our garbage, it gave us light to dispel the darkness of the night, it gave us heat when we felt the evening chill, and it roasted our s'mores!

In this text God is described as "a consuming fire!"

- He burns up all that is unclean in our lives like the garbage from our campgrounds.
- He gives us unquenchable light in a dark and confusing world.
- He warms us when the chill of fear, despair or loneliness overcomes us.
- He roasts treats for us, giving us sweet and tasty surprises in life that we would never have without him by our side.

The unshakable kingdom that Jesus gives us is the rule of this fiery God in our lives. Let this fire burn!

Youth: Have you found any Lord for your life as good as Jesus?

Adults: When we are shaken by life is there anything more unshakable than the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Gracious Father in Heaven, your rule in our lives is our greatest treasure. Be for us a consuming fire that cleanses us, enlightens us, warms us and blesses us with treats far better than what we deserve! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Morocco

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 33:1-34:31

Hebrews 13:1-25

Psalms 115:1-18

Proverbs 27:21-22

The Wedding Feast

by John McKee

There was a wedding feast at Cana
The Lord Jesus attended
That was grand to the point of sublime.

His mother, Mary, said to Jesus
 "They have run out of wine."
He demurred, saying that it wasn't his time.

But when she said to the servant,
 "Do whatever he tells you."
Jesus miraculously restocked the bar

By simply directing the servants
 To fill the empty containers
With fresh water they poured from a jar.

Jesus told them to take it
Over to the head waiter
Who tasted it and beamed with *delight!*

For Christ had turned the fresh water
 Into a delicious wine
The best they had served guests *all night.*

This miracle was the first
Jesus was to perform
That his glory would be revealed,

The miracle caused quite a stir
 It spread like wildfire
This event would not be concealed.

But He's saved the best for the last
In God's Kingdom of Heaven
When Jesus calls home his Church Bride

To the wedding feast he's planned
 For all who love him
Who evermore with him shall reside.

What a celebration that will be
At the Holy Lamb's table
With family and friends gathered around

While the Choir sings sweet praises
 Softly unto our Lord
Blending joyfully in harmonious sound.

All of the 'Who's Who' in Heaven
Will be at the event...
With Martyrs and Saints we shall dine

And Christ, the Groom, will see to it
Those attending his party
Shall never run out of his holy wine.

Let us join in prayer for:
Caregiver Sunday

The Merciful, Compassionate Christ

by Marie Ruiz

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy ... you have freed me from my chains ... I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord in the presence of all his people ... in the courts of the house of the Lord. -Psalm 116:1,16c,17,19a

This Psalm should be an ongoing example for us to read as we walk through this life of hardship, illness and sometimes great suffering. It is an assurance that God does indeed hear our cries for help and is merciful. In this Psalm, the person's very life was spared, and the response of overwhelming gratitude was that the person wants to sacrifice and thank God in a most public way. It is a desire to share this good news from the rooftops. Not holding anything back, the Psalmist rightfully wants others to know of the mercy and grace of the Lord.

This outcome is one example of the mercy of Christ. Not all outcomes are the same. Sometimes it is most compassionate for our Lord to grant a release through death of a sick loved one. We are reminded that "... *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints*" (Psalm 116:15). We cannot know completely this side of Heaven God's perfect plan. But this Psalm teaches us something about the mercy and love that God has for us. And it also teaches us that the only response that is warranted is that of a grateful heart regardless of the outcome. That is the loudest demonstration of our trust and faith in the Lord's sovereign plan.

Youth: When you pray and ask God for something and you don't get what you've asked for, are you still thankful? The Bible says to be thankful in everything.

Adults: When hardships beset us and ill health robs us of our years, do you find it hard to be grateful? But God in his mercy knows our frame and provides us with the grace to not only be victorious, but also thankful!

Prayer: Dear Lord, you are the maker of all things, the designer of our days. Help us Lord always to be grateful for the continuous mercy you afford us in protecting us from harm each and every day. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Egypt

An Active Faith

by Jennifer Monroe

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

-James 2:17

It's one thing to believe that the water will hold you; it's another thing to actually swing your legs over the side of the boat and start walking. It's one thing to believe that Jesus will heal you; it's another thing to actually get close enough to grab his cloak. It's one thing to believe that you want to follow Jesus; it's another thing to sell all you have, give the money to the poor, actually lace up your shoes, and go. It's one thing, James seems to be suggesting, to believe that you are a "religious person"; it's another thing to do the hard work of religion: "to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Isn't it a good thing we have the book of James? From the writings of Paul, we get a clear understanding of being saved "by grace through faith," but James reminds us of the other side of the equation: that our faith is virtually useless unless it is manifested in actual deeds. James wants to prevent believers from slipping into a lazy, cheap grace kind of thinking that would say "Whew! I've been saved by grace, I know I'm going to Heaven, now I can just sit back and enjoy the ride!" On the contrary, James says, your faith should compel you forward, forcing you to ask hard questions, to make hard decisions, and to take difficult pathways. The remarkable thing is that, as you do these hard things, you will find that your faith increases and is strengthened, enabling you to do even scarier and more difficult things! It's one thing to *say* you believe, another thing to *believe* you believe, and quite another to *behave* as though you believe, and often, it's the behavior that makes belief even more real.

Youth: What is one time in your life that you had to have faith that something was true?

Adults: Can you look at examples in your own life of faith manifesting itself in action? What happened?

Prayer: Lord, we believe. Give us the courage to act faithfully on that belief. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Syria and Jordan

Speaking with a Forked Tongue

by Judy Williams

(The tongue) is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. -James 3:8-10

James' words make us realize what a powerful instrument the tongue really is. It can be a tool to use in singing praise to God. It can deliver eloquent and elevating speeches that cause others to want to improve the world. It can say soothing words to raise others' spirits. It can be used to encourage and give sincere compliments. Or, it can insult, destroy, tell lies, lead others astray, spread gossip or be blasphemous.

To realize that the same organ can be used both for good and for evil should make us pause and reflect on what this really means for us. I recently found an article clipped years ago from a newspaper. It was entitled: *What Would Grandma Say, and Other Stop-cussing Tips*. In part, the article said:

- Imagine your grandmother or toddlers are listening to you.
- Stop swearing at yourself; think in clean language.
- Stop using foul words so common on TV and in movies.
- Improve your vocabulary and be more creative. Be aware of the influence your words have on others. Remember that YOU may be the only Bible others have ever read!
- Control your anger. People usually swear when they are upset.

Youth: How often do you stop and really think about what you are saying? How many times do the words other people say offend you?

Adults: Have you become used to hearing offensive language so that it has slowly become acceptable to you? What can you do to control the words you THINK as well as the words you SPEAK?

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are mindful of how easily we fall into the trap of angry speech. Keep us mindful of our tongues and help us always to set a good example for others with our words. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Lebanon

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 40:28-41:26

James 4:1-17

Psalm 118:19-29

Proverbs 28:3-5

Life is Tenuous!

by Frank Shallenberger

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. -James 4:14

In view of recent events in my own life, these few words took on a very deep and personal meaning to me. On August 3, I attended church services, heard an excellent sermon and received communion. I felt very blessed. Little did I realize that the following day I was going to be admitted to the Tucson Heart Hospital for 11 days. I was told that my congestive heart failure had reached the point where it was about to take my life.

As I lay in a hospital bed, I realized how tenuous are the strings that hold us to this earth. Like the puffs on a dandelion which are blown about by the wind, we sprout up on this earth, grow, mature, endeavor to serve both God and man and then suddenly are whisked away. No matter how much we are loved, revered, valued by friends and family and perhaps even society, the memory of man is exceedingly short. Spouses, children and a few friends will keep us alive in their hearts as long as they are here on this earth and then all of us are gone.

Let us never come to the end of our life and have to say as did Cardinal Wolsey a few days prior to his execution "O Cromwell, Cromwell, if I had served God as I have served my king, he would not have forsaken me in my old age." Life is very fragile and we do not have time to neglect our service to the Lord.

Youth: Are you doing as so many young people do and believe that dying is for the elderly?

Adults: We are so fortunate when God is generous to us with years. Do you believe that the Angel of Death will not come to you until you're old and you have plenty of time to prepare?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open the hearts of each one of us young, adults and the elderly to realize that your call can come at any moment. Help us to put our priorities in order that we may look forward to an eternity of life with you. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Armenia

What Gift Would You Make for God?

by John Charles Cheek

Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. -Psalm

If you knew you Jesus was coming to see you tomorrow, what would you prepare for him? If you are a painter, would you work all night painting the best work of your life? If you were a poet, would you write an exquisite poem? If you're a cook, would you make your very best dish?

Psalm 119 is a literary masterpiece. It is a poem of 176 verses, broken into 22 sections of 8 verses each, one section for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In each section, the first word of each verse begins with that letter of the alphabet. It was an incredibly complex undertaking, and the psalm itself is breathtakingly beautiful in its content. I'm persuaded that the Psalmist created it as an elegant offering to God.

Youth: If you could give God a present, what would it be?

Adults: How can you offer God the very best you are capable of, in every aspect of your life? What gets in the way of that?

Prayer: Lord, you deserve our very best. Help us to live that out for you every minute of every day of our lives. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Israel, Palestine and Jerusalem

Strangers on Earth!

by Dick Leon

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me. -Psalm 119:18-19

They say: “When in Rome do as the Romans do.” And “they” mean to tell us that we should live like those who live around us. Is that a good idea? I lived in India for two years; did that mean I should treat lower caste people with contempt? During a summer in Peru I visited a tribe of cannibals. Does that mean the missionaries should follow their customs and have their enemies for lunch? Hardly!

The Psalmist prays to understand God’s law and live according to his ways. That makes him a “stranger on the earth.” We are “resident aliens” on this planet because we seek to live by a code of conduct that comes from outside any one of our cultures. For instance:

- God’s code says that sex belongs in a life-long, committed relationship between one man and one woman that we call marriage. How is that for making us strangers in our sexually-saturated libertine culture today!
- God’s code: all we have is a gift from God and we are to be faithful stewards so they are used to serve others and to advance the boundaries of the Kingdom of God! How is that for making us strangers in our materialistic and acquisitive culture today!

Implicit in this psalmist’s prayer is the rock solid conviction that God’s ways (*commandments*) are better and will lead to a more blessed life than the ways of this world. So, as Thanksgiving nears, thank God that we come across as “strange” to those around us ... because that shows that we are not strangers to our Lord!

Youth: Are you able to be “different” from the crowd?

Adults: How many times in this past week have you consciously chosen to behave differently because of the “commandments of the Lord”?

Prayer: Mighty God, your commandments have given us a fresh way to live, and you have shown us that way in the life of our Lord in the flesh. We pray in Jesus’ Holy name! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Israel, Palestine and Jerusalem

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 45:13-46:24

1 Peter 1:13-2:10

Psalm 119:33-48

Proverbs 28:11

Judge Not, Lest Ye Be Judged

by John McKee

God revealed a great truth to me
As I sat in church today
And bowed with the congregation
As we all began to pray.

For the Pastor's sermon on prejudice
Seemed to really strike a chord.
It was just as though the words he spoke
Were uttered by the Lord.

His message simply put was this
It doesn't matter the color of skin
What matters to God in Heaven,
Is the spirit we have within.

For everyone sins and all fall short
Of doing the things that we should
Such as rooting out prejudice that we harbor
That prevents our doing good.

We feel very smug and superior
Upon assuming God's role as judge.
But we fail to consider he's a God of love
And he never bears a grudge.

But we have a Counselor in Jesus Christ
Pleading our case before God's Throne,
To ask the Father to forgive us our sins
That Jesus took on the cross as his own.

And, though none are worthy, if we but repent,
Jesus said that he'd forgive us all.
But, unlike man who forgives but still remembers,
God forgives our sins without recall.

Let us join in prayer for:

Christ the King Sunday

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 47:1-48:35

1 Peter 2:11-3:7

Psalm 119:49-64

Proverbs 28:12-13

Truth and Reconciliation

by Scott Coverdale

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. -Proverbs 28:13

When South Africa was becoming a democracy, there was a great deal of fear in the land. White settlers and governments had systematically abused and repressed the black Africans whose ancestors had lived in that land for centuries. Terrible deeds committed against people whose crime had been to merely hope for justice, respect and equality. Fear ran rampant. It happens often in this sad world, that people are quick to seek revenge on those who have oppressed or injured them.

My family were living in Lesotho at the time, a small mountain nation surrounded by South Africa. When elections were held in 1994, and Nelson Mandela was elected president, we held our breath, half expecting all hell to break loose. Mandela had different ideas. And so did Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa. Tutu headed a "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" by which people who had committed atrocities against others during the previous years would be given opportunity to confess their deeds, often in the presence of survivors and family members, and request amnesty and forgiveness for their actions. That was one of the few times when I witnessed godly wisdom being implemented on a national level. The world would be a much different place if people would practice the model of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Though the world often practices revenge and payback, we can follow the advice in Proverbs and confess our sins, accept others' confessions and be reconciled to those we have sinned against as well as those who have sinned against us.

Youth: Have you ever had to admit to something wrong that you had done? What was the result of your admission?

Adults: Are there any outstanding issues that you need to confess to someone? What do you expect the outcome to be?

Prayer: Lord God, give us faith and courage to quickly extend forgiveness and grace to those who need it from us as well. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Iran and Iraq

The Rest of the Story

by Jerry Smith

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

-1 Peter 3:15b-16a

Let me begin by finishing my thoughts from the November 11 devotion. After Jesus shed his own blood as the one and only atonement for our sins we had direct access to God in the Holy of Holies. This act of Jesus removed the necessity for the existence of the Chief Priest.

After the Day of Pentecost, he removed the need of the Temple, as we no longer need to go to the Holy of Holies to find God for he no longer lives in the Temple but in our hearts by his Spirit. This excites me to think that when I see my brothers and sisters in the Lord, I am also seeing God in the flesh. Jesus said, "Where two or three gather in my name there I am also." He wasn't kidding because he was there two or three times. We sometimes give our "Pentecostal" brethren grief for their exuberance. But if we have the love, joy peace, patience and power of the God's Spirit why aren't we exhibiting some of this exuberance? Instead of reluctantly going to church, we should be waiting in line for them to open the doors so we can experience the shekinah glory of God in all our brothers, sisters and preachers of the Word.

Now if you have God's Spirit and his fruit in your life it should be a spiritual delight to explain:

1. What your life was like before Chris entered it?
2. How Jesus introduced himself to you.
3. What your life has been like since you turned it over to Jesus?

Youth: Are you prepared to explain your hope in Jesus?

Adults: Are you prepared to explain your hope in Jesus?

Prayer: Father, we ask you to fill us with the fruits of your Spirit and make us eager to walk across the room to share the blessings you've showered on us with others. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Synod of the Sun (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas)

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Daniel 2:24-3:30

1 Peter 4:7-5:14

Psalms 119:81-96

Proverbs 28:15-16

Hungry Lion

by Anne Price

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. -1 Peter 5:8

I am picturing the devil as a hungry lion in the jungle. When he sees his prey he may or may not roar. It may be that he just sneaks up on his prey and attacks.

In life, I have found that when I am most vulnerable to sin I am full of self. I feel that I am in control. Life is smooth. I am just gliding along when BAM! An idea comes from left field that is not from God. As a real human being I have been diverted from what I know is right with God and suffered the consequences.

Satan is ultimately responsible for the evil that happens to us. He may kick us when we are vulnerable. He is lurking and prowling about. We are commanded by God to stand firm and fight the battle, knowing that the war is already won. We are not alone, others are fighting the same battles.

As I walk the walk of faith, I must discipline myself to face sickness, separation from loved ones and death, knowing that the devil wants me to turn to him and not to God who never leaves me unprotected.

The hungry lion after being satisfied temporarily will get hungry again and look for other prey. The devil is still looking. May we be alert in the jungle of life. God is our true protector.

Youth: Do you know that you are never alone, that God is by your side every moment?

Adults: Are we certain that God will always win against Satan no matter what the situation?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for being with me no matter where I may roam in the jungle of life. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Arkansas

Our Election is Sure!

by Marie Ruiz

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. -2 Peter 1:3-4

We have just been through a national election in our country and no one knew the outcome of that election until the last ballot was counted. And it's hard to predict how that candidate will fare once in office.

But Peter paints a completely different picture - one of assurance for the future. It is our promise in Scripture that "His divine power has given us *everything* we need for *life and godliness!*" There is no doubt about our outcome, no doubt about the divine wisdom that is afforded to us. It is right and sure and will prevent calamity at every turn. You see *our election is sure*-we can be confident that God has already conquered the foe, has provided a lasting security of eternal life in Christ. We aren't consumed by fear regardless of what may come our way, because we are assured through God's word of the equipping power to live a life of godliness here on earth.

Peter urges Christians to be eager to make their calling and election sure. It is the promise that Peter talks about and the warning he also gives to us that cautions us to listen to God's wisdom and not the wisdom of those who only profess to be Christians and yet are false in every way. God's power is enough for us to live a Godly life doing the right things and escape corruption here on earth.

Youth: When fear and trouble overtake you, do you pray and ask God for his divine wisdom?

Adults: We have a high priest who has intervened on our behalf. He has made our election sure. Do you walk in the confidence that his promises are sure?

Prayer: Lord Jesus you have provided us with countless examples in scripture for which we are grateful. Help us to read your word with conviction accepting the promise that is ours. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Thanksgiving Day

Do You Remember This Bible Story?

by Frank Shallenberger

But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.

-Daniel 5:21-22

This chapter of Daniel is probably one of the most widely recognized recounts of the supernatural. During what appears to have been an orgy in his day, King Belshazzar brought in the gold vessels that were intended to be used only to serve the Lord and used those to pour out libations for his drunken friends. Then suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote a message upon the palace wall. No one in the kingdom was able to interpret this message until finally Daniel was called. Daniel then recounted the story of Belshazzar's father, Nebuchadnezzar. When he was finished, he admonished the king, telling him that even though he knew all that had happened to his father, he did not humble himself but challenged the Lord of Heaven. After using the sacred vessels in a profane manner, he then proceeded to praise the so-called gods of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood and stone which could neither see nor understand him.

This story is one that every one of us should engrave in our hearts. Learn about our God and his ways from what has happened in the past. When we have knowledge of the past we have accumulated the ability to avoid the mistakes of those who came before us.

Youth: Are you one of those people who can only learn by trial and error? Do you ignore the lessons of the past?

Adults: Have you accumulated the necessary knowledge of the sins of the past so as to avoid them yourself?

Prayer: Father God, fill us with the desire to learn from the histories of people's past what pleases and what displeases you. Engrave that knowledge upon our hearts and souls that we might avoid the occasions and temptations of sin. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Cimarron Presbytery (Oklahoma)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Daniel 6:1-28

2 Peter 3:1-18

Psalm 119:129-152

Proverbs 28:21-22

What Riches Do We Seek?

by Ralph Comey

A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished. -Proverb 28:23-24

King Solomon asked for wisdom instead of wealth, and God promised to give him both. Solomon wrote hundreds of proverbs, really short poems, which place high value on wisdom and sharply contrast good and evil. This proverb uses the full meaning of the word "rich" to promise that God will reward faithfulness but punish the single-minded pursuit of wealth. This proverb was composed 3,000 years ago, but it is so relevant now that it could have been written yesterday.

As I write this, our country and most of the world is engulfed in a serious financial crisis. This disaster is complex and some of the causes go back many years, but eager pursuit of riches, if not unchecked greed, is surely involved. Many are being punished.

Greed is not new. The virus of greed is very seductive and some of us have been bitten by it, at least temporarily.

However, sometimes, wealthy people become philanthropists. They use their wealth wisely for the common good. They may have become wealthy without being greedy.

Is this a reminder that we should not be too quick to judge others?

Youth: Living a faithful life comes about gradually, taking one step at a time. Are you following this path? Are you finding rich rewards?

Adults: Who are the faithful? We know many of them. They are going about their lives quietly, doing countless good deeds, and being richly blessed.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me be faithful in my daily life. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Daniel 7:1-28

1 John 1:1-10

Psalms 119:153-176

Proverbs 28:23-24

Footprints in Time

by John McKee

We are but a footprint
In mans' march through time
That inexorably plods ever on.

We are born and we bloom
Then all too quickly
Like a flower loses petals, we are gone.

It is well to reflect
On this truth every day;
And to realize our time here is short.

But, if we make the most
Of the time we have left,
Then we'll leave this world with a pure heart.

Are you harboring anger,
Or ill will for someone?
Does hatred burn deep down inside?

Pray to God and ask him
To replace it with love
To displace all of your foolish pride.

For you're just hurting yourself
When you're unforgiving
Of a real or an imagined slight.

But, whatever the hurt,
When you forgive in your heart,
Your outlook on life will grow bright.

Let us join in prayer for:

San Francisco Theological Seminary



Northminster Presbyterian Church

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