

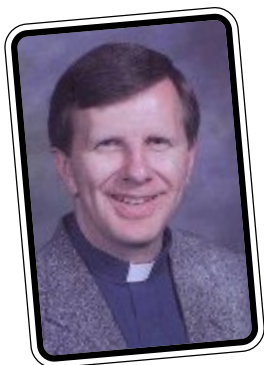


Devotional Expressions

Written by Members of Bethany Lutheran Church

2009

Welcome to Bethany's Growing in Faith and Mission Devotional Resource!



I am Pastor Russ Sorensen and it is my pleasure to introduce you to a unique devotional resource developed by Bethany's *Growing in Faith and Mission* Prayer Team. These devotions are offered by the people of Bethany Lutheran, Rice Lake, Wisconsin as a resource for your personal times of prayer and encouragement. They can be used one at a time, fourteen days in row.

Or if you can't wait to hear and experience God's grace through the words of the people of Bethany, use them in a shorter time span. These are meant to be resources for you to be used more than once. You may find that each day is a new day to hear and respond to God's word and God's blessings in prayer.

Reflecting the words of Paul, I also say to you,

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

Phil 1:3-6

***May God's Grace and Peace be with you each day as you respond to God's blessings in your life everyday.
Amen.***

Helen Block

At the end of the day when the last light fades from the sky, should we ask, “What have I gained?” or rather, “What have I given?”

Have we given others joy, confidence, laughter, peace, a sense of well-being, loving-kindness? Have we made their day easier, happier?

If we have done that, we have shared what we’ve learned from God’s word. The familiar line from the book of Acts, “*it is more blessed to give than to receive*” can be understood on so many levels of daily life.

Throughout his journey on earth Jesus sought nothing for himself. We cannot totally emulate that because we have responsibilities to provide for our families and ourselves. But his message to me is clear: “It is not all about you.”

And how wonderfully amazing it is to discover that what we share of our time and talents with others can repay us with personal satisfaction, happiness and a great sense of fulfillment at the end of all our days.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Help us to remember that your blessings have been with us from our earliest days and will continue to embrace us throughout eternity. Let us share this truth with our fellow men forever. Amen.

Conrad Eastwold

Jeremiah 29:11

“Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Bethany has been a great blessing for Kris and me and our family over the last 31 years. God has used it as a safe place and community to come to each week. It has been a place to receive support and comfort during the difficult times and a place to share excitement during the good times.

It has also provided windows to God’s work in the community as well as the world outside Rice Lake through our mission emphasis.

There have been times, including the planning and completion of the new addition, that decisions made by Bethany Congregation were driven by faith that we were about God’s work and that He would provide. At those times, this verse from Jeremiah has been a comfort to me. God assures me and us that He sees the big picture and that we are in the exciting position of being part of His plan.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the Christian community you have given my family and me here at Bethany. Thank you that we can be part of your plan. Give me the faith to step out into the future with you. Amen.

Philippians 4: 5-7

“Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

A former pastor at Bethany, preaching a sermon during our annual stewardship drive, brought from his pocket a small cross and spoke about the fact that the “cross is always with us” – that for our sake God gave His own son, Jesus, to take our sins and burdens away and give us that visual promise of the cross that we would always be in His care. And, therefore, what would be our sacrifice for the “sake of God?” As we left worship that day, each of us was given a small silver cross to carry with us. I still have mine and like God’s love, amazingly it shows no wear!

Men have pants pockets in which to carry their important things such as wallets, loose change and keys; women have purses and/or wallets and isn’t it amazing the things we can pack into those wallets and still fold them or those purses and still close them? Many of the members of Bethany walked out that day with that little cross; it went into pockets and into purses; mine is still in the portion of my wallet where I keep loose change. Each time I make a purchase using change or receiving change, I see that cross and quite honestly, the message of that sermon is brought to mind again and again and like God’s amazing love, it shows no wear!

The cross in my billfold is a reminder of the price paid by Jesus so that my life and the lives of all could be lived in forgiveness and love because God always gives us enough. Bethany has given much to our family; friends, fellowship, love, kindness, support, prayers for healing and much more. All of these probably MORE THAN ENOUGH therefore, how can we not respond to God in stewardship of our time and talents? Our stewardship is a personal response to God's generosity.

Prayer: Dear God, We give you thanks for each new day and the reminder that you always provide "enough" of the things we need. Keep us mindful that you have given us the most precious gift of your Son; and our gift, however humble, is yours for the sake of the Gospel and we are obligated out of love for you to share these gifts willingly with all who are in need and who wait to hear your Word.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone whoever believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”

This is one of the first bible verses most of us learned when we were children. I know I did and it has always stayed with me. As time goes on, I find that this short verse has more and more to say, especially at Easter time. I found myself thinking of this verse when we studied the ‘languages of love’ during our past Lenten services. It increased my realization and understanding that God, through Christ, is our guide of how to live a life of thankfulness and a life of understanding, acceptance and caring for others. He is our model of how to use our words, time, talents and gifts with others. When we do this, it shows that we are letting him be our guide. And then I thought of all the activities, opportunities and support that Bethany provides to us as members and then out into our community. How thankful I am to be part of Bethany’s church family. As one of the songs we use at our church services says; It is sharing and caring that makes us a family of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for all you have given us. Help us and guide us to use our words, our time and our gifts with the people in our lives and in our community. In your name, Amen.

2 Corinthians 9:7

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

How can I live my life for the glory of God? This is a question I need to ask myself every day. I am blessed with a wonderful family at home and a wonderful church family at Bethany. Because of these blessings, I have grown immensely in my spiritual life. I realize others do for me, and wonder how can I do for others?

I can be generous with my prayers, service and giving. Spending time with the Lord in prayer helps me give from the heart all for the Glory of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are in my heart and I feel your presence as I set out to tackle each day. I pray for you to lead me in directions that are pleasing to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Ephesians 2:8-9

“For it is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of our own efforts, but God’s gift so that no one can boast about it.”

I believe I was fortunate to have parents and grandparents who believed in Jesus as their Savior. They believed that it was important to worship and grow in your faith. We worshiped every Sunday at our rural Minnesota Lutheran Church. Other people influenced my faith. They were Sunday School teachers, pastors and friends who by their words and example strengthened my faith.

Since 1974 when we moved to Rice Lake, Bethany Lutheran Church has been a vital part of our daily lives. We witness strong faith and service to others in so many individuals. However, we must remember it is by God’s grace we are saved by faith not because of our own work.

Pauli and I have been on several mission trips to Jamaica. We witnessed the strong faith of many of the Jamaicans. We see that they are very poor but seem to be quite happy. In this country, most of us are blessed with many material possessions. We are reminded that we should thankfully give God a tith of the gifts he has provided. We need to support the mission of our church including providing help for our fellow man, especially those in need.

Prayer: My prayer for Bethany is that we as members continue to strengthen our mission in the Rice Lake community. I ask that the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and gives us guidance to lead others to faith in Jesus in our neighborhoods. Amen.

Joshua 1:9

“Yes be bold and strong! Banish fear and doubt! Remember, the Lord your God is with you wherever you go!”

Joshua 1:9 was the Bible verse my niece, Jolene, found strength in as she walked her path fighting a nasty form of leukemia the past six months. Just as Jolene used these words to give her strength each day – these words speak to all of us. With the support and help of my Bethany family, I am able to look forward to each new day and new calling. If I want to dwell on these “bad economic” times, I could doubt that the *Growing in Faith and Mission* can succeed. But, I know better – God is here guiding us and encouraging every step we take.

Prayer: God, I know you are with me always and with the people of Bethany. One more time we ask for your guidance as we look forward in our ministry. Amen.

Psalm 100

*“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth
worship the Lord with gladness;
come into His presence with singing.*

*Know that the Lord is God.
It is He that made us, and we are His;
we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.*

*Enter His gates with thanksgiving
and His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.*

*For the Lord is good; His steadfast love endures forever,
and His faithfulness to all generations.”*

Our very existence is a gift from God. If we turn our back on God, we have no hope. It is through his gifts that we rejoice in the good news of his promises – promises of forgiveness and the ultimate promise of eternal life.

Praise and thanksgiving can be our response to God, our outward show of appreciation for his love in us. May we be exuberant in our “joyful noise to the Lord,” declaring that the Lord is God, and that he made us; that we are his, we are his people.

***Prayer: God of new songs and new voices, you
inspire melody and verse, color and art, words and
literature. Help us to use our eyes, our ears and our
voices so that every sense be awakened to new visions
of your grace. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.***

Matthew 9:38

“Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Growing up on a farm in Northwest Wisconsin, I have always marveled at the crops that are grown and what a reward harvest time always meant. At the same time, there was an urgency to complete the harvest before a storm, a drought, an early frost or freeze.

Our Lord is like minded in that Jesus had compassion on people who were harassed and helpless. His prayer for workers to go into the harvest is our joyful invitation to go and tell others the great news of salvation.

Time is short! God give us willing hearts to harvest for him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, make us mission minded. Give us a sense of urgency in our witnessing that many may hear the sweet news of salvation through us. Amen.

Joan Gerland

I want to share with you how Bethany Lutheran Church has influenced my life. It is not the church per say that has caused this transformation, but the people of Bethany.

Let me explain: I was raised Catholic and went to mass and Sunday School with my parents and eight siblings. During college, I tried out a variety of churches by myself and with my sister, Katie, and her then boyfriend, Peter Muschinske. They always gravitated back to Bethany and they took me along. A few years passed and I married Todd Gerland at Bethany in 1994. A few more years passed and our daughter Samantha was baptized here by Pastor Grandpa George Muschinske. Our son Daniel was also baptized at Bethany in 1999.

I started by attending worship and gradually became more involved. First with Sunday School, then Bethany Choir, Here We Stand Confirmation and currently church council.

As you can see, I have stopped dipping my toes in the water and have jumped in feet first...or head first. I love my involvement with the church. It has been very rewarding in many ways. I never would have gotten to this point in my life without the many people at Bethany; without the guidance of my parents, Ben and Alice Miannecki; my sister, Katie; my great friend and mentor, Mae Muschinske and my family.

I know I wouldn't have any of these things I love in my life without God's help and guidance.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help me continue to share my time and talents with others for my spiritual growth. Amen.

Luke 2: 10-11

“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

For many of us, Christmas is a time of Good News, The Good News that Christ, our Lord came to bring external life to all people. For others, Christmas may be a time of not so good news. Signs of economic recession are still around. Unemployment remains near 10% and home foreclosures continue to rise. Retailers relate good news to the frequency of cash registers jingling and the number of sales made each day. Food pantry shelves are empty before the line of hungry people are fed.

God’s Good News is not dependent on the economy or the state of world affairs. In fact, we don’t even have to wait until December 25th to appreciate that Good News. The ever living Savior is by our side, strengthening, listening, helping and encouraging us continually.

This Christmas we can be remembering the Son of God who was born to save us from ourselves, from our sins, from Satan and from a world of bad news. What a glorious gift has been given to us, the greatest gift of all, Eternal Life! That is good news indeed!

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, I am overwhelmed with gratitude and praise that you have saved me...and nothing in this world can change that. Thank you for being my good news of great joy! In your Holy Name, Amen.

Paulette Hanson

Luke 6:38

“for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

“We give thee but thine own, whate’er the gift may be
All that we have is thine alone, a trust, O God, from thee.”

We declare that all we have belongs to God but then sometimes we act as if all we have is ours. We think maybe, just maybe, we’ll part with a little bit. We come into this world with nothing and we leave it the same way. The only mark we leave is the kind of person we were. Nothing really belongs to us, it has just been entrusted to us for a short time. It is a gift from God, given to us to share with others.

Prayer: Dear God, You made it all possible: life, sustenance, family and friends, our country, our church. We thank you for these gifts and ask you to teach us that they are gifts and how to give back.

Luke 6:31

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Recently, someone sent me a story about Dave and John who were hiking in the Rockies. As they walked, they spotted a mountain lion. Similarly, the mountain lion’s hungry look said he had also spotted them. John froze in his tracks, but Dave sat down on a log, tore off his hiking boots and quickly began lacing up his running shoes. John whispered, “For crying out loud, you can’t outrun a mountain lion!” Dave smiled, “I don’t have to outrun the mountain lion, I just have to outrun you.”

How different our present and our eternity would be if Jesus thought that way. How sad would be our lives if Jesus decided to save Himself and not us. Thankfully, the cradle, the cross and the empty tomb tell us Jesus didn’t think that way.

And He doesn’t want us to think or live that way either. In a beautiful and incredibly concise way, He tells His people: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” If everyone followed Jesus’ rule, this world would be transformed and we’d have a whole lot less over-fed mountain lions around.

Prayer: Dear Lord, It’s such a blessing when we encounter people that are a reflection of You. Make me one of them. Help me treat others in such a way that when people see or hear me, they will see the presence of the Redeemer who sacrificed Himself for my salvation. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Mark 6:41

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He (Jesus) gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to His disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.”

This bible passage reminds me of the challenges and economic concerns in our world today. We are concerned about losing our jobs, keeping our homes and paying our bills. These are very real problems. Unfortunately, if we concentrate on these problems so much, we may forget Jesus’ promise that God will not give us burdens heavier than we can bear. God tells us to without ceasing and boldly ask for what we need. We just do not communicate with God as we should.

The Lord tells us to imitate the birds of the air. They neither worry about the cares of tomorrow or where their food will come from. Yet the Lord provides for them. And He has promised to take even better care of us.

As we turn to Him in faith and trust in Him to care for us, He calms our fears and helps us face our problems and concerns with the assurance that with God, nothing is impossible. If God did not spare his only Son, but offered him as a sacrifice to sin our eternal redemption, surely he will generously provide for our every need on earth.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Be our guide in these difficult times. We leave our problems in your hands and trust in your power and wisdom to provide for our needs. Give us the faith and courage to believe your promise that you are with us always. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.