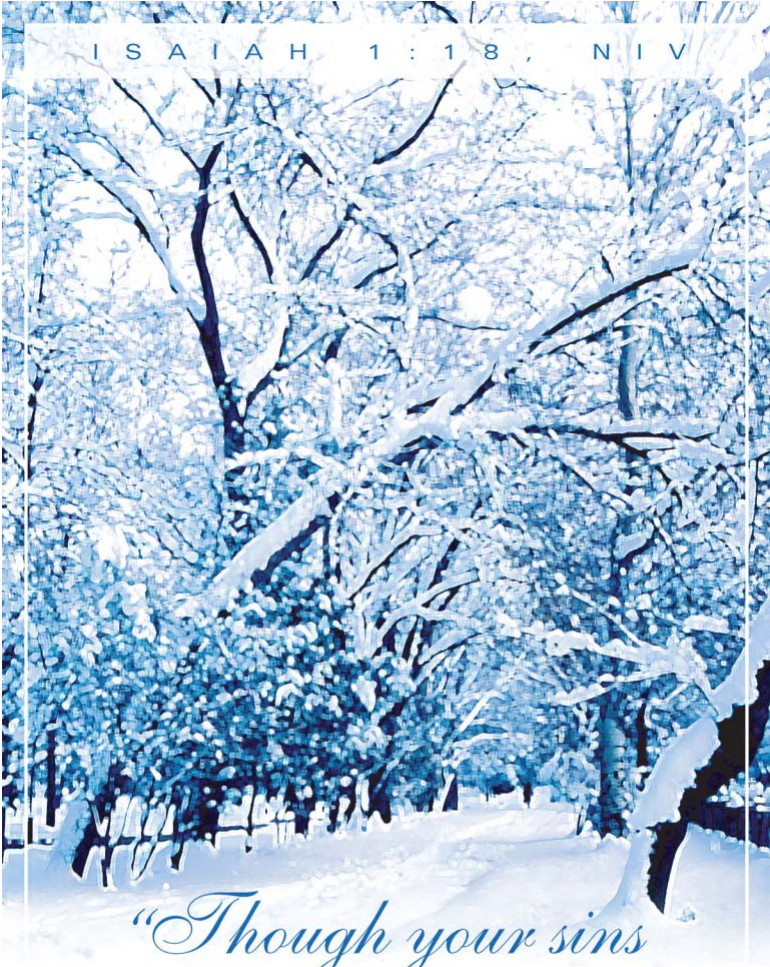




Northminster
Presbyterian Church

I S A I A H 1 : 1 8 , N I V



*“Though your sins
are like scarlet, they shall
be as white as snow”*

Daily Devotions

JANUARY 2012, VOLUME 39 No. 1

May these devotionals be a blessing to you as we are guided through the daily Scripture readings from The Presbyterian Church (USA)'s *Daily Lectionary*.

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

The February, 2012 issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, January 29, 2012.

Northminster Presbyterian Church
2450 East Fort Lowell Road
Tucson, Arizona 85719-2417
520-327-7121 520-327-1839 fax
www.npctucson.org
office@npctucson.org

2012 Devotions Writing Team

John Cheek	Conrad Plimpton
Ralph Comey	Anne Price
Scott Coverdale	Andy Ross
Karen Foss	Marie Ruiz
Cliff Frederick	Pete Seiferth
Jennifer Hager	Jerry Smith
Dick Leon	Hazel Soyannwo
Kathy Lynd	Elizabeth Templin
Dale McArthur	Alan Van Epps
Joan McArthur	Wendy Van Epps
John McKee	Judy Williams
Dan Meinke	Marshall Worden

Heartfelt thanks to these dedicated and gifted writers for another wonderful year! If you would like to use your God-given talent to become a part of the Devotional Writing Team, please call the Church Office at 520-327-7121, and talk to Pastor Pete Seiferth, or Publications Editor, Patti Gabrys. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 98, 150 1 Sam 1:1-2, 7b-28 Col 1:9-20 Lk 2:22-40 Ps 99, 8

New Year, New Song

by John Charles Cheek

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

-Psalm 98:1, 2

New Year's Day! A brand new year has been laid out before us. What will happen this year? What might it bring?

These are normal questions we might ask. We might wonder if this year will be better or worse than last year. We might wonder if things, whether they're political or financial or personal, will be better for us than they were last year. These are all reasonable questions, but, in my view, they're all questions that have the wrong subject and object.

What if we asked how we can make things better this year? What if we asked what we can do to make things in our families, workplaces, community, and world better this year?

The Psalmist in our passage this morning calls on us to do a thing that fits perfectly with New Year's Day, and every day. He says that we are to sing a new song to the Lord. We should sing a new song of hope, a new song of courage, a new song of joy, and a new song of devotion.

Let us strive every day to fully appreciate the marvelous things the Lord has done. May we, by our hope, our kindness, our courage, our humility, and by our new song, make known to everyone around us that the Lord has worked salvation and made his salvation and his righteousness known. Happy New Year!

Youth: What do you hope will be new this year? Can you help make that happen?

Adults: What are your hopes and dreams for this New Year? What role can you play in making those things come to be?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for this New Year. Walk with us throughout every day of it, and place a new and beautiful song in our hearts. We love you, Amen.

MONDAY, JANUARY 2 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 48, 145 1 Kng 19:1-8 Eph 4:1-16 Jn 6:1-14 Ps 9, 29

Foot-in-the-Door

by Scott Coverdale

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body...as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

-Ephesians 4:15, 16

I was raised in a particularly evangelical church, one where the youth group would go to the park and talk to people about the Four Spiritual Laws; one where we learned the Romans Road and Evangelism Explosion. Anybody remember the "I Found It!" bumper sticker campaign of the late '70's? My family had one on our '64 Plymouth station wagon, our '71 Plymouth station wagon and our '76 Honda Civic. We were there. In our church, missionaries went out to jungles and teeming cities where they planted churches, started seminaries and showed the Jesus film.

When I got finished with my schooling (not to say my education) I knew I would head out to the mission field. As I contemplated my role on that mission field, though, I was not quite sure that I was going to preach and teach and "win" people to Christ. So, it was with a little bit of trepidation that I stood up on my last Sunday night at church and told all of those very evangelical people that I wasn't too sure what to teach people to believe, nor did I have a neat package of propositional truth that I could confidently hand out to the lost. I told them that I didn't really understand things enough to put myself forward as a teacher. What I did understand, I told them, was that Jesus wanted me to care for the poor, and show mercy to the broken. Instead of packing up a crate of Bibles and a film projector, I was going to stir pots of powdered milk and corn meal for refugees in Somalia. I told them that I did understand that much of the Gospel, anyways.

And those good people didn't talk down to me or ask me why my faith was so weak or how could I forsake the saving knowledge of Christ for a watered-down social gospel. They said, "Yes. You will be a foot-in-the-door in Somalia. Not everyone has to be a preacher." That was a big relief for me, because I sure didn't feel like a preacher. And somehow, by God's good grace, I learned that the body needs all of its parts, even a foot-in-the-door.

Youth: What part of the "body of Christ" do you think you might be? Why?

Adults: What skill or gift or calling do you think you have that might enable the body of Christ to do the work of the kingdom?

Prayer: Dear loving God, thank you for using all of us to fulfill your purposes for us and for your kingdom. Amen.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 3 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 111, 146 1 Kng 19:9-18 Eph 4:17-32 Jn 6:15-27 Ps 107, 15

Resolutions

by Karen Foss

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

—Ephesians 4:25-32

We just celebrated the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and a new year has begun. Are there things in your life that you would like to change? It might be a good idea to read this scripture at the beginning of every week of 2012.

A lot of people make resolutions in January and forget them by March. Paul wrote these words for the believers in Ephesus around A.D. 60. But they are still as relevant today. I think that if we would follow these words of Paul we could make no better resolution for this New Year.

Youth: When you read these words, are some of them speaking to you?

Adults: Will you keep your Bible handy this year, and read passages every day to help you keep your resolutions?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgiving Father, help me to change my ways and follow the words of Paul each and every day. All praise to God. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 20

Jos 3:14-4:7

Eph 5:1-20

Jn 9:1-12, 35-38

Ps 93, 97

What Pleases the Lord?

by Jennifer Hager

...*And find out what pleases the Lord.*

-Ephesians 5:10

This short verse is tucked into Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in our modern Bible in chapter five. Paul starts this section by saying "Be imitators of God." (Eph 5:1) It makes sense to me then that pleasing the Lord involves imitating Him.

Every Christian has in his/her heart a desire to please the Lord. We know that Jesus loves us and counts us as His brothers and sisters. But we pray and ponder the meaning of our role in His kingdom.

I think it is important to recognize how direct God is in His direction of how we do that. Our number one priority is to bring glory to Him. But how? God speaks to us right here in Ephesians: be imitators of His Holiness and please Him. *Just as Christ loved us, we are to love others.* (Eph 5: 2)

To follow His Way, we must fully and enthusiastically use the tools provided to us by God: prayer and meditation, worship and praise, study of His word, and fellowship and outreach. The more we know of Christ, the more we can imitate Him.

Youth: Do you demonstrate Christ's love for you in your attitude and actions?

Adults: Do others know that you are a follower of Christ? Is it apparent in your word and deed?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive for not using the tools You so richly provide us. Help us to grow in our knowledge and relationship with You so we can bring glory to You in all we do. Amen.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 5 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 99 Jon 2.2-9 Eph 6.10-20 Jn 11.17-44 Ps 147:12-20

Unwrapping our Grave Clothes

by Dick Leon

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

-John 11:44

When Jesus brought Lazarus out of the tomb he was still wrapped up in grave clothes and so Jesus told his friends it was their task to help him out of the wrappings of death. He does this because Lazarus cannot do this for himself, his hands are bound to his side and he needs the help of his friends.

Sounds like us, doesn't it!

Before we knew God, that is when we were literally "dead to God," we were helpless to save ourselves. Only Jesus can raise us to live again.

But after we are raised up from our deadness, we are equally helpless to unwrap ourselves from all those marks of death that still cling like glue to our lives. We need the help of our church friends to unwrap us.

Think of the wrappings of death that we need stripped away:

- Habits that persist to drag us down;
- Language that pops out of our mouth and that tastes foul;
- Selfishness that endures in spite of our efforts to root it out;
- Thoughts that are dark and depressing about ourselves, others.

The church, through weekly **worship** that cleanses and uplifts us, the **Bible**, with words of grace and mercy to change our mind and heart; **small groups** of good friends who help make our faith personal and real; thoughtful **classes** to get our heads back on track ... all of these are ways the church helps unwrap our grave clothes so that the new life Christ gives us can burst forth in joy.

Youth: Who helps you the most to clean up your life?

Adults: Are you in any close relationship that constantly helps you unwrap your grave clothes and enables you to help unwrap the grave clothes of others?

Prayer: Gracious Lord, you deliver us from death and give us new life when we come to believe in you. Now, raise up Christian friends who will help free us from those sticky grave wrappings so that we may experience the full joy and goodness of your life-giving grace. Amen.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 72, 148

Isa. 49:1-7

Rev 21:22-27

Mt 12:14-21

Ps 100, 67

Praising and Making Your Joy Complete

by Kathy Lynd

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.

-Psalm 148:5

Would you look at this? Isn't it awesome?! Sometimes I beckon my mother away from her activities whenever a beautiful sunset drapes over the mountains in Tucson. My mother is both an artist and a photographer and I can hardly contain myself and must share my joy. Isn't this the nature of praise?

When we consider some aspect of life praiseworthy, we must have others join with us. Whether it's a wonderful rainbow in the sky, a baby's first steps, or a beautiful painting we see in a museum, our delight is multiplied when others enjoy that special something with us.

The writer of the psalm keeps encouraging us to join him in praising the Lord saying "Look, I just have to show you...God is so great, you just have to praise God with me." When we join with others in praising God, our joy finds its completion.

Youth: Will you praise God today for something you see in his creation and tell your family or a friend about it?

Adults: Will you praise God today with someone else and make your joy complete?

Prayer: Help me to praise you, Lord, and make my joy more complete by sharing it with others. Amen.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 46 or 97, 149

Deu 8:1-3

Col 1:1-14

Jn 6:30-33,48-51

Ps 27,93 or 114

Worry is Expected

by Dale McArthur

Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the chariots with fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.

—Psalm 46:8-10

God created us to be free. God knew we would worry. Psalm 46 is a cure for worry. This scripture is proof that God loves us.

Therapists tell us that their patient load increases tremendously the year before elections, as people worry about their nation. This must be normal, but there is lots of help available in the scripture above.

If we must worry, here are some possible subjects: finances, family, education, neighborhood, church, various wars (select any), taxes, government, health ... after selecting your favorite worry subject, then read again the scripture of today.

Part of my graduate studies were under the guidance of a Jesuit priest, and at that time it was becoming common for their parishioners to have confession just sitting at the desk beside their priest. They just talked about what bothered them. It might be helpful for us to find someone to share our concerns with, even if it's just a neighbor with a cup of coffee at the kitchen table.

We have God's assurance that He is in control. Just look around you and identify all He has done.

Let go and let God.

Youth: Knowing what worries us is not a secret. Can you share it with a trusted friend?

Adults: Sharing our problems with other members of the family helps them identify what burden they are carrying and make them willing to unload it with others. Will they share it with you?

Prayer: Lord, please help us to identify our real concerns and worries and to be willing to put them in prayer for you to show us the solution. In Jesus name, Amen.

SUNDAY JANUARY 8 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 104, 150 Gen 1:1-2:3 Eph 1:3-14 Jn 1:29-34 Ps 29

In the Beginning, God!

by Andy Ross

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

-Ephesians 1:4-5

What can a coffee mug teach you about God?!

I have a notorious traveler mug I use for taking in my car. It has several fine qualities: It is thermal insulated. It has a snappy lid that keeps the coffee from splooshing into my gear-shift. It features a nice chrome and black macho look. But here is the significant weakness: It has a narrowed, thin base that is designed to fit snugly into my cup-holder. Problem? Anywhere else I use this mug — it typically gets tipped over! Unless it is sitting in my car's cup-holder, I can count on it being knocked off its small base and spilling coffee everywhere!

Can you see where I'm going here? We were designed – by God – to live in the secure base of his presence, his providential care, and guidance. When we try to live a life that is “For myself – By myself” we are like my mug: tippy and messy.

How appropriate that in this New Year we read from Genesis those amazing first words: “In the beginning God ...” Four words that say so much, right? When you think about creation ... all of life ... you have to start with the reality of God, who holds all of space-time reality in his cup-holding power and grace!

And just when that begins spinning your mind in wonder and praise, we read these words from Paul in the New Testament: That before the divine act called Creation, God chose us to belong to him, to become adopted into God's family through his own Son, Jesus.

Let's live in this day, putting our full trust and weight down into the care and guidance of our Sovereign God. We might still have messy lives, but by trusting in our Creator and loving heavenly Father, we are secure beyond comprehension!

Youth: Quick: What's the worst spill you've had in life? How does this make you think about God who holds us secure when we feel upset?

Adults: What has trusting in God's providential care meant to you? How has that changed your way of living?

Prayer: Glory! Hallelujah! We praise you, Almighty and Holy God — for you have given us your creation, and even better, claimed us in your love through Jesus! Amen!

MONDAY, JANUARY 9 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 5,145

Gen 2:4-9(10-15) 16-25

Heb 1:1-14

Jn 1:1-18

Ps 82,29

Angel Wings

by Joan McArthur

Are not angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

-Hebrews 1:14

This passage establishes that God spoke to the prophets at many times and in various ways. It also makes plain that His Son is the Heir and all God's angels worship him. It also says angels become changeable as he makes his angels winds or flames of fire.

In today's world, we are so caught up in technology and in getting results quickly that we get frustrated with waiting. Have you ever called a company and gotten the recording "All of our associates are busy but your call is important to us?" Really?

When we call on the Lord with a great need and wonder how it can be solved, do you connect that "out of the blue" someone either phones or you receive a letter that is an answer to your need? Many people will say it is luck or coincidence, but when you have taken a concern to the Lord with trust in Him, He can send his angels to those who believe, *those who will inherit salvation.*

Youth: Have you ever had an experience when you felt God's angels helped you?

Adults: In our busyness of daily life we sometimes miss the importance of giving thanks to God for each day. Do you start the day with prayer?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, you have made the world and all things to provide for us. We thank you for giving us extra protection by sending your angels. In Jesus name, Amen.



TUESDAY, JANUARY 10 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 42, 146 Gen 3:1–24 Heb 2:1–10 Jn 1:19–28 Ps 102, 133

How Thou Art Fallen...

by John McKee

Lucifer Cast Down From Heaven – by: Gustave' Dore



The universe was in chaos
When GOD by His Word
Hung the moon, the sun and the stars...

The planets Venus and Neptune
And all heavenly bodies
Including Jupiter plus the 'Red Planet', Mars.

The myriad Angels in Heaven
All shouted for joy
As the earth's foundations were laid.

The Angel Lucifer, however,
Angered the Lord
For the arrogance that he displayed

When he sought to share
GOD's rule throughout the Heavens
As an equal upon his own throne.

He was cast down to earth
For his rebellious pride...
But Lucifer did not leave there alone...

A full one third of the Angels
Had become his minions
And were cast with him into exile.

There was rejoicing in Heaven
After Lucifer departed
Amongst Angels he could not beguile.

Upon expulsion from Heaven
He began roaming the earth...
Traversing throughout to and fro...

It was a very dark day
For the whole of mankind
When Saint Michael forced Lucifer to go.

He tempted the first woman, Eve,
With the forbidden fruit
GOD commanded they were not to eat...

And Adam succumbed to temptation
When Eve offered to him
A piece of the fruit which was sweet.

Things were never the same
Between man and GOD
Since their willful decision to sin...

They were expelled from the Garden
For their disobedience
Never walking with GOD there again.

Youth: What does the sheer majesty and power of God mean to you, and can you imagine the arrogance of Satan wishing to share God's rule over His creation?

Adults: We must be ever on our guard against the principalities of darkness who constantly try to entice and ensnare us into sinful acts hurtful to God. Pray daily for His protection.

Prayer: Father, please keep us from evil, forgive us our sins and grant us the guidance we need to do Your will each day ... we ask this in the name of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 89:1-18, 147:1-11 Gen 4:1-16 Heb 2:11-18 Jn1:(29-34) 35-42 Ps 1,33

Integrity

by Dan Meinke

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

-Psalm 1:1

Integrity appears to be something we have lost in this country. The Government struggles with controversy as it fails to explain “Fast and Furious” and dealings with certain solar power companies. We are told that FREDDY MAC and FANNY MAE need more money as their executives get huge bonuses. There was a time in this country when integrity was the fiber that made this country work. A handshake could seal deals, a man’s word had worth and there was pride in being honest and behaving in an upright manner.

At work, does our behavior demonstrate our integrity? What sort of integrity do we demonstrate at home? Can your spouse or children depend on what you say and have faith that your word will be carried out?

Integrity starts by being honest, first to yourself and then to others. It’s how we act when no one is around, when no one is looking. Is our behavior acceptable to Christ when we are alone?

Integrity is telling the truth under every condition. Can people depend on your telling the truth, even though it may work against you?

Integrity is having wholesome motives, lifestyle and relationships with other people.

Integrity means knowing the effects of our actions. Are we overly demanding? Do our pleasures affect other peoples’ happiness? One example is a loud radio. Do we over-indulge? Do bad habits control our lives? Again, integrity starts by being honest with yourself. Integrity is our values and the choices you make. Integrity establishes your moral fiber. Integrity is character.

And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

-Luke 6:31

Youth: Who gossips more – kids or adults? Do you think gossip would be a lack of integrity?

Adults: Do you understand the connection between character and integrity?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, help us to treat people with honesty and fairness. Let our choices and values be acceptable to You. Forgive us when we fail. When our integrity is challenged, give us the strength and courage to do what is honorable and right. We thank You for Your love and grace. In Jesus name, Amen.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 97,147:12-20

Gen 4:17-26

Heb 3:1-11

Jn 1:43-51

Ps 16:62

To Be a Turtle

by Anne Price

Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay all according to their work.

-Psalm 62:11-12

I was attracted to this verse over and over. It took me deeply into my understanding of faith and works that James, Jesus' half-brother wrote in his book of the Bible. Just saying we believe that God can help us is not enough. We need to take real steps of faith or another word for it "works".

Now let's have some fun. My sub-conscious can come up with wild ideas on any given topic for our devotionals. I pictured a turtle sticking its' head out of the shell in order to move ahead. I took one of my field trips to *Petsmart* to see a turtle. Luckily they had a couple of them for me to view. I watched them move slowly across the rocks while almost looking at me, telling me that they had a story.

It reminded me of the Lakota Native American women that prize the ways of the turtle. They believe that turtles live long, are resilient and are always protected by their shell. Our protective shell is our faith in God, and we can move ahead, aware of His love. I pray that I may have some of the qualities of a turtle.

I can sit and pray for some type of result on any desire of mine, but if I do not take action, I have not listened to all of God's words.

Youth: Have you ever watched a turtle move ahead with no fear?

Adults: Can you think of all of the times you moved ahead on a project knowing that God was protecting you?

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for teaching me lessons from Your word, and even from a turtle. Amen.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 51, 148 Gen 6:1-8 Heb 3:12-19 Jn 2:1-12 Ps 142, 65

Honor and Obey Your Parents

by Marie Ruiz

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

—John 2:3b-5

I've heard it said that daughters have a close relationship with their dads and sons have a close relationship with their moms. I've also heard it said that daughters look for spouses who have many of the traits their fathers have, and so, too, sons look for wives who have many of their mother's traits.

In this passage, we can clearly see how much Jesus loved his mother. He was obedient to the request his mother made of him, even though "His time had not come." I am struck anew when reading this passage at the way that Jesus responded to his mother. He was Jesus, God in the flesh, and yet he could not go against the commandment to honor and obey his parents.

This is a vivid lesson in obedience. It is also the first miracle that Jesus did in turning the water into wine. Jesus could have responded that the wedding guests had already had enough wine – in fact, exhausted the supply. But instead, he saw his mother's heart of generosity and concern and obediently met her request by performing this first recorded miracle.

Obedience is always right; in fact, 1 Sam.15:22 tells us that obedience is better than sacrifice. God has given us Ten Commandments to live by. Honoring your father and mother is the fifth commandment, immediately following the commandments about how we are to respond to God. I would say in the order of commandments, it is a very important one.

Youth: In what ways do you find it hard to obey your parents?

Adults: Although we are adults, we are still to honor and obey our parents until death. Are you a good example for your children to witness?

Prayer: Dear Lord, you have given us earthly parents to raise and care for us. Help us to recognize that obedience to our earthly parents is obedience to you. Amen.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 104, 149 Gen 6:9-22 Heb 4:1-13 Jn 2:13-22 Ps 138, 98

Scripture is God's Truth

by Judy Williams

I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.

-Psalm 138:2

God speaks His Word to me in the scriptures. The truths he wants me to know are written there to guide my thoughts and actions. Therefore, the more deeply I read and purposely strive to understand the Bible, the truths I find there will establish themselves in my mind and heart.

Another passage in today's readings is found in Hebrews 4:12: *Indeed the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* This says to me that if I read my Bible with intention, I find that the Holy Spirit helps my understanding, convicts me of my sinfulness, convinces me that God is who He says He is, and comforts me when I need to be comforted.

As our denomination continues in the age-old struggle to apply God's truth, as found in the scriptures, to our lives; we individually are called to delve deeper in our study to determine what our creator intends for us to do with the lives we have been blessed to live. Through prayerful, spirit-led reading of his Word, we will come to a clear understanding of the truth for each of us.

Youth: As you come to understand what the words in your Bible mean for you, are you trying to remember to apply the lessons to your daily life? And are you thankful that God is always listening when you pray to understand what He wants you to do?

Adults: As the leadership in our church strives to keep the truth of God's Word clearly before us, will you strive more than ever before to know God's will for your own life?

Prayer: Father, I know you are unchanging and eternal. As our culture seeks to pick and choose which words in scripture to believe, give me discernment to understand the truth of your words as I open my Bible each day. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 19, 150 Gen 7:1-10, 17-23 Eph 4:1-16 Mk 3:7-19 Ps 81, 113

The Draft

by Pete Seiferth

These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

—Mark 3:16-19

For sports fans, there can be a certain fascination with “the draft.” Which team with the worst record will win the “so-and-so” sweepstakes? Who will go first? What outrageous outfit will he wear? What outrageous contract will he sign, worth millions, despite not yet playing one down, inning, quarter, or period?

Maybe the fascination with the draft goes back to the days of picking kickball teams. The two best players were not drafted; everyone knew they would be the captains. And they alternated picking people for the team. They used certain criteria to pick the team. Among the pool of available talent, who had demonstrated that they were a good player? Who always dropped the ball? The only hope for those picked last was that they would have the chance to make a big play – that might improve their draft status for the next game. Jesus picked his team of disciples using some mysterious criteria. Were these really the best available guys? Think about it:

- Peter was an impulsive fisherman.
- James and John were interested in prestige and power.
- Matthew was a hated tax collector.
- Simon was a Zealot (code for insurgent terrorist).
- Judas greedily betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Yet, Jesus called these twelve to be with him, to learn from him, and to be given power and authority to preach and even cast out demons. Jesus did not gather a group of people who were all alike. Their diversity of backgrounds, experiences, class, and privilege makes us wonder how anything got done. Yet, isn't our church the same way? Doesn't Jesus call our community of faith together from diverse backgrounds and perspectives? If we let him, Jesus will even give us authority to proclaim the gospel, to heal, and to cast out demons, in his name.

Youth: Have you ever thought about what is unique about you that Jesus can use to serve God and help others?

Adults: We all have “a past.” In what ways do you see Jesus' transforming grace in your life working to include you in his ministry of sharing good news?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you know our faults and liabilities, yet in Christ, you have chosen us to live for you. Assure us and strengthen us with your Spirit's power and hope. Amen.

MONDAY, JANUARY 16 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 135, 145 Gen 8:6-22 Heb 4:14-5:6 Jn 2:23-3:15 Ps 97, 112

What a Man of God

by Jerry Smith

Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every living kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all creatures that move along the ground."

-Genesis 8:15-17

I thought it would be interesting to look at some of Noah's accomplishments. First of all he built a boat (actually, what we would today call a ship) that was 450 feet long, 45 feet high and 75 feet wide. It would take a shipyard and dry dock to even contemplate a ship of this size, and Noah, and I guess, his sons, did it on dry land.

How they managed to keep it upright is beyond me. Then to build quarters for six people and two of every kind of bird, two of every kind of walking animal and two of every kind of crawling, creeping animal or creature, and to build it in such a way that all of these animals survived.

The next unbelievable feature is the length of time they spent in the ark. You know it rained for 40 days and 40 nights, but if you add all of the days, starting with the seven days before it started to rain until our Scripture above, when God said they could come out of the ark, the number of days is 531 days spent in the ark. At only one meal a day, where did they store the food and then distribute it daily? What about the six humans? Noah accomplished an amazing feat. But anyone who thinks this could have been completed without the mighty hand of God in it all the way is dreaming.

Youth: Wouldn't it be interesting to know the exact number of creatures that were aboard the ark?

Adults: After reading about Noah and the ark, do you realize that God never asks you to do anything that He hasn't already provided everything you need to accomplish it?

Prayer: Father, we thank you for the promise that you will never again destroy all living creatures as you did in Noah's time. We just ask that through the power of our risen Savior and the indwelling Spirit of God, we can be worthy of that promise. Amen.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps123, 146 Gen 9:1-17 Heb 5:7-14 Jn 3:16-21 Ps 30, 86

In His Image

by Elizabeth Templin

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

—Genesis 9:6

When God made a new covenant with Noah and all men and animals after the flood, he reiterated a statement from creation ... *in the image of God created he him; male and female he created them.* -Genesis 1:27. Recently, I was reminded of this as I sat on the porch of a friend's cabin beside a quiet pond.

The pond was surrounded by tall, beautiful trees that were reflected in the quiet water of the pond. It was nearly perfect. Like the image of God is perfect in each man and woman. Then a duck landed on the pond and the movement of the water blurred the image of the trees, but it was still there. Then a frog leaped and splashed, a fish jumped, and then a gentle breeze sent a ripple to disrupt the image. On another morning, the fog shrouded the pond and no image could be seen. But, as the sun came out, the fog dispersed and the image reappeared to me. Now, I knew that the trees were always there, but sometimes the image in the pond was blurred, and sometimes completely darkened to my view.

I was reminded that the image of God is part of each of us. It may be blurred and fuzzy and nearly completely hidden at times, but each human has been created in the image of God. How does that knowledge affect the way I treat each person I meet?

Youth: Can you find the image of God in people you don't like? Can they find the image of God in you?

Adults: Does knowing that God's image is somewhere there in the being of a criminal change the way you think of him or her?

Prayer: Loving Father, help me to see your image in those around me and love them as you do. Thank you for the grace to do so. In Jesus name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 15, 147:1-11

Gen 9:18-29

Heb 6:1-12

Jn 3:22-36

Ps 48, 4

Starry, Starry Night

by Alan Van Epps

He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

—Psalm 147:4

Have you ever looked up into the clear night sky and tried to count the stars? If it is a particularly clear night, you could probably count for the entire night and then give up. Imagine, a few hundred years ago, men of science decided that they could give an accurate count of the stars ... 6,126! Of course, that was with the naked eye. Later, when the telescope became an astronomer's most trusted tool, that number looked a little thin. With the advances made in the magnification of the telescopes and the discovery of many galaxies composed of innumerable stars, and with the famous Hubble telescope, we now understand that the night sky teems with trillions of stars—and that is probably a gross underestimation!

God is not encumbered by the thought of fantastically large numbers of stars. He did, after all, create all of the stars, but not only that, he also *named* each one of them. In Job 38:31-32, he asks Job, "*Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion?*" Yes, God created the heavens and all of the galaxies with all of their countless stars. Yet he is the same loving Lord who later in Psalm 147 is described as "*...sustaining the humble...provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.*" How wonderful and awesome is our God who made the countless stars in the heavens and yet cares for us so much that he gave up the most precious "star" of all, his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Youth: Have you ever tried to count the stars in the sky? Do you know the name of the galaxy that contains the stars that you can see in the night sky?

Adults: When you have some free time, try looking up (googling?) how many stars there are estimated to be in the universe. Does that number help you understand the awesome power and majesty of God?

Prayer: Almighty God, please help us to remember each day that You are the creator of everything in this remarkable and vast universe. Amen.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 36, 147:12-20

Gen 11:1-9

Heb 6:13-20

Jn 4:1-15

Ps 80, 27

Messages

by Wendy Van Epps

I have a message from God in my heart . . .

—Psalm 36:1

I have always enjoyed sending and receiving messages. My best friend and I had a secret code in elementary school, and our notes to each other were encoded so no one else could read them (or so we thought). In high school my boyfriend and I put our notes in each other's locker. When I was in the Air Force I kept in touch with family and friends by writing letters or making telephone calls. As technology changed, so did my method of communicating: now I look for an email from my friends, and when my daughter was in Argentina we would Skype with each other. I am glad I never had to resort to a steamboat to transport a letter, or hope a carrier pigeon would arrive safely. These days, if you really want to get a message to someone, you can do it almost instantaneously.

You can talk to friends and family quickly enough, but how do you get a message to God? It's easily done through prayer, and whether it is spoken or unspoken, God receives your message. Prayer is the original instant messaging! There is no doubt that God is always available to receive your petitions and praise.

The real question to ask is "How does God get his reply back to you?" You could think of the Bible as a letter from God, and search it for the reply to your question, but that is time consuming and could be a little confusing. Is my answer in Psalm 146 or in the Gospel of Luke? Perhaps a better way to receive a direct reply is simply to listen for God's answer. Listen with your heart.

Youth: How do you exchange messages with your friends?

Adults: Did you ever have a message from God in your heart?

Prayer: Dear Lord, please open my heart to receive your messages. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 130; 148

Gen 11:27-12:8

Heb 7:1-17

Jn 4:16-26

Ps 32; 139

Stubborn or Confessing

by Marshall Worden

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; . . . I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

-Psalm 32:3-6a, 8-9

As a child, I became acquainted with mules on my grandfather's ranch. One particularly uncooperative and sometimes ornery mule was often brought along (without bit and bridle) on family hikes into the foothills, just in case one of the younger cousins needed a ride. This one mule seemed to take special delight in brushing up hard against me and stepping on my feet; I never understood why we didn't bring one of the much more friendly horses. I came to realize that Grandfather Sam especially liked that old mule, and the mule was obedient to grandfather, if not to anyone else.

I know there have been seasons in my life when I have been like an uncooperative and stubborn mule refusing to repent of my errant ways. God then has had to harness and rein me in and confront me with my own sin and resistance to his ways. It has never been fun. I think the worst part for me about unconfessed sin, however, is that accompanying overwhelming feeling of guilt that always blocks joy and vitality in daily life. In contrast, with maturity, I have come to understand and experience the forgiveness, happiness, refreshment, freedom, joy and spiritual liveliness that result from voluntary and frequent confession of my disobedience and sin. It is then that I am most aware of God's closeness and gentle leading in my life.

Youth: Do you ever think about the ways you may be disobeying God? We call that sin and we need to ask God to forgive us. Talk to Jesus about those things in your life that may be displeasing him.

Adults: Are you consistently honest and upfront with God about sin in your life? If not, what are you going to do about that? Have you considered meeting in prayer with friends that can help one another be better accountable?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for hearing our confessions of sin and transgression against you. Thank you for forgiving and loving us. Amen.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 56, 149 Gen 12:9–13:1 Heb 7:18–28 Jn 4:27–42 Ps 118, 111

Hearing Jesus

by Scott Coverdale

They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

-John 4:42

This is the story of Jesus meeting with the Samaritan woman. She believes in Jesus right away, and then she tells her neighbors and they believe—then they go out and meet Jesus for themselves.

Alene and I have a couple of kids, and we try to teach them to love truth, to love God the Creator, to love Jesus and follow him with their lives. We haven't done a perfect job of teaching them this, either with our words or with our actions, but it is what we have tried to do. The great thing for us will be when our boys say what those Samaritan villagers said, that it no longer is because of what we have told them, but that they have heard Jesus for themselves, and have come to know him as the Savior of the world.

All right, it's a little scary when your kids head out into the world to figure it out for themselves. After all, it is a dangerous world with a lot of competing narratives. Parents can't interpret the world for their kids. We have to put our own faith to the test, and believe that the one who spoke into our lives will also speak into the lives of those we love; our kids, our grandkids, or simply the people that we care about in this world. We have a role in many people's lives. We can speak loving truth to them, and then we have to hope and pray that those people will hear Jesus for themselves and be drawn by that voice, down their own road of faith.

Youth: What do you think it means to hear for yourself, and come to your own faith, independent of the people who have brought you to believe in God?

Adults: What is the key to letting our loved ones come to their own faith, independent of us, their parents or mentors?

Prayer: Dear loving God, thank you for the privilege of pointing others to you. Please teach us to trust that you will speak to them in your own time and way. Amen.

SUNDAY JANUARY 22 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 67, 150 Gen 13:2–18 Gal 2:1–10 Mk 7:31–37 Ps 46, 93

“Be Still.” Yeah, Right!

by Andy Ross

Be still, and know that I am God.

—Psalm 46:10

This is one of my favorite instructions from the Bible. Probably because I'm aware that our heavenly Father knows we need this instruction. *I need this instruction!* While multi-tasking can at times give us the exhilarating rush of getting lots done, I find that God usually does his best work in me — when I stop, and try to be still.

If you look carefully at each of our readings, you can see how God works in the moments-stilled opportunities. Jesus heals the deaf man by taking “him aside.” We like to think of Paul as a man of missionary journeys and adventure, but today we read it was when he stayed, and visited with the apostles, that they were able to discern that he was appointed by God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Even in Abram's struggle with Lot, it was when they “looked up” that they noticed an entire plain where they could stretch out and find a way to live in peace!

Do you need to pause? Breathe deep? Look up? Listen with opened ears?

If you're like me, you need to *practice* being still before God. That's why they call it “practice”? We aren't always really good at it the first time.

So today (or, ok, this year) try practicing ...

- A quiet still moment with God's Word and prayer in the morning?
- Stopping in your tracks whenever our Artist crafts a sunset of glory?
- Interrupting yourself, even in busy-ness, to go have a “God break”?
- Make a New Year's resolution to have a still God moment each day?
- Make yourself a reminder to stop and be still — at your desk?
- Put silence into your travel time: no radio, no music, no phone ...?
- Go for a “listening” walk with God?

Youth: With all the noise of our media-soaked world, how do you find quiet places that are helpful to you?

Adults: What have you learned about listening that helps you in your life with God?

Prayer: No words today ... just still ... listening ... Praise you, holy Lord! Amen.

MONDAY, JANUARY 23 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 57, 145 Gen 14: (1-7) 8-24 Heb 8:1-13 Jn 4:43-54 Ps 85,47

The Lord is Near

by Jennifer Hager

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

-Psalm 145:18

Recently, I had a friend recall a powerful tool used by Nicky Gumbel in the Alpha class. Nicky shows a slide of a 17th or 18th Century painting of Christ outside of a closed door on which the door knob is inside. Nicky uses this painting to illustrate that Christ waits for us to call on Him. The scripture reference is Revelation 3:20: *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

In Psalm 145:18, this clue to Christ's nature is revealed to us by David. Thousands of years before Christ's birth, the Lord used David to foretell how things were going to work through Christ. The Lord is near (just outside the door) to all who call (open the door) to Him.

To those who don't know Christ as their personal Lord and savior and who seek Him in truth, the door will be opened. This is God's promise.

To those who have a personal relationship with Christ, His nature and being are opened up to us when we ask Him in truth.

Youth: Have you opened the door of your heart to Jesus Christ?

Adults: Is your life open to the way of Christ? Do you follow the Holy Spirit's leading?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we want to open the door to You in everything. Lead us in your truth so that we may know you better. Amen.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 54,146

Gen 15:1-11, 17-21

Heb 9:1-14

Jn 5:1-18

Ps 28, 99

Who Are Our Princes?

by Anne Price

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

-Psalm 146:3-4

Let's first look at the title, *Prince*. In America, we do not have a monarchy, but elected leaders. Younger people, when they see the name prince, tend to think of the popular singer who took on the name, Prince.

This verse that King David wrote in his Psalm tells us not to put our trust in princes for when they die, their plans perish. One person that I would select as a prince in our history would be Dr. Jonas Salk, whose work continues today in the form of the vaccine to protect the world from polio. Many of us who are grandparents and great grandparents remember what it was like before the polio vaccine. While I was in junior high school, there was a time when my parents were afraid for me to go to the public swimming pool, the movies, or even to church to dip my fingers into the holy water, for fear of contracting the disease. By the time I was having children, the vaccine was available and the tragic disease was eradicated.

Our younger people tend to want to make royalty out of the stars in the entertainment field. Yet as the years go on, we see little evidence of good that the stars leave behind.

This is an invitation to you to think of whom you would select as a prince in your life. The first prince that comes to my heart and soul, and who lives forever is Jesus Christ, the real Prince of Peace, who gives us eternal life.

Youth: Whom do you think of as a prince that helps people?

Adults: Has someone been a prince to you that has changed your life?

Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending us the real Prince, whose crown can never tarnish. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 65, 147:1-11

Gen 16: 1-14

Heb 3:12-19

Jn 5: 19-29

Ps 125, 91

Dwelling in the Most High God

by Marie Ruiz

If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

—Psalm 91:9-11

As we begin this New Year, we have probably made plans as to what we would like to accomplish. Perhaps we made resolutions prior to New Year's Day in hopes we wouldn't forget them after the first week. Plans are good to make because they keep us focused on our goal. None of us knows what this year will bring our way. We can only pray for the best in the year to come.

However, our scripture passage in Psalm 91 gives us a promise worth holding on to and believing. You see, trusting in God and dwelling with him each day will give us the assurance that whatever may come our way, He is there to protect and guard us in all things. God's word says He will send angels to guard us. Angels can be in the form of other people who are sent to minister to our needs, uplift our spirits, and provide for our well-being.

The months and years go by so quickly, but let's not forget daily to place our trust in the Lord. His love for us is abundantly rich. He will be our refuge in times of trouble.

As you contemplate the plans you have made for this year, include God in those plans. It is only then that you can rest in the shelter of the Most High, your God in whom you trust.

Youth: Have you ever thought about what it means to put your trust in God alone?

Adults: When your future is uncertain, will you remember that you can count on the One who will deliver and honor us?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for your precious promises of protection to those who put their trust in you. Amen.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 143, 147:12-20

Gen 16:15-17:14

Heb 10:1-10

Jn 5:30-47

Ps 81, 116

Following the Leader

by Judy Williams

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

-Psalm 143:8, 10

Through the years of my life I have sometimes been in the role of a leader and at other times a follower. As situations change, most people find themselves occasionally being leaders, and then following others for a time.

As a follower, I learned to be obedient to my parents, teachers, and eventually to my employers. On some occasions I followed my friends as they served as my guides. But on one memorable occasion, I followed a good friend who was leading a small group hike. You guessed it! Our guide led us the wrong way and we became confused and lost. By wisely staying together we were able to retrace our steps and ultimately return to familiar surroundings. Lesson learned: Not every leader is a good guide! But there is one guide who will never lead us astray.

God, through the sacrifice of Jesus, has left each believer with the Holy Spirit to guide every step we take. And when the Holy Spirit guides our scripture reading, God's words speak plainly to us. Anyone in a position of leadership can trust God's Word and Spirit to help lead those who follow. Parents, teachers, government leaders, employers, and all who strive to give truth need to rely on prayer and scripture to be leaders pleasing to God.

Youth: What are some qualities you can look for in the people who are leading you each day? Will you pray that God will show you how to make careful decisions in choosing whom to follow?

Adults: If you find yourself in a leadership position, how will you seek God's wisdom in all the ways you must deal with others? And how will you use prayer and scripture to help you discern when it is appropriate to be a follower?

Prayer: Father, thank you for having a plan for my life and for giving me the tools to follow the path you have set for me. Give me the strength to follow where you lead. Amen.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 88,148 Gen 17:15-27 Heb 10:11-25 John 6:1-15 Ps 6:20

If We Could See What They Saw

by Dale McArthur

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

—John 6:14

One of the joys of my ministry was being invited to be a volunteer Chaplain at Shriner's Hospital. The job description was to visit patients, sit with relatives in the waiting room and many odd jobs anyone could think of.

One Saturday morning one of the odd jobs was to ride in the van to the airport to meet a plane. This plane was donated by one of the larger firms and had flown to South America to pick up a young girl, kindergarten age, and her parents.

The plane arrived and the first problem was that they could not speak English, but we got past that through sign language and hugs. Their daughter had a severely crippled right leg. They were devastated that she could not walk. We rushed them to admittance and the volunteer doctors and staff were waiting for her.

The parents and I spent time together in the waiting room, not being able to speak. After several agonizing hours, the nurse came out and advised us that the surgery was over and that she would be out soon.

As their daughter was wheeled out, the surgeon moved the sheet back to reveal that her leg was straightened and that she would be able to walk. I wish you could have seen the expression on her parents faces as they witnessed this miracle.

If we could just observe God's work around us through the eyes of those parents, we would see the miracles all around us that God has performed for us so that we are able to walk with Him.

Youth: If there are things you don't understand, take a second look at it – it may be God at work. What do you see?

Adults: Have you ever stopped to think that the answer to our prayers for our family may be in a form that we fail to recognize at first view? Take a second look – it may be just what you asked for after all.

Prayer: Dear Father, Help us feel your presence around us as you work to change the world. We fail to realize that the things we ask you for may be world-shattering, but you make our lives and your gifts one. In Jesus name, Amen.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 122, 149 Gen 18:1-16 Heb 10:26-39 Jn 6:16-27 Ps 100, 63

Reflections

by Jerry Smith

But we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but those who believe and are saved.

-Hebrews 10:39

I think it helps to reflect on how God impacted my life even before I became a believer, and especially since. My last devotional was centered on Noah and the ark. This started my thinking about an exercise in stupidity that we had in my first squadron, VF43, flying Corsairs, or as it was fondly called, "The Bent Wing Eliminator." This exercise called for landing on the U.S.S. Palau, a jeep carrier about the same size as the ark. Our normal class carrier was the Essex Class, about twice the size of a Jeep. To make matters worse, this exercise was in the Atlantic Ocean in the dead of winter, which meant we had to wear survival suits. Well, we landed successfully and sat down to an evening meal. The problem was the Ward Room (Dining Room) was on the aft (back) end of the ship, over the ship's propellers. The dishes and glasses jumped on the table from the propellers' vibrations, which made eating rather difficult. The next morning, we took off on some type of exercise, and on our return, the ship was in an area of dead calm. Now, the Jeep Carrier was built on a Liberty Ship hull, and it had a top speed of 12 knots. Due to the size of the landing area, we needed at least 15 knots of wind speed to land. So they sent us ashore to land at a U.S. Naval base in the area.

We got down fine, but this was the beginning of one of the most miserable days of my life. All we had to wear were our survival suits, which were designed as dry suits made of rubberized cloth, with tight fits around the neck, arms and feet. They were fine for cold water, but downright miserable in a warm room. About every 30 minutes, we had to take them off and pour out the water. The next day we went back aboard the Palau and packed our gear and headed for home.

This wasn't particularly dangerous as some other close calls had been, such as flight training, Korea, or the day the engine quit on my back at 8,000 feet. And as I reflect, there were so many times it easily could have gone bad. So, I thank my grandmother Fulton for all of her prayers during those times, and for a gracious God who heard them and responded.

Youth: Life is full of dangers, so did you choose your grandmothers carefully?

Adults: Do you have a prayer partner to thank and a Protecting God to worship?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for all the times you have protected me from myself, and from outside dangers that I had no control over. You have been a patient, forgiving, loving and gracious Father. Praise your name forever! Amen.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 108 Gen 18.16-33 Gal 5.13-25 Mk 8.22-30 Ps 150

The Beautiful Life

by Dick Leon

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

-Galatians 5:22-23

I think I am right in remembering that John Adams, our second President, once said: "Freedom cannot survive without religious faith." His point was that freedom requires an inner restraint to bad behavior. Soft governments (in contrast to police states) cannot compel good behavior; they can only impose penalties for wrong-doing. Only faith moves us to be good. (Sadly, as faith dwindles in our society more oppressive Laws are needed to rein us in!)

Paul, in his letter to Galatia, is saying the same thing. In Christ we are now free from living under the Law (outside us). Now we are to live by the Spirit (inside us). It is the Spirit that makes life beautiful inside and out.

Consider these fruits of the Spirit in our life that come when we follow Christ:

- Love ~ the mature kind of love that chooses to be loving
- Joy ~ that is deeper and more enduring than happiness
- Peace ~ not the absence of conflict but the presence of God
- Forbearance ~ the strength to carry on regardless
- Kindness ~ the gift of genuine caring for other people
- Goodness ~ the quality that shines in Christian living
- Faithfulness ~ being trustworthy people to those around us
- Gentleness ~ the strength to show our soft side to others
- Self-control ~ the power to tame destructive impulses!

No Law can generate that kind of behavior in our lives. But when Christ makes His home in our heart and the Holy Spirit sets up shop in our lives, then these are going to be the marks of a wholesome, joyous, generous, **beautiful life!**

Youth: What "fruit of the Spirit" have you noticed in your life?

Adults: Can you achieve a life that is described by these nine fruits of the Spirit without God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Mighty Lord, and Gracious Spirit, we thank you for entering our lives to transform us from the inside out and for making life beautiful! Amen.

MONDAY, JANUARY 30 LECTONARY READINGS

Ps 62, 145 Gen 19:1-29 Jn 6:1-12 Heb 11:27-40 Ps 73,9

How Strong Is Our Faith?

by Conrad A Plimpton

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

-Hebrews 11:39-40

The readings for today and tomorrow focus on faith, the tenacity of the faith of those that went before us, both in Biblical times and recent memory. The mystery is that God rewards our faith, but not in ways we might imagine.

In 1960, when I entered college, inspired by entrepreneurial successes of my parents' Boston friends, and Sputnik's challenge to America to produce scientists, I switched majors from English Literature to Astrophysics, fervently hoping to start my own business (which didn't happen).

Fifty years later in Tucson, by God's grace, I am helping the younger generations at the University of Arizona and Eller School start their own businesses, and helped two sons start very distinctive businesses.

God has blessed my faith journey, but not the way I expected, yet bountiful beyond expectation (including 16 grandchildren!).

Youth: What have you fervently prayed for? What is your vision for your life?

Adults: How has God answered your prayers of your youth? Did you keep faithful to God, despite everything? How did God respond?

Prayer: Lord, we are in trying economic times that test our faith. Pray, strengthen us that we may endure this time of testing. Amen.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 31 LECTIONARY READINGS

Ps 12, 146 Gen 21:1-21 Heb 11:13-22 Jn 6:41-51 Ps 36, 7

I am the Bread of Life... *

by John McKee



With two fish and five loaves
Jesus fed the five thousand
Who had followed Him hoping to see
More miracles performed
By this amazing Prophet...
This Teacher from Galilee.

Perceiving this crowd would try
To make Him their king
Jesus hastily retreated from sight...
He withdrew to the mountain
To be by Himself...
And remained there throughout the night.
Taking their boats the next day
Across the Sea of Galilee
The crowd found Him on the other side...

He accused them of following Him
Only for more free bread,
A motive they did not try to hide.

Jesus then told the Jews

I am the Bread of Life...

GOD sent from Heaven to them

As *the Way* to redemption

To the life everlasting

For all who believe in Him.

This revelation by Jesus

Raised the ire of the crowd...

They murmured disputing His claim.

Many Disciples who heard Him

Were skeptical too...

In their hearts, most of them felt the same.

This is a hard saying.

Who can listen to it?

The disciples said, murmuring doubt.

It is the spirit that gives life

The flesh is of no avail...

Jesus explained is what life is about.

Many Disciples stopped following

Lord Jesus after this,

But His chosen twelve were not to leave...

Peter told Jesus they'd stay.

For to whom else could they go?

In Him alone did they believe.

Did I not choose you, the twelve,

And one of you is a devil?

Christ Jesus to Peter replied,

Alluding to Judas Iscariot

Whose dark betrayal

Led to the cross upon which Jesus died.

* John 6

Youth: How do you believe you may have reacted to the statements made by Lord Jesus had you been listening in that crowd on that day?

Adults: Don't you find that the love, teachings and sacrifice of Lord Jesus are the '*Spiritual Food*' leading to the life everlasting that the Savior alludes to when He called Himself, '*The Bread of Life*'?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we give everlasting thanks for the 'Bread of Life' You sent to us for our salvation and beseech forgiveness for our sins. Please grant us the wisdom to make the decisions You'd have us to make, the courage to face adversity and the faith to move mountains, Lord. We ask this in Your Son's holy name. Amen.

Psalm 51:12, NIV



“Restore to
me the joy of your
salvation and grant
me a willing spirit,
to sustain me.”

Abbreviations of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Genesis - Gen
Exodus - Ex
Leviticus - Lev
Numbers - Num
Deuteronomy - Deu
Joshua - Jos
Judges - Jud
Ruth - Ruth
1 Samuel - 1 Sam
2 Samuel - 2 Sam
1 Kings - 1 Kng
2 Kings - 2 Kng
1 Chronicles - 1 Chr
2 Chronicles - 2 Chr
Ezra - Ezz
Nehemiah - Neh
Esther - Est
Job - Job
Psalms - Ps
Proverbs - Prv
Ecclesiastes - Ecc
Song of Solomon - Song
Isaiah - Is
Jeremiah - Jer
Lamentations - Lam
Ezekiel - Eze
Daniel - Dan
Hosea - Hos
Joel - Joel
Amos - Am
Obadiah - Obad
Jonah - Jon
Micah - Mic

Nahum - Nah
Habakkuk - Hab
Zephaniah - Zeph
Haggai - Hag
Zechariah - Zech
Malachi - Mal

New Testament

Matthew - Mt
Mark - Mk
Luke - Lk
John - Jn
Acts of the Apostles - Acts
Romans - Rom
1 Corinthians - 1 Cor
2 Corinthians - 2 Cor
Galatians - Gal
Ephesians - Eph
Philippians - Phil
Colossians - Col
1 Thessalonians - 1 Thes
2 Thessalonians - 2 Thes
1 Timothy - 1 Tim
2 Timothy - 2 Tim
Titus - Titus
Philemon - Philemon
Hebrews - Heb
James - Jam
1 Peter - 1 Pet
2 Peter - 2 Pet
1 John - 1 Jn
2 John - 2 Jn
3 John - 3 Jn
Jude - Jude
Revelation - Rev

Who We Are

“Joyful and alive in Christ!”

Our Purpose

Through Jesus Christ . . .

Planting seeds of hope

Branching out in faith

Bearing fruit in love

. . . All for the glory of God!

Northminster Presbyterian Church

2450 East Fort Lowell Road

Tucson, Arizona 85719-2417

520-327-7121

Fax: 520-327-1839

email: office@npctucson.org

www.npctucson.org