

Mission Bend United Methodist Church
Season of Prayer and Fasting



PRAYER JOURNAL

I am *flawed* but *forgiven* and God is forever *faithful*.

Dr. Carolyn McCall Livingston, Senior Pastor

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Mission Bend UMC Family,

I want to thank you in advance for your continued support to Mission Bend UMC through service, prayer and giving. We will be observing Lent with a church wide time of prayer and fasting.

“Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting. Bring the leaders and all the people of the land into the Temple of the LORD your God, and cry out to him there” (Joel 1:14 NLT).

As we enter this time of prayer and fasting, I am encouraging each of you to contemplate on what God is attempting to give birth to through you; what God is liberating you from; and/or changing your heart toward by considering the following commitments:

- Commit to pray daily
- Commit to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you.
-
- Commit to give and
- Commit to serve.

Remember, the details are not as important as the spirit in which you participate. If you have any known medical conditions or suspect such conditions, consult your doctor before beginning the fast.

During our time of fasting, we desire God’s clarity on where He is calling us to in 2019; therefore, we will fast on Wednesdays. During our time of prayer and fasting on Wednesdays, I have outlined some specific areas for us to focus on:

- 1) God’s Will
- 2) The Love of Christ
- 3) Unity and Peace
- 4) Revival and Renewal
- 5) Building Faith and Trust
- 6) Forgiveness & Spiritual Healing

I have great expectation that this will be a blessing to you and your family. I look forward to hearing and celebrating God with you.

Blessings,



Rev. Dr. Carolyn McCall Livingston
Senior Pastor



Rev. Hilda M. Gradnigo
Associate Pastor

Dates to Remember



Sunday Worship @ 10:30 am | Sermon Series - Story of Simon Peter

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| March 10 th | Call of the Fishermen |
| March 17 th | In the Storms |
| March 24 th | Bedrock or Stumbling Block |
| March 31 st | I Will Not Deny You |
| April 7 th | From Cowardice to Courage |
| April 14 th | The Rest of the Story |
| April 21 st | He is Risen! - w/Brass Quartet & Butterfly Release |



Family – Fellowship – Fun

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| April 14 th @ 10:30 am | Procession of Palms |
| @ 4:00pm | Eggstravaganza - Easter Egg Hunt |
| April 18 th @ 6:00 pm | Fish & Chips Supper |
| April 21 st @ 10:30 am | Easter Sunday w/Brass Quartet & Butterfly Release |

How to Use Your Journal

This journal was created with you in mind. From the size of the font to the **Table of Contents**. It is my prayer that you entrust this time to God and allow Him to do something remarkable in your life. Here are a few details that should make things simpler to follow.

Prayer and Fasting

And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting, Mark 9:29 KJV.

We will begin our prayer time with an Opening Prayer on Thursday, March 7th and close with a prayer on Saturday, April 20th. We will **pray and fast** specifically for the following topics on **Wednesdays**. We will follow the Daniel Fast guidelines and food list which are included. We are asking everyone to commit to praying together as a church @ 7:00 pm. Please use the following information to dial in:

- 1) God's Will
- 2) The Love of Christ
- 3) Unity and Peace
- 4) Revival and Renewal
- 5) Building Faith and Trust
- 6) Forgiveness and Spiritual Healing

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Devotionals have been provided for every day. You can find the devotion for the day in Table of Contents by date with page number.

The goal of prayer and fasting is not so we can **disconnect** from the world, it is that we **connect** with God.

Acts of Kindness Calendars

It is customary that during a time of prayer and fasting, persons also offer a service or kind gesture to others. Please adhere the **March** and **April Calendars** for gestures for each day.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Dates to Remember..... | 3 |
| How to Use Your Journal | 4 |
| What is Lent? | 7 |
| Ash Wednesday | 8 |
| Why Fast? | 9 |
| The United Methodist Church and Fasting..... | 10 |
| What is the Daniel Fast? ** | 11 |
| The Daniel Fast Food List | 12 |
| FAQ's..... | 13 |
| A Call to Faith in Action | 14 |
| March Acts of Kindness Calendar | 15 |
| Thursday, March 7 TH – Opening Prayer | 16 |
| Friday, March 8 th - LENT (<i>Let's Eliminate Negative Thinking</i>)..... | 17 |
| Saturday, March 9 th – Be Still | 18 |
| Monday, March 11 th – Desiring God's Truth..... | 19 |
| Tuesday, March 12 TH – God Is & Is Ever-Present | 20 |
| Wednesday, March 13 th - Love of Christ | 21 |
| Thursday, March 14 TH – Say My Name | 22 |
| Friday, March 15 TH – Wholehearted Life | 23 |
| Saturday, March 16 TH – Do You Know My Name?..... | 24 |
| Monday, March 18 TH – Walking in Faith..... | 25 |
| Tuesday, March 19 th – God's Presence | 26 |
| Wednesday, March 20 th – God's Will | 28 |
| Thursday, March 21 st - Stillness | 29 |
| Friday, March 22 nd - Clean Slate | 30 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Saturday, March 23rd - Worry: An Act of Rebellion | 31 |
| Monday, March 25th - The Shepherd's Tools | 32 |
| Tuesday, March 26th - The Power of Prayer | 33 |
| Wednesday, March 27th - Revival and Renewal | 34 |
| Thursday, March 28th – Sharing God’s Love | 35 |
| Friday, March 29th – Reliability of the Synoptic Accounts | 36 |
| Saturday, March 30th – Being Thankful for God’s Gifts | 37 |
| April Acts of Kindness Calendar | 38 |
| Monday, April 1st - Prayer..... | 39 |
| Tuesday, April 2nd - Life-One Day at a Time..... | 40 |
| Wednesday, April 3rd - Unity and Peace | 41 |
| Thursday, April 4th - Walking in the Light | 42 |
| Friday, April 5th - The Cost of the Cross | 43 |
| Saturday, April 6th - Troubled Heart | 44 |
| Monday, April 8th - Why Prayer is Real and Powerful | 45 |
| Tuesday, April 9th - Praising the Lord Seems So Easy—Or is It?..... | 46 |
| Wednesday, April 10th – Building Faith and Trust | 47 |
| Thursday, April 11th - Flowing Fresh Water | 48 |
| Friday, April 12th - In the Beginning..... | 49 |
| Saturday, April 13th - Old Love..... | 50 |
| Monday, April 15th - Pine Trees Know When It Is Easter..... | 51 |
| Tuesday, April 16th – Faith and Strength | 52 |
| Wednesday, April 17th - Spiritual Healing and Forgiveness..... | 53 |
| Thursday, April 18th-Trust the Lord and He Will Take Care of You | 54 |
| Friday, April 19th - Sundays in Lent..... | 55 |
| Saturday, April 20th – Closing Prayer..... | 56 |

What is Lent?

Lent, the period of 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays), begins on [Ash Wednesday](#) and ends at sundown on Holy Saturday, the evening before Easter.

Lent comes from the Anglo Saxon word *lencten*, which means "spring." The forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

During Lent, we enter into a season of preparation, self-reflection and repentance when we seek to literally “turn around” and realign our lives and focus toward God. It is a time to give up things as well as take on new life-giving practices, helping us rid ourselves of distractions and our own selfish desires. By doing so, we seek to live and love as more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter" and the reverent spirit of Lent is tempered with joyful anticipation of the Resurrection. This year may we experience the anticipation of the Resurrection through the life of Simon Peter, a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

Ash Wednesday

The first day of Lent. It marks the beginning of a period of reflection and penance. In the Bible, sprinkling oneself with ashes was traditionally a sign of one's sorrow for having committed sins. In the Christian tradition, Ash Wednesday also marked the beginning of preparation for the understanding of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The particular symbolism of ashes for this day comes from a practice in the Roman Catholic churches in which the ashes from the palms used in the preceding year's Palm Sunday celebration are blessed. With these ashes, the priest on the first day of Lent marks a cross on the forehead of each worshiper. This practice has become a part of Ash Wednesday services in many United Methodist churches.

Ash Wednesday emphasizes two themes: our sinfulness before God and our human mortality. The service focuses on both themes, helping us to realize that both have been triumphed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

During some Ash Wednesday services, the minister will lightly rub the sign of the cross with ashes onto the foreheads of worshipers. The use of ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in Jewish and Christian worship. Historically, ashes signified purification and sorrow for sins.

It is traditional to save the palm branches from the previous Palm Sunday service to burn to produce ashes for this service. Sometimes a small card or piece of paper is distributed on which each person writes a sin or hurtful or unjust characteristic. The cards are then brought to the altar to be burned with the palm branches. The ash cross on the forehead is an outward sign of our sorrow and repentance for sins.

Why Fast?

I. What Is A Fast?

Fasting means abstaining from **food**, turning away from the things the body craves in order for the inner man to concentrate on God in worship, prayer, service, and praise. Fasting has been a part of Christianity through the ages. Fasting is a form of **spiritual** and **scriptural** sacrifice. The Hebrew word for *fasting* means “to cover the mouth.” The Greek word for *fasting* means “not to eat.” In other words, you are fasting if you are not eating food. Fasting does not change or impress God. Fasting changes us. Through fasting, Christians are empowered to discipline their daily relationship with the Lord.

II. Why Should Christians Fast?

Matthew 6:16 states: “Moreover, when you fast...” not “if you fast.”

Fasting is a spiritual discipline. It forces the Christian to become aware of who they really are (remember we are spirit beings living a fleshly body). Many Christians don't fast because it forces them to deny themselves. Therefore, there is a constant battle between the flesh and the Spirit of God. The Bible states that Christians must worship God in spirit and in truth. Fasting forces the Christian to see the truth about themselves, their decisions, their thoughts, and their lifestyles.

1. Consistent fasting soon clears up the misconception that our bodies need food three or more times a day. Deuteronomy 8:23
2. Food is used as an emotional crutch to give pleasure, satisfaction, escape, and to active drowsiness (to withdraw). Matthew 6:25-34
3. Abstaining from food brings Christians face to face with other painful issues in our lives. God begins to reveal the need for us to forgive others, to repent of our wicked ways, to stop running from Him and start trusting Him. This is referred to spiritual and soulish detoxification. Isaiah 58:4-12
4. The ability to totally depend on God our Supplier even when you are weak. Psalm 109:24-31, Philippians 4:13.

III. Benefits of Fasting

1. Helps us to become more sensitive to the Holy Spirit.
2. Intensifies our prayer life.
3. Sharpens our spiritual intellect, skill, discernment, and understanding.
4. Demonstrates an act of obedience.

The United Methodist Church and Fasting

There is a strong biblical base for fasting, particularly during the 40 days of Lent leading to the celebration of Easter. Jesus, as part of his spiritual preparation, went into the wilderness and fasted 40 days and 40 nights, according to the Gospels.

Fasting has been a part of Methodism from its early beginnings. John Wesley considered fasting an important part of a Christian's life and he fasted weekly. To Wesley, fasting was an important way to express sorrow for sin and penitence for overindulgence in eating and drinking. He believed it allowed more time for prayer and was more meaningful if combined with giving to the poor. Wesley did advise caution against extreme fasting and against fasting for those in fragile health.

Although fasting usually refers to any practice of restricting food, there is a distinction between fasting (limiting consumption of food and drink) and abstinence (abstaining from eating meat.) Abstinence from meat one day a week is a universal act of penitence. It is important that you check with your physician before attempting a total fast (no food, water only) for more than 24 hours.

Lent is a very personal time of self-reflection, so The United Methodist Church does not have official guidelines on how individuals should observe Lent. Some choose to give up a certain food, however a spirit of fasting can include restriction of activities such as television watching, shopping or social networking. Some choose to give away clothing or possessions, give time by volunteering or increase time spent in prayer. We fast to reorient ourselves away from the distraction of those things and back toward God.

What is the Daniel Fast? **

The Daniel Fast is a method of fasting. It's a *partial fast*, meaning that some foods are eaten and others are restricted. The Daniel Fast is based on the fasting experiences of the Old Testament Prophet Daniel when he and his companions were captured in Israel by the Babylonians under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar. These young and very intelligent men were to be groomed to take some of the administrative positions of the growing Babylonian empire. So while they were captives, they were still treated very well.

Daniel was a man of deep faith and devoted to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When served the food and wine of the king, Daniel didn't want to defile his body and so requested a different meal:

"Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink." Daniel 1:12 KJV

Pulse is food grown from seed, so the Daniel Fast is a plant-based way of eating and consists of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, health oils, herbs and spices. You will also see from the verse that the only beverage on the Daniel Fast is water.

Many years later, Daniel was mourning over Israel and its long captivity. From this experience we gain another set of guidelines for the Daniel Fast:

"I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled." Daniel 10:3 KJV

From this passage, and using various translations, the standards of sweeteners (including artificial varieties), leavening agents, deep fried foods, solid fats and sweet desserts are not allowed on the Daniel Fast.

****We will fast every Wednesday during Lent as a church. We will follow the guidelines for the Daniel Fast ONLY ON WEDNESDAYS.**

Meal Planning for the Daniel Fast

Food manufacturers are now providing more prepared foods that are free of sugar, processed ingredients and man-made chemicals. However, you will find you need to prepare most of your meals at home if you want a reasonable variety of meal choices.

Invest a little time one day a week and plan your menus and your shopping list during this time.

The Daniel Fast Food List

Please make sure to **READ THE LABEL** when purchasing packaged, canned or bottled foods. They should be **sugar-free** and **chemical-free**. Keep this in mind as you review this list of acceptable foods.

Foods TO INCLUDE in your diet during the Daniel Fast

All fruits. These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned. Fruits include but are not limited to apples, apricots, bananas, blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, cantaloupe, cherries, cranberries, figs, grapefruit, grapes, guava, honeydew melon, kiwi, lemons, limes, mangoes, nectarines, oranges, papayas, peaches, pears, pineapples, plums, prunes, raisins, raspberries, strawberries, tangelos, tangerines, watermelon

All vegetables. These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned. Vegetables include but are not limited to artichokes, asparagus, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chili peppers, collard greens, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, ginger root, kale, leeks, lettuce, mushrooms, mustard greens, okra, onions, parsley, potatoes, radishes, rutabagas, scallions, spinach, sprouts, squashes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, turnips, watercress, yams, zucchini, veggie burgers are an option if you are not allergic to soy.

All whole grains, including but not limited to whole wheat, brown rice, millet, quinoa, oats, barley, grits, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat tortillas, rice cakes and popcorn.

All nuts and seeds, including but not limited to sunflower seeds, cashews, peanuts, sesame. Also nut butters including peanut butter.

All legumes. These can be canned or dried. Legumes include but are not limited to dried beans, pinto beans, split peas, lentils, black eyed peas, kidney beans, black beans, cannellini beans, white beans.

All quality oils including but not limited to olive, canola, grape seed, peanut, and sesame.

Beverages: spring water, distilled water or other pure waters.

Other: tofu, soy products, vinegar, seasonings, salt, herbs and spices.

Foods TO AVOID on the Daniel Fast

All meat and animal products including but not limited to beef, lamb, pork, poultry, and fish.

All dairy products including but not limited to milk, cheese, cream, butter, and eggs.

All sweeteners including but not limited to sugar, raw sugar, honey, syrups, molasses, and cane juice.

All leavened bread including Ezekiel Bread (it contains yeast and honey) and baked goods.

All refined and processed food products including but not limited to artificial flavorings, food additives, chemicals, white rice, white flour, and foods that contain artificial preservatives.

All deep fried foods including but not limited to potato chips, French fries, corn chips.

All solid fats including shortening, margarine, lard and foods high in fat.

Beverages including but not limited to coffee, tea, herbal teas, carbonated beverages, energy drinks, and alcohol.

Q. What if I fall off during this time of prayer and fasting?

A. If you fall off during this time of prayer and fasting, get right back on it. Do NOT allow the enemy to tell you that you failed.

Q. What if I am under a doctor's care or I regularly take medications?

A. PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE consult your physician before fasting or altering any medications. It is wise to consult your doctor regarding the effect of fasting combined with your medication.

Q. Should I share with others that I am fasting?

A. There is usually no reason for telling strangers or casual acquaintances that you are fasting. If you do, they may subject you to a lot of questions that you may not want to answer. But in any case, use your best judgment and the Lord's leading in telling people about your fast.

Q. Will this make me more spiritual?

A. Prayer is a discipline for the believer. It is through prayer that we communicate with God about His plans in the earth. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. It is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spiritual. Long times of prayer and reading God's Word will be very essential. The more time you spend with God in fellowship, worship, and adoration of Him, and the more you read and meditate upon His Word, the greater your effectiveness will be in prayer and the more meaningful the fast will be.

A Call to Faith in Action

God has called us to walk by faith not by sight. He has also “called” us to action – to do, to go, to give, to help, to pray, to serve. Every week during Lent, we are asking you to answer the call by committing to one or more of the following “faith in action” commitments as commissioned in the book of James.

“Dear friends, do you think you’ll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, “Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!” and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn’t it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?” James 2:14-17 MSG

Faith in Action Commitments: Please choose ONE for each week of Lent.

- 1) Sacrificing in my giving
- 2) Inviting and bringing others to worship at Mission Bend
- 3) Releasing my gifts to be used in service, word, and action in ministry, outreach and community at Mission Bend Church
- 4) Reading, studying and meditating on the Word of God to renew my mind concerning to the vision and mission at Mission Bend Church
- 5) Allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and lead me in creative evangelism
- 6) Building the bridge of diversity through personal witness and invitation

March Acts of Kindness Calendar

March 2019

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|--------|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 Ash Wednesday | 7 Say a Prayer for a Loved One | 8 Call a Senior Citizen | 9 Bring a Meal to a Friend |
| 10 Give to Charity | 11 | 12 Pray for Children | 13 Fast from Gossip | 14 Pray for our Military | 15 Read One Bible Verse | 16 Avoid a Temptation |
| 17 Create Space for Silence In Your Day | 18 | 19 Pray for Peace | 20 Fast from Technology | 21 Exercise | 22 Read Something Inspirational | 23 Share a coffee/tea with Someone |
| 24 Do a Daily Chore with Joy | 25 | 26 Assist Someone With Their Chore | 27 Fast from TV | 28 Pray for a Friend in Need | 29 Call a Distant Friend | 30 Read Your Favorite Bible Story |
| 31 | | | | | | |

Thursday, March 7TH – Opening Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. You are the Lord who is, who was, and who is to come. You are the Almighty. Thank You for the many blessings that You have done through and in Mission Bend UMC. Thank You for blessing our church to be a light in a dark world. Thank You for our pastors, leaders, and church family. Thank You for blessing us to provide spiritual water to a spiritually thirsty world.

Father, we submit this time of prayer and fasting to You so that Your plans will be done in our church family, our families and our community. Father, as we submit to You and the Holy Spirit, remind us of Your provision and Your power. Father, as we confess Your Word throughout this fast, we believe that it will not return to You empty but it shall accomplish what pleases You and it shall prosper in the thing for which it was sent regarding Mission Bend UMC, our families, and our communities.

Help us to remain faithful and focused during this time. Please strengthen us in our understanding of our sacrifice as we advance the Kingdom of God through Mission Bend UMC with prayer. We commit to seeking Your Kingdom first, so that all other things concerning our mission, ministry and families will be added.

Father, forgive us as we forgive others. Remind us of anyone we need to forgive and we will be quick to forgive them.

Lead us not into temptation during this time; but, deliver us from the evil one.

You are holy, Almighty God. You are the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture References

Revelation 4:8, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 6:33, Psalm 72:19

Friday, March 8th - LENT (Let's Eliminate Negative Thinking)

Read Romans 12:1-6

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God
Romans 12:2 KJV

Lent is a season of reflection and repentance. We invite you to look inside your heart, seeing yourself with compassion and truth. We are to see others or ourselves *not* as we see ourselves, but *rather* as God see us. When you clear what you **do not want** from the recesses of your mind, it will miraculously disappear from your life. Use LENT...Let's Eliminate Negative Thinking this season as a guiding light for change and life transformation. Allow this poem from Acts of Faith – Daily Meditations for People of Color to fix your attention on God to inform and renew your mind.

When you think negatively, you attract negativity.
That is awesome power of the mind.

When you confront the world with negative thoughts,
you will have experiences to confirm what you are thinking.

Thought to experience, this is the process. It is not the other way around.

What you believe people and the world are doing to you is actually a reflection of what your thoughts are drawing to you.

If you want to free yourself from the harshness of the world... clear harsh thoughts from your mind...

Clear anger with forgiveness.

Confusion with orderly thinking.

Clear restriction with an open mind,

Violence with peaceful thoughts.

Clear denial with acceptance, hate with thoughts of love.

LENT = Let's Eliminate Negative Thinking-Earl Nightingale

Thought of the Day

How about thinking LENT this season with destroying negativity out of the way by renewing your mind through the WORD of God?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I surrender my life, my thoughts, my heart and my mind to your will and way. Lead to the rock of my salvation, amen.

Prayer Focus: Destroying Negativity

Written by: Rev. Dr. Carolyn McCall Livingston

Saturday, March 9th – Be Still

Read Psalm 46: 1-6; 10

“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth”.

Psalm 46:10 KJV

I enjoy being able to structure my time. After over 40 years in the “work world”, I can spend my time as I choose. The most valuable time to me is the time I spend in the morning with God. This is the quiet time where I can prepare for my day with study, prayer and meditation. Often during this time, my mind will wander, and I have to re-center on Christ. I can get very frustrated when this happens, wondering why I can’t just “be still and know that He is God”. Recently, I looked that verse up in Psalms, knowing I’d see a lovely vision of quiet restful concentration when the author filled up his spirit in communication with God. What I found instead was mountains falling into the sea and nations in an uproar, God breaking bows and shattering spears!!!! So much for that perfect scene in my head. As I read the chaos, I thought how often the chaos in my mind echoed it, and I literally heard “Be still”. As I continue to learn scripture, deepen my prayer life, and grow closer to God, I may always struggle with a mind that wanders but those two little words – *Be Still* – can bring me back to God – my loving creator.

Thought of the Day:

I can find peace and stillness in my communication with God.

Prayer: Dear Creator God, You know all things, You know that I want to concentrate on You only. Please forgive a wandering mind and help me to build discipline in my prayer life.

Prayer Focus: Calm in the chaos

Written by: Mary Jan Newton

Monday, March 11th – Desiring God’s Truth

Read Luke 10:38-42

**But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part,
which shall not be taken away from her.**

Luke 10:42 KJV

Have you ever volunteered to help with a project thinking that this was where God was leading you, and then get immersed in the “details” so you lose the original focus? Martha showed great hospitality by inviting Jesus and his followers for dinner, but she got caught up with the form of being a good hostess. Whereas, Mary chose to sit at Jesus’ feet, listening to His Word. Jesus tells us our highest priority in life should be to “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...” Matthew 6:33.

Prayer: Most Gracious Lord, help me to spend ample time with you, particularly pushing back the demands of the day. Help me to remember that You are omnipotent and able to bend time and events in my favor, and I will be able to accomplish *more* in less time because of rich communion with You.

Prayer Focus: What is your will for my life?

Written by: Author Unknown

Read John 3:14-18

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 3:16 KJV

Often when I wake up in the morning, I pause, as a great awareness strikes me that I'm privileged. I'm conscious of my existence in this very moment of life; that God has Blessed me with a new day. I'm aware of my surroundings. My window is already allowing His natural gift of Light to come shining through – a reminder of His presence, our Light of the World. Our God is willing to be known through His Son Jesus Christ is enough for me to know He is ever present when I am awake -by His Saving Grace.

I wholeheartedly believe and trust in God, and my faith in Him remains steadfast. I know He and only He is behind this ability to assess my current position. I believe because He loves us so very much, He came again in the form of man, Jesus Christ. Seemingly, we then are on the same page, as flesh, we will listen and focus on Him in all His teachings and message of the Salvation of God; His provision of life, (*John 3:16-17*) filling any spiritual emptiness we may experience.

He promised He'll never leave or forsake us (*Hebrews 13:5*). He places a hedge of protection around us daily. I rest assured as I step from my bed to start the new day, that we, in the aura of His Holy Spirit that dwells in our hearts, will enjoy the great love our great Comforter always offer us.

Thought for the Day

Our God is faithful, so let us Fellowship with Him through
His Son Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Dear God, new every morning is Your Love; through sleep and darkness you bring us safely again to light and power and thoughts of you. May we never take your presence for granted but recognize that it is by your saving grace we are offered a new opportunity to serve you better, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, amen.

Prayer Focus: God is near; reach out to Him.

Written by: Yucca James

Wednesday, March 13th - Love of Christ

Read Romans 8:35-39

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

Romans 8:38-39 KJV

Thank you for Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. You who love us and freed us from our sins by Your blood, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Therefore, I pray to walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword? May we have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thought of the Day

Nothing is greater than Christ's love, and nothing can separate me from it.

Prayer: Dear God, help us receive the fullness of Christ's love, amen.

Prayer Focus: Christ's Love

Written by: Peggy Moree

Thursday, March 14TH – Say My Name

Read John 20:1-17

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master”.
John 20:15-16a NKJ

Mary Magdalene was a Jesus devotee. She and other women supported the itinerant Jesus so that he could focus on his work of being “God among us” in order that people would believe in him and in God. Her devotion demonstrated her deep love for Jesus. He had done much for her soul and she continually demonstrated her gratitude towards him.

At the tomb where Jesus had been buried, Mary Magdalene’s devotion is again deep and apparent. She was deeply distressed, crying and searching for her lost Savior. The disciples had gone home, but Mary stayed, still searching. Then Jesus appeared. He spoke to her, but not until he called her name “Mary”. Did she recognize him? Her great joy probably caused her to buckle to the ground. By calling her name, He acknowledged and rewarded her love for Him. He had made her whole once again.

Thought of the Day

At the end of my life I want to hear Jesus call my name in a good way.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please let me be devoted to you so deeply that others come to know, love and honor you, and we are all made complete in you.

Prayer Focus: Worthy of Jesus

Written by: Kathy Aaron

Friday, March 15TH – Wholehearted Life

Read Romans 12:5-18

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality
Romans 12:11-13 KJV

I am what some call a “Cradle Methodist”. Baptized as an infant by a young Methodist minister who later became a Methodist Bishop! At 4 years of age, my Mother recorded, “Connie loves Sunday School and singing ‘Jesus Loves Me’”. When I was 12 years old, I was diagnosed with Scoliosis (curvature of the spine). After avoiding back surgery and a body cast for a year (a miracle story of its own), my father bought a “Ditch Witch” trenching franchise and uprooted our family from the only place I had ever lived. I knew and was known by just about everyone in Stillwater, Oklahoma and moved to Arlington, Texas where I knew NO ONE! Lena Faye, Cindy and Mrs. DeShong at First Methodist Church wholeheartedly embraced this scared, “back-brace” clad young girl who loved singing Jesus songs & coming to Sunday School and church.

Because of the love and witness of COMMITTED church members like these and more during my formative years, I am a dedicated Christian all these years later! They showed up no matter what their circumstances, joyfully encouraged participation in helping others, opened the scriptures on a regular basis, and showed the love of Christ to all those around them. This makes the daily choice easy to say “Yes” to a life-long commitment to Jesus and His Church.

Thought for the Day

Will I choose Jesus **today** and **always**?

Prayer: Lord, Jesus, thank you for committed Christians who share Your love and grace **everyday** with all those around them. Help me to be counted among the committed, amen.

Prayer Focus: Commitment to Christ

Written by: Connie Fowler

Saturday, March 16TH – Do You Know My Name?

Read Mathew: 25:31-46

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me”.

Mathew 25:40 KJV

Whenever I am introduced to someone new, I have a difficult time remembering that person’s name. If I am at a gathering where I am introduced to several people at once, then I am fortunate if I remember any one’s name at all. I once utilized a name recalling technique that involved associating something about that person that was unique, with something that was familiar to me. The technique worked this way. If you met someone named Marilyn, look at the person carefully and find something that would associate that person with the actress Marilyn Monroe or someone else familiar to you with that same name. This name association technique made it easier to recall the names of new people that I met. I tried this technique for a while. It worked, but it required so much energy, focus and thought. It required me to let go of the things that were preoccupying my mind and focus entirely on the person that I met. I eventually abandoned the process and fell back into my old habits.

Later, as I matured in my faith journey, I realized that Jesus can be found in every human encounter. He is present when I encounter a homeless person on the street, a friend in need, a grocery store clerk, a neighbor walking a dog, a person with a disability, a mother with an unruly child, or a company CEO.

I discovered that I must focus on making my encounter with people meaningful. I realized that I needed to value people enough to remember their names, their uniqueness, and their individuality.

Thought for the Day

Jesus is found in every encounter; with the sick, poor, and nameless.

Prayer: God, open my eyes to the presence of Jesus in the lives of those whose names I know and those whose names I must still learn.

Prayer Focus: Take time to really know people.

Written by: Katherine Odum

Read Romans 10:13-17

**“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”.
Romans 10:17 KJV**

What is faith? Faith is trusting God, believing in something you cannot see, but you know in your heart is true anyway. Faith is the key that will open the door to all of God’s blessings He has for you. As you take the time to get to know God personally through prayer and study, faith will come alive in your heart. As you begin to have a more intimate relationship with God it becomes easier to have faith in Him and His willingness to be a major part of your life. Faith is trusting God to do what you cannot do.

Thought of the Day

Faith is essential to receiving anything from God.

Prayer: Dear God, I know that my relationship with You grows as my relationship with You grows each and every day.

Prayer Focus: Where is your faith?

Written by: Linda Hooker

Tuesday, March 19th – God’s Presence

Read Psalm 139:7-10

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? Psalm 139:7 KJV

Some years ago, my husband’s job took our family to live and work in Singapore. This country was 14,000 miles from home, and we knew very little about this faraway place. We arrived just before school started for our younger daughter, so we worked hard to unpack all the boxes and settle into our new home. On the first day of school, my daughter got on the school bus and my husband went to work, as usual. What was I going to do for the next few years? After some thought, I realized that I might be able to do some of the same things in Singapore that I did in Texas. First, I began searching I to find a new church to attend in worship and sing in the choir.

God led me to the nearby John Wesley Methodist Church, the Methodist mother-church in Singapore, which had ten services every Sunday in at least three languages! The first Sunday in worship, I was overwhelmed to discover that this new place had the same liturgy, the same hymnal; the same God of all was very present there. In joy and great expectation, I spoke that day to the choir director after the service, asking if I could join them going forward; Mrs. Choo said yes. In the following two weeks, my daughter and I became very ill with dengue fever; after a doctor visit we both needed to stay in our apartment for an extended recovery.

Renewed and strengthened after three weeks, I returned to John Wesley Methodist Church, rejoicing to be back in God’s house and very sure I wanted to participate there in worship and song. I made many wonderful new friends in the choir, and over time, I was surprised when several of my choir friends began thanking me for my witness to the choir and the congregation! Every Sunday before worship, we rehearsed our music and fellowshiped over breakfast and we gathered in Lim Su Min’s home for Bible study on Friday evenings. New certainty of God’s presence and faithfulness confirmed and strengthened me in my prayers, on my walk in a new place, and in the gifts and opportunities God had given me to serve Him.

Prayer: Holy God, your Spirit is with us everywhere we go. Every day, Lord, I thank you for your great love, and your constant presence and help. Amen.

Prayer Focus: Trusting God

Written by: Nancy Denison

Wednesday, March 20th – God’s Will

Read Proverbs 3:1-10

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths”.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Many Christians have asked, “What is God’s will?” The question leads me to His Word, the Holy Bible. His inspired Word takes me to the beginning where He created the Universe, and being lonely, Adam. He later sent into this world - His Son Jesus Christ, in flesh, that we may come to know our God and love Him as He loves us; and that we may recognize that Christ teachings come from Him – the Father God – and not of His (the Son) own. God’s Word, through Christ, has taught us to be in constant fellowship with Him. We are taught that through His Word, His path will be made known to us.

In life, we are often faced with road-blocks – what do we do or what is the best choice? A favorite song among Christ-seeking brothers and sisters is taken from *Psalms 119:105*, which reads: *“Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”* So, He is leading us into a revelation of His will. And so, we need to steer in the direction of His Word...the Holy Bible. We should pray without ceasing, knowing that in staying close to Him, always, He will make the path we should follow known through Jesus Christ His Son.

When we make prayer a part of our lives, we benefit from the Holy Spirit which becomes our guide toward God’s will for us. As disciples of Christ, we should be more diligent in our faith-walk with Him through bible study, meditation, prayer, fasting, and daily study His Word.

Thought for the Day

Am I seeking daily, God’s plans for me?

Prayer: Father God, your Word is a Lamp unto our feet, and a Light unto our path. May we quickly recognize and do the things which edify your kingdom.

Prayer Focus: Being guided in life by the Almighty God.

Written by: Yucca James

Thursday, March 21st - Stillness

Read Psalm 46:5-13

“Be still, and know that I am God...”
Psalm 46:10a

Have you ever wondered why God does not answer? Think about a time when you expected an answer to a prayer. Days go by maybe even months. What interfered with the answer – distractions (phone, tv, computer, work, meetings)? Did you put God on your to do list or make time to spend in silence?

When we communicate with others there is usually a talk and listen in each conversation. I talk you listen, you talk I listen. So, it is with God, we have to do our part and listen.

Take a few minutes today and be still and just listen to God.

Take a few minutes more tomorrow and the next day and soon you will have made a habit of sitting in silence with our Lord and Savior.

Thought of the Day

Release the distractions and embrace the stillness with God.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father please help me to be still and know that You are my God. Show me how to listen when you are speaking. I ask that you help me set a time aside today to hear you. Thank you for this day, amen.

Prayer Focus: Listening for the voice of God

Written by: Author Unknown

Friday, March 22nd - Clean Slate

Read Matthew 6:13-16

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”.

Matthew 6:14-15 KJV

You and I live in a land of unforgiveness. Are we not challenged every day to pay attention to the Lord's commandments to live in love with your brothers and sisters? The Lord's love always forgives and set others free from all bondage of unforgiveness. During the Lenten season, let us search our memory for offenses we have taken when someone has wronged us. Determine in your heart to forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Also, search our memory for those times when you may have caused offenses to others, in your families, close friends and church community. During the Lenten season, may the Lord break all curses once you have repented, asked for forgiveness and have granted forgiveness to others. This Lenten season, desire a clean and fresh start with a clear and pure heart. Ask God to renew a right spirit within you. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me (Psalm 51:10). Remember that the Lord loves you. A Clean Slate Is yours.

Thought of the Day

I can offer forgiveness, because God has forgiven me.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me for not being obedient to your commandments. Examine my heart and move me to forgive me as I seek to forgive others.

Prayer Focus: Unforgiveness

Written by: Rev. Dr. Carolyn McCall Livingston

Saturday, March 23rd - Worry: An Act of Rebellion

Read Deuteronomy 29:25-29

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 29:29 KJV

Our loving Savior is leading us step by step through our lives. So, why do most of us worry about the future? The future belongs to God. Have you ever considered worry as a form of rebellion?

The solution to worry is to repent and focus on the Savior and His promises to care for us. Relax, hold his hand, and enjoy the journey.

Thought of the Day

God is always present to help us through every worry.

Prayer: Loving Savior, forgive me when I leave your side and allow worry to take over. Take my hand and help me to focus on your faithful promises, amen.

Prayer Focus: Worry

Written by: Ruth Stovall

Monday, March 25th - The Shepherd's Tools

Reading Psalm 23

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Psalm 23:4**

The rod and staff are very important tools of a shepherd. The rod is mostly used as a weapon to protect the sheep or goats from wild animals or intruders. The staff is a tool with a hook at the end which can be used to catch a sheep that is wandering off. It is used for clearing the path in a bush also. It is sometimes used to pull a lamb close to the shepherd to inspect its body for scratches or cruises.

Sheep or goats, a lot of times fall into situations where they need to be rescued. A shepherd needs to be with them always to care for them and to guide them. The rod and staff are both "caring tools" carried by the shepherd always while tending to his flock.

So how are God's rod and staff a comfort to us? They comfort us because God is our Shepherd who guides and guards us daily. Some days, we may feel the hook of the staff around us guiding us back to the right way. Sometimes, we may hear the rod flying over our heads to chase away something harmful. On some occasions, we feel the staff of God's love pulling us close to Him.

Thought for the Day

Knowing that the Shepherd is with us always is reassuring.

Prayer: Precious Lord, Our great Shepherd! Thank you for watching over us even when we are stubborn or foolish. Thank you for pulling us close to you when we sometimes wander away, amen.

Prayer Focus: His rod will comfort us.

Written by: Adesola "Desh" Olufeko

Tuesday, March 26th - The Power of Prayer

Read Philippians 4: 4-9

Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4: 6-7

God knows all your wants and desires. God also wants to have a personal relationship with you through prayer. I liken this to a relationship you have with a spouse, a child or anyone you truly love. You know this person loves you, but you always want to hear them say, "I love you". God also wants to hear the same from us, through prayer.

Our God is a loving and caring God, wanting to fulfill our wants and desires but we have to ask God for what we want. However, we must remember that God answers prayers, but it is on his schedule, not ours.

Thought of the Day

God answers prayer, let me pray for you.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are all powerful and wonderful. I want a personal relationship with You and want others to have their personal relationship with You. Your graciousness is overwhelming and Your capacity to give beyond my expectation. In Jesus name I pray, amen.

Prayer Focus: God answers prayers – So ask!

Written by: Mike Phillips

Read Psalm 51:10-15

**Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.
Psalm 51:12 KJV**

We all meet trials in life, problems to work out or solve or endure, tests of faith or patience or stamina. Several years ago, both my husband of 45 years and my life-long twin sister (she was 5 minutes older than me) died in the same year. After brain surgery, vascular surgery, exacerbation of COPD and many doctor visits and more, I had become Frank's 24/7 caregiver, medical devices manager, chauffeur, chief cook and bottle washer, and much more. After three years of declining health, he died in January of 2016. About a year after beating cancer, my sister Franci's immune system could not fend off a new problem, fungal meningitis; she died in November of 2016 in our birthday week.

After these life-changing events in the same year, I was physically and emotionally worn out. Thanks be to God for sustaining my spirit with the peace and comfort that only he could give; family and friends held me up in encouragement, prayers and love.

The next year, Hurricane Harvey came to the street on which I live. I left my home in a boat and returned in a friend's car at the end of the week to see piles of wet debris on the lawns both beside my house and many others nearby. My house had been completely spared. Both metaphorically and in reality, I have new insight into Isaiah 43:1-4 and the song "Be Not Afraid" by Craig Courtney.

Be not afraid for I have redeemed you. Be not afraid, I have called you by name. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the floods, they will not sweep o'er you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be consumed. You are mine, you are precious in my sight. By Craig Courtney, 1992.

Prayer: Holy God, will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you, amen.

Prayer Focus: Trials and Tribulations

Written by: Nancy Denison

Thursday, March 28th – Sharing God’s Love

Read Mark 12: 28-33

**And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.
Mark 12:30-31 KJV**

First ask yourself what is love and how do I show love? Now, focus on verse 31 - *love your neighbor as yourself, there is no commandment greater than these (Mark 12:31, NRSV)*. For a moment think about how much you love yourself and then consider loving your neighbor with the same amount of love. But first you may need to ask yourself who is my neighbor? Your neighbor is not just the person who lives next door to you. They are the persons you happen to stumble upon as you go about your daily life.

To love your neighbor means to seek what is good for them. It means you must be kind and patient with people that you live with and work with. It means to be generous to strangers. Jesus said, “There is no other commandment greater than these”.

We get to see to what extent God’s love really lives in us by how much it shows in our character as we relate with the people around us. A powerful form of love that is unconditional and pure is referred to as agape love. One great example of agape love is how Jesus sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world.

Thought of the Day

You must first love yourself then share that same love with your neighbors.

Prayer: God we Thank you that you are loving & gracious. Thank you that your love is perfect, it never fails, and that nothing can separate us from your love. Help us to love as you love, amen.

Prayer Focus: Moving beyond saying I love you.

Written by: Marylyn Green

Friday, March 29th – Reliability of the Synoptic Accounts

Read Mark 8:22-29

And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

Mark 8:22-29

The four gospels have often been questioned because of their varying accounts of the story of Jesus. If the gospel writers don't agree, how can we be sure that Jesus is the divine Son of God?

Using the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, scholar F.F. Bruce cites several types of comparisons such as how many verses of one gospel story appear in the other stories; which gospel agrees with another and how; and he provides arguments from scholars given through the millennia regarding languages and writing flairs. *

Bruce further explains that the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are written in styles that resemble a modern-day police report. In court, a policeman wouldn't "adorn his narrative with graces of oratory". He continues, "The object of this is that the evidence he gives may conform as closely as possible to the actual course of events . . . what his narrative lacks in artistic finish, it gains in accuracy". Bruce concludes "no matter how far back we may press our researches into the roots of the gospel story, no matter how we classify the gospel material, we never arrive at a non-supernatural Jesus." Enough said.

Thought of the Day

Jesus is most certainly the son of God.

Prayer: Holy Jesus, the horrific shedding of your divine blood is the only way we can return to our Father and Creator. Thank You for Your divine sacrifice, and help us live our lives for You.

Prayer Focus: Do the Synoptic Gospels Prove Jesus as the Son of God?

Written by: John Aaron

* "The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?" by F.F. Bruce

Saturday, March 30th – Being Thankful for God's Gifts

Read Philippians 4:8-13

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Philippians 4:11 KJV

In 2007 unexpectedly, I became unemployed. After spending 6 yrs. on a job with no warning "poof gone". Now being out of work for almost 2 months. Our Father God provided every time there was a need, he was shelter in my storms, food when I was hungry, and my strength when i felt like falling. I was reminded "when God give it to you it's enough".

I could hear his voice saying, "Chill, my child rest easy I got you". We all need to embrace the secret of being content in Jesus Christ. Only through Him can we do *all things*.

Prayer: Father God, teach us Your mind set. To walk this Christian walk according to Your plan for our lives. Guide us in the direction you will have us to go throughout our lives. Teach us to be content in every circumstance. Thank You in advance for all You do. Thank You Father God all we need is in You, in Jesus name, amen.

Prayer Focus: Content with the Lord

Written by: Terri Maxwell

April Acts of Kindness Calendar

April 2019

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| | 1 Count your Blessings | 2 Reach Out to a Family Member | 3 Fast from Technology | 4 Build 10 Minutes of Silence Into Your Day | 5 Turn a Negative Conversation Positive | 6 Pray for our World Leaders |
| 7 | 8 Ponder Any Bad Habits | 9 Give Your Time to Someone In Need | 10 Fast from Your Favorite Past time | 11 Write a Card To Someone | 12 Create Some Silence in Your Day | 13 Read the Passion in the Bible |
| 14 E | 15 Say a Prayer for a Loved One | 16 Pray for Someone That Has Hurt You | 17 Fast from Using a Credit Card | 18 Attend Holy Thursday Service | 19 Attend a Good Friday Service and Fast | 20 Build One Hour of Silence In Your Day |
| 21 Easter Sunday Give Thanks! | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | | | | |

Monday, April 1st - Prayer

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I find it amazing how poetry can open the mind to numerous ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking about a subject. I guess that is why I love to read the book of Psalms. The Psalms are not just words strung together. They are beautiful lyrical poems of praise and thanksgiving to God. They bring light and come to our souls and remind us of the beauty, depth and boundless measure of God's love for us. The Psalms are prayers just as the hymns we sing are prayers. They take us away from the world for a while and give us the opportunity to commune with God. When the time is over, we return to our lives refreshed, renewed, and sometimes filled with answers to the questions we posed in prayer.

During Lent, prayer is so important for the Pilgrim. It is prayer that gives us the wherewithal to be steadfast in the quest of walking in the steps of Christ. It is prayer that gives us clarity to move from one step to another, while also allowing us to understand why we do what we do. It is prayer that brings us closer to Christ and makes us one with Him on the inside. It is prayer that allows us to shine our Pilgrims' light for others to see and share.

Thought of the Day

The more we pray, the more we know Christ

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the boundless opportunities to commune with You in prayer.

Prayer Focus: How Prayer Can Heal Us

Written by: Linda Best

Tuesday, April 2nd - Life-One Day at a Time

Read Job 1:16-22

**The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.
*Job 1:21b KJV***

The year was 1994 and the World was at my feet. I was raised in the church and believed I was a good Christian. But the facts showed that my heart did not serve Christ. While helping family, I fell out of a tree and broke my back and wrist. The doctors said I was paralyzed and would not walk again. Thanks be to God, they were wrong! Over the next 24 months I had surgery, physical and psychological therapy. During that time, I lost my job, my home, my family (divorce), some of my friends and was now living with chronic pain: I was angry at God and the World! I had some decisions to make. Would I continue to live in fear, anger, and lack of trust? Would I live one day at a time without complete answers to all of life's questions and still trust in My Lord Jesus Christ. All of us go through rough or bad times; it is the decisions we make during those times that will either "set us free" or bury us. God has blessed me immensely and continues to everyday; and I, by God's grace, have become a more trusting and faithful Christian.

Thought for the Day

Life challenges every day, TRUST in the Lord.

Prayer: Lord of Life, may You grant us wisdom and grace that we may trust You in good times and bad, in Jesus Name, amen.

Prayer Focus: All that I have thy hands have provided.

Written by: Monte Hyman

Wednesday, April 3rd - Unity and Peace

Read Matthew 5: 13-20

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”.

Matthew 5:16 NKV

I was a teenager living the so called “Good Life” when one Saturday evening I was on my way to pick my date up to begin the weekend rituals of having a “good time”. I had to drive by my church home (St. Matthews Anglican Church) to get to her. As I got to the entrance to the church, I saw a crowd gathered and pulled over to investigate. (This was my hometown where everybody knows everybody). Upon checking, I found out there was an accident in which one of my friends crashed into a pedestrian who was now lying bleeding on the street. The nearest hospital was eighteen miles away. I wondered why no one did anything so I immediately asked for help getting him on to the back seat of my car. The folks at the hospital tried their best but Lloyd Morgan did not make it.

I wondered if someone had had the courage to get Lloyd some help earlier if he would have made it. You see, Lloyd was the newspaper guy who sold the paper at the storefront in the mornings. He may have been thought of as one of the least of us. “Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matthew 25:40).

I lamented on the fact that my efforts did not yield a better outcome, but we can never fully understand God’s will. When Jesus was on earth, He used the ordinary to do extraordinary things. Let us see in each other the creation of God and let us love each other unconditionally as God loves us. It is only then can we make the claim that we have done to others as we would have others do unto us.

Thought for the Day

Lord, help us to see all your children as our brothers and sisters and to do for each as we do for all.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to see in each other your image and Your love. Let us love each other as You have loved us, unconditionally and eternally. When we have done that, we can truly think of ourselves as your children, in Jesus name we pray, amen.

Prayer Focus: Loving your neighbor as yourself

Written by: Hylton James

Read Matthew 5:13-20

**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,
and glorify your Father which is in heaven
Matthew 5:16**

The Poet John Davies suggests in one of his poems that in order for us to judge ourselves, we must transcend ourselves and comprehend the light which gives us light and power. For me, this means not taking myself too seriously and recognizing that I am not my creator and I do not control my life... God does. God is the Light, the Creator who gave me eyes to see around me and a soul to see within.

It is important to understand how God works in us and in the universe. It is so important to look within and find not only answers, but God. Seeing the Light within is seeing God. God is the transcendent "light" within which is not abstract, but personal and loving. Encountering and walking in that light is encountering God and Jesus!

Thought of the Day

When we seek the Light, the more we glorify God

Prayer: Dear God, shine within me so that my soul will be constantly illuminated by Your love.

Prayer Focus: Looking Within

Written by: Linda Best

Friday, April 5th - The Cost of the Cross

Read Luke 9:21-26

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Luke 9:23 KJV

When we take an assessment of our life, we must do so by counting the cost. From every decision and sacrifice we made or did not make. The costs do add up. However, the total sum of the costs will never compare to the cost of the cross. Daily Jesus invites us to “take up our cross and follow Him”. By denying ourselves we give up anything that does not please the Lord by daily submitting our will to Him. The world has defined success in many ways. A definition many have tried to live out and failed. Jesus defines success as one who lives a life in Christ by following the example of the cross. Deny yourself, submit your will to God and follow Me. As we take time to reflect during Lent, think about the following question, “Have I counted the cost?”

Thought for the Day

How will I give thanks for the cost of the cross?

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, You paid the cost of the cross for me. Help me to count the cost of Your sacrifice daily in my decisions and doings. Remind me that all that I do is a response to what You did, in Jesus name, amen.

Prayer Focus: Help me to follow You in all that I do.

Written by: Rev. Hilda Gradnigo

Saturday, April 6th - Troubled Heart

Read Acts 2:17-21

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Acts 2:21

I am a teacher, who was told on the last day of school, that I would be moving to a Kindergarten class. I was not certified for that grade and I did not feel comfortable teaching the little ones. I had to do something about it. I spoke to my principal and explained how uncomfortable I was that decision. He said he would consider putting me in another grade. He did not get back with me until August.

He decided to put me in second grade class, which again I have never taught. I was not going let that stop me, but it did. My new classroom was infested with mold and as a result I became seriously ill with sinus issues. To top it off my parents became ill as well.

I started to feel overwhelmed. Depression started to set in, I stopped eating, crying all the time which led to the suicidal thoughts that began to form in my mind. I would have conversations with God and I felt I was a disappointment to Him. The devil was working hard on me. God took over and reminded me I was loved, and I needed to learn to LISTEN to Him. I did, and I was able to work part time and take care of my parents and myself. Thanks Be to God!

Thought of the Day

When you have a troubled heart, pray and just listen, God will give you the answer

Prayer: Dear God, protect the ones who have a troubled heart. Amen.

Prayer Focus: Losing Control

Written by: Lisa Asi

Monday, April 8th - Why Prayer is Real and Powerful

Read Matthew 6:5-15

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:10 KJV

In his book “Christianity Rediscovered” Vincent J. Donovan, a missionary dedicated to bringing the gospel message to the Maasai tribes of Tanzania, wanted to leave the people with something that would insure their continued Christian maturation. He decided to teach them to pray. He wrote on several aspects regarding prayer, but one element was new and empowering to me. Father Donovan writes:

“We Christians profess to believe . . . that God is continuing to create. . . that if God ceased to create, took away his creative presence, all things, and we ourselves, would cease to exist on the instant. This creative power is acting now and here. The purpose of prayer is to open us up fully to that power.”

This wasn't the only mind-blowing idea. Centering around the story of the annunciation, Father Donovan further writes that when Mary responded to the angel “Let it be done” and when Jesus taught us to pray “Your will be done”, and again Christ in the garden before his suffering, “Your will be done” that: “This is a single prayerful statement with a twofold meaning: “I will be open to your presence continuing to create in me, and I am willing to be involved in the answer to this prayer.” Okay, now my mind is exploded by the blessing of who God says I can be in him. What a loving creator!

Thought of the Day

I want God's will to be my prayer.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I love your kingdom. Show me what to do for it and thank You for all the other things You have provided for me.

Prayer Focus: God Created, Is Creating and Grants Our Participation through Prayer

Written by: Kathy Aaron

Read Psalm 67

Let the people praise You, O God; Let all the people praise You.

Psalm 67:3 KJV

We have praise on our lips when things are good. We praise God for the happy times. We praise Him when he answers our prayers—our way. What about those times when we feel everything is going wrong, or we are sad, or we have not gotten an answer to prayer. At least we do not think we have because we did not get the answer we wanted.

In the Psalm 67:3 it says, “Let all the people praise”. I do not find any boundaries on when or what to praise for in this verse. I understand this verse to mean that we need to remember to praise our Heavenly Father for the good, the bad, and everything in between.

Thought of the Day

Today try to praise God for something you normally would not offer Him praise for.

Prayer: Lord, I ask for the help to be able to praise you for everything, even those things that make me sad or mad. I praise and give you thanks for this day and all the things that will cross my pathway. In Jesus name, Amen

Prayer Focus: Praise

Written by: Suzanne King

Read Hebrews 11

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1 KJV

Do you ever wonder what words mean? Often, I like to look up definitions in Webster's Dictionary and word search the Bible to have God's perspective on a subject. Webster says that faith is strong belief or trust to duty or a person; belief and trust in and loyalty to God. Trust is an assured reliance on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone. God is filled with the best of all these wonderful things; He is worthy of our trust in Him.

So how can we build faith and trust?

The Bible, God's Word, says, "To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see" (Hebrews 11:1 GNT). The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd. By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word; what we see created by what we don't see (Hebrews 11:1-3 The Message). Let us trust in the Lord with all our hearts and never rely on what we think we know. Let us remember the Lord in everything we do, and He will show us the right way. Let us never think that we are wiser than we are; simply obey the Lord and refuse to do wrong (Proverbs 3:5-7 GNT).

May we carefully build ourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, staying right at the center of God's love, keeping our arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life (Jude 20-21 The Message)!

Thought for Day

What issue today can I use to build my faith and trust in God.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for sending us Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners, to call us to repentance, to build us up in our faith, and so much more, amen.

Prayer Focus: I trust Him no matter what it looks like

Written by: Nancy Denison

Read Ezekiel 47:6-12

And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.

Ezekiel 47:8 KJV

Ezekiel was a temple priest taken into exile in Babylon. There, God called him into prophecy and sent many visions to Ezekiel; familiar visions like the dry bones living again and the wheels with living creatures. Through Ezekiel, God spoke judgement against Jerusalem, the Israelites and the Gentiles. But God also spoke of the restoration of Jerusalem and his temple. A most intriguing part of this restored temple vision is in chapter 47 where God speaks of water trickling from under the threshold of the temple's south side. As the water flows towards the east it becomes progressively deeper so that Ezekiel can no longer pass through the water. The river eventually flows into the Dead Sea. Here the river changes salt water to fresh, so that there will be large numbers of fish and everything will live. In verses 10 through 12 the vision continues with the great benefits of this river: fishermen will have many places along the shore to spread their nets and fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing because of this river.

This vision makes my heart sing because I hear Jesus being the living water of our salvation. Drawing all nations to himself. God's people bringing the good news of Jesus to others of our Christ who brings healing and sustenance to all who come to him. This vision tells of Jesus being God's salvation for us.

Thought of the Day

Only Jesus can restore what is corrupted (salt water) to goodness (fresh water) again. Only Jesus can bring eternal restoration, healing and sustenance.

Prayer: Jesus, keep me close to the river of You. Thank You for Your restoring, healing and sustaining power in our lives.

Prayer Focus: Jesus: Renewer and Sustainer

Written by: Kathy Aaron

Friday, April 12th - In the Beginning

Read Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Genesis 1:1-2 KJV

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED. Do you believe the first five words of the Bible? If you do, you likely believe the rest of the Bible. I do. If you don't believe the first five words of the Bible, then this Lenten challenge is for you. John Wesley relied on three aspects to strengthen his faith: study of the Bible, Prayer, and Scholarly Conversation with peers. Are you doing all three? Are you in a good Bible study group? A good Bible study group will help to accomplish all three. If you don't know of one, consider starting a Bible Study. Notice in verse 2, the Holy Spirit was active from the very beginning. The Spirit either lives within you or wishes to live within you. Please let THE SPIRIT lead you on your journey.

Thought of the Day

God the Creator

Prayer: Dear Holy Spirit, please be active within me, strengthen my faith, guide me to a deeper understanding and relationship with the Creator, amen.

Prayer Focus: Believe

Written by: Mike Ellis

Read John 3:14-19

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 3:16 KJV

Having just come in from a long drive in nasty rain at 7:00 pm at night. I have never been so conscious of God's love. A black pickup almost broadsided me. With the rain, I couldn't see the lines on the road and I moved over too far. As I corrected this, I realized that no other cars were around me and I felt the Lord's presence wrap me in His Love. Yes, I know He loves me. The one thing that I can always rely on when tears, heartbreak and pain and fear and sorrow paralyze me is the comfort of the lyrics of the song, "Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.

Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong. YES, JESUS LOVES ME".

As I have aged, I learned new additions to this song. "Jesus loves me, this I know, Though my hair is white as snow. "Though my sight is growing dim, Still He bids me trust in Him. Though my steps are oh, so slow. With my hand in His I'll go. On through life, let come what may. He'll be there to lead the way".

When the nights are dark and long, In my heart He puts a song. Telling me in words so clear, "Have no fear for I am near. When my work on earth is done. And life's victories have been won. He will take me home above, Then I'll understand His love". I love Jesus, does He know? Have I ever told Him so? Jesus loves to hear me say, "That I love Him every day". YES, JESUS LOVES ME.

Thought of the Day

Jesus loves us through every area and circumstance of our lives.

Prayer: Thank you God in and through Your Son Jesus Christ for loving and protecting us, amen

Prayer Focus: Love
Written by: Terri Bennett

Monday, April 15th - Pine Trees Know When It Is Easter

Read1 Chronicles 16:27-36

**Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD,
because he cometh to judge the earth.**

I Chronicles 16:33 KJV

As a young girl growing up in East Texas, I was often taught about God by my mother and grandmother by using examples that I could see and touch. One story that really amazed me was what seemed to be common knowledge to them. The pure testimony to God from the pine trees that surrounded our property. The pine trees start their new growth many weeks before Easter. We would go outside every day to look at the tops of the trees. Two weeks before Easter, we saw yellow shoots starting to grow on all the tree tops. As the days got closer to Easter Sunday, the tallest of these shoots branched out and formed a cross. By the time Easter had arrived, I could see that most of the pine trees had yellow crosses on all the tall shoots. This is a phenomena that still touches me every year as I watch the crosses begin to form on the pine tree in my front yard. He is risen.

Thought of the Day

There are signs of God's grace and mercy, if but look for them.

Prayer: Father, as I walk in the beauty of Your Creation, help me to remain as a child at heart, trusting and thankful for everything You provide.

Prayer Focus: God sightings in the earth

Written by: Terri Bennett

Tuesday, April 16th – Faith and Strength

Read Joshua 1: 1-9

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Joshua 1:9 KJV

When we are faced with difficulties that are apparently out of our control, it is easy for us to throw up our hands in despair, often even questioning why God would allow such things to happen. It is even harder at times to acknowledge that we are instructed in the Bible (frequently, I might add) to have faith that there is a larger plan, and that all things have an interconnected purpose. After the death of Moses, God instructed Joshua to have faith, to trust in God amid all the turmoil he was facing. Time and again Jesus had to remind His disciples to replace their fears with faith: fears of stormy waters, fear of Roman soldiers, and fear of persecution. They repeatedly saw the proof of what Jesus had told them yet continued to demonstrate shaky faith in subsequent faith-testing situations.

When Hurricane Harvey ruthlessly turned our church sanctuary and choir room in “Mold Central,” we had to close it down for repairs. The entire congregation (including the choir) was shell-shocked. We were advised by the mold remediation people to DISCARD over \$80,000.00 worth of music scores, and I told them, “No, we won’t; we’ll figure something out.” At that point the music (550 anthems, cantatas, orchestral scores, etc.) was bagged and removed to a large mobile storage unit placed in the back-parking lot. When the choir rehearsed in the chapel (packed in like sardines), I addressed the choir and said, “Things look bad right now...but we must have faith that we will emerge from this, stronger than before. Soon the day will come when we look back on this and feel what it feels like to overcome this obstacle: with God’s help, things will be OK.

I can now say that the day I predicted has come to pass. Thanks to the hard volunteer work (easily well over 1,000 man-hours) of numerous choir members and non-members, ALL of the music is now mold-free (the story of how the mold was eliminated is a long story in itself), reboxed, recatalogued, relabeled, and reshelved, with extra thanks to all who contributed money to make it happen WITHOUT dipping into church coffers.

Doesn’t this all just demonstrate what a little faith can do? Our trust in God makes it possible to overcome despair, pain and fear: we stand firm like rock cliffs against waves of fury!

Thought of the Day

Be like the promontory against which the waves break, standing firm and taming the fury of the water around it (Marcus Aurelius, 121-180 A.D.).

Prayer: Lord, keep us reminded of your constant presence, keep us close, trusting in your love and grace, amen.

Prayer Focus: Faith in Times of Trouble

Written by: Dan Kramlich

Read Psalm 103:1-6

**Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;
Psalm 103:3 KJV**

Who among us has not had a moment when we cried out to the Lord and He did not answer your prayer right away, but He answered it in a mighty way! His answer was a God answer because it was way more than you could have imagined and more than you asked for. It feels as if He reached out his right hand and pulled us out of the deep pit of depression or pain or maybe He took away a worry that you had been stressing about for so long.

Sometimes as Christians we forget that as God's chosen people we have virtues we must uphold. We need to remember to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, loving and forgiving. It's not always easy but God does require it of us.

When we receive God's answered prayer we are reminded that He is forgiving, kind and loving.

Thought for the Day

We should all strive to be like God kind loving and forgiving.

Prayer: Thank You heavenly father for Your grace, forgiveness and love for Your children, amen.

Prayer Focus: Be more like God.

Written by: Josie Schwedler

Thursday, April 18th-Trust the Lord and He Will Take Care of You

Read Psalm 91

I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

Psalm 91:2 KJV

Psalm 91 is a magical remedy for world issues that troubles us. The psalmist invites us to a personal profession of trust, with divine promises of deliverance. Believers are reassured that God will deliver. God will protect. God will answer, and He will save us and show us salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

Thought of the Day

Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding!

Prayer: Dear God, sometimes our fears overwhelm us and we feel as though we are drowning in a sea of darkness. Help us Lord to trust You and to give all worries and troubles up to You in this day. Lord, we thank You for always taking care of our every need and we thank You for courage to face whatever comes our way, with the full confidence that You are always with us. Lord, give us a strong heart full of hope, make us fearless as we trust You and pray in Jesus name, amen.

Prayer Focus: Trust God and fear not

Written by: Rev. Cathleen Haughton

Friday, April 19th - Sundays in Lent

Read Luke 24: 1-9

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. ³ And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

Luke 24: 1-4 KJV

The British Methodist Scholar and Poet Malcolm Guite suggests that Sundays are an exception in Lent. Sundays should be celebrated as days of resurrection, giving us a glimpse of heaven and the joy, it brings. So, in the spirit of Christ's resurrection we rejoice today knowing that Sunday is coming!

Monday, we go back to following Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. Remember the people he met, the miracles He performed, the conversations He had and the numerous conflicts with the authorities. Today we must take the time to thank God for the gift of His son and rejoice in the fact that we know Him. We should speak His name boldly and strongly, and by so doing, make ourselves bold and strong for what is to come.

Thought of the Day

Never forget to give thanks for Christ's resurrection

Prayer: Lord, as I remember Your Son's resurrection and what it means for my life, I glorify You.

Prayer Focus: Keeping Jesus in our Hearts

Written by: Linda Best

Saturday, April 20TH – Closing Prayer

Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord is the greatness, the power and the glory the victory and the majesty. For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours. Yours is the Kingdom O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might. In Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name. Father, we will sing to You. We shout joyfully for You are the Rock of our salvation. We come before Your presence with thanksgiving. You are the great God, the great King and You are reign over all gods. Thank You for blessing us to remain faithful and focused during our time of prayer and fasting. Thank You for hearing our prayers during the fast.

Father, we have prayed believing that we have received what we have prayed for. We declare that Mission Bend UMC, our families and community will possess and prosper in the land that You have given us because of our sacrifice.

Lord, there is none like You. You are great and Your name is great in might. You are the true and living God and the everlasting King. Yours is the kingdom now and forever, in Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture References:

Psalm 95:1-3, I John 5:14-15, Jeremiah 10:6, 10