

Devotions for Church Meetings

Meditations written by
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Meditations adapted and devotional pages written by
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How many meetings do you conduct each month? Are you expected to lead an opening or closing devotion? Here are 20 devotions ready to use. Each sheet in this file is printed on both sides of the paper. You copy one side and distribute it to the participants. At the time for the meditation, read the text from the reverse side of the original. Each meditation is adapted from "Letters", a collection of thoughts about Christian living from a retired pastor to his adult children.

The 20 Titles

1. A Bit of Clay
2. A Taste of Life
3. A Thank-You Will Do
4. Benediction
5. Dashes
6. Depend on the Lord
7. Have a Good Day...Unless
8. I Love You, Jesus
9. Jesus is Lord
10. Keeping in Touch
11. Move Closer to the Light
12. On Being Grateful
13. Pray and Keep On Praying
14. Remember Your Baptism
15. Stop! Look! Listen!
16. That Little Gem
17. The Difference that Made a Difference
18. The Touch of Jesus
19. Wait Three Days
20. Wait Until You Get to the Corner

Consider using...

Anytime; Pentecost
Time of trouble in congregation/community
Thanksgiving; Celebrations
End of school/church/calendar year
January; to memorialize someone

July; Pentecost; time of difficulty
Anytime; Pentecost; time of conflict
Anytime; Lent
Advent; Christmas; Lent
Anytime

Start of school year; Advent; Lent
Thanksgiving; on being spared disaster
Anytime
Lent; Easter; Pentecost
Start of school year; Pentecost

Confirmation time; Anytime
Advent; Christmas
Lent; Advent; Christmas
Easter
Anytime; Time of difficult decisions

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1. A Bit of Clay

There are many references to clay in the Sacred Record, but at this time let us talk about some certain clay mentioned in the Bible - not clay molded into some pottery or vessel - but a **BIT OF CLAY** on a pathway somewhere in Galilee. What about this **BIT OF CLAY**? If it could communicate with us we would probably hear this **BIT OF CLAY** saying something like this:

*"There is really not much for me to say about myself. There is no real reason for me - A **BIT OF CLAY** - to receive any kind of recognition. For ages I just laid there on a path. I didn't count for anything. For all practical purposes I was useless - without virtue and value. One day, however, all that changed.*

You see, the Master came along. His disciples were with Him. There was also a blind man nearby - blind from his birth. His disciples asked Jesus, recorded in John, chapter 9, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him." Then the Master went on to say, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work."

*And do you know what the Master did then? Well, I was at His feet, (a good place, by the way, for you to be) and He stooped down and gathered me into His hand. He moistened me, squeezed me with His fingers, and then He used me - a **BIT OF CLAY** - to anoint the eyes of the blind man, saying, to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam."*

And then it happened! The man who had been born blind was able to see for the first time in his life! What a thrill that must have been for him! He was able to see! He saw more than trees and flowers, people and houses. With eyes of faith he saw Jesus as His Savior. When Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of man?" he answered, "And Who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen Him, and it is He Who speaks to you." And then the man who had received his sight for the first time in his life declared, "Lord, I believe!"

*What a beautiful confession! And to think that the Master - to bring about such a miracle - used me, A **BIT OF CLAY**.*

There are so many blind people in your day - people who need a miracle performed on them. They do not know Christ Jesus as their Savior. Some of these people live far away while others live at your very door-steps. And unless they receive an anointing by the Spirit of God, they will be lost eternally. They will be separated from God forever. They will be doomed to that place of darkness "where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 13:42.

*What are you thinking? Are you thinking there is nothing you can do? Oh, of yourself, that is true. Like me, in your original state you are only A **BIT OF CLAY** - lifeless, helpless, useless, hopeless clay. I was that way until the Master touched me long ago on that certain day. His touch made all the difference. And if He could use me, A **BIT OF CLAY**, He certainly can use you, too."*

So much for the message from the **BIT OF CLAY**.

What was it that Jesus said to His disciples? "We must work the works of Him Who sent us, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work." John 9:4. This is our day. This is our time. This is our opportunity to do His work. And what is His work? Simply stated, to open the eyes of the blind that they might see Jesus as their personal Savior. Only Jesus, of course, can open eyes. Only Jesus can give sight. Will you let Him work through you? He wants to. He really wants to work through you.

A Bit of Clay

We Begin

- L: God created man in His own image; male and female He created them.
G: We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

We Search Scriptures - Isaiah 29:16; Romans 9:20-21; Job 10:8-12

Three readers: (1), (2), (3)

- 1: You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"?
- 2: But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?
- 3: Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- ⇒ God is the Potter; we are His clay.
- ⇒ A message from a bit of clay.
- ⇒ You are a bit of clay, molded by God for a purpose.
God can use you, too.

We Respond

- L: We praise You, O God, for You made each of us special.
G: But sometimes we don't feel very special.
L: In fact, sometimes we feel worthless and useless.
G: We may even wonder why You made us at all.
L: Remind us, Lord, that You made us for a purpose -
G: So You could save us and we could serve You.
L: Remind us, Lord, that we have the ability to serve You,
G: For You have equipped us with the gifts we need.
L: Show us our talents and gifts, Father,
G: And inspire us by Your Spirit to use them
L: To the glory of Your holy name.
G: We praise You, O God, our Maker, Savior, and Sanctifier.

We Pray

God, we know you made us, but at times we wonder why. Yet Your Word assures us that each one of us is special to You. You made us special, with different talents and skills, but for the same purpose: to serve you in the Church and to reach out with Your love to those who don't yet know You. Use us, Lord. Use us for Your holy purposes. Amen.



2. A Taste of Life

Some cities have an annual festival at which many of the restaurants of the city offer their specialties for people to taste and to enjoy. The restaurateurs and chefs are hopeful that a taste will sell you on their famous recipes. So their invitation is, "Come, taste and see for yourself how good our food is."

The Psalmist David once said, "O taste and see that the Lord is good..." *Psalm 34:8f*. David goes on to say, "I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears...The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry....The Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles."

Now back to the invitation to taste. It seems that following a recipe and preparing a dish have some similarities to living a life. Some of the ingredients of a recipe aren't very tasty in themselves. For example, have you eaten a spoonful or two of flour lately? Or how about a spoonful of baking soda? Or how about a scoop of Crisco? Or some pepper? Any one of these ingredients taken alone can hardly be called a wonderful taste experience. But when blended in the right proportions and subjected to the process of cooking or baking, the result is a wonderful experience plus nourishment.

Isn't that the way with the events and experiences of life? Some in themselves seem rather "hard to swallow". They are not very pleasant. We don't accept them very readily. Sometimes we might well refer to life as *a bowl of cherries*, but at other times we might think of it as *the pits*.

And what happens? In times of failure we forget the successes we have experienced. In times of sorrow we forget the many joys of life that we have had. In days of financial problems we forget the experiences of prosperity, and in times of sickness we are apt to forget the many days and even years of good health. Life, however, is a blending of all these ingredients. And this blending of the *bitter with the sweet* is good and, perhaps, more necessary than we realize or would admit.

Think about it: We could not properly appreciate rest if we had never known weariness. We could not properly appreciate joy without knowledge of sorrow. We could not properly appreciate light without the experience of darkness, or gain without familiarity with loss. And we will not appreciate our job unless we have experienced being unemployed.

This blending of experiences in life also makes it possible to enter sympathetically and helpfully into the circumstances and situations of our fellowman. Because we have had such experiences, because we have been there, we know. We can relate. We do understand. We can reach out to comfort and to help.

In *2 Corinthians 1: 3, 4* we read: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

Are you in the midst of a time of hurting? A time of trouble? If so, look back upon your life and see if this may not be just one of the ingredients, not tasteful now, but which will eventually prove to have been a necessary ingredient of a satisfying "tasteful" life, especially if through the troubling experience you have been drawn ever closer to Him of Whom the Psalmist says, "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all....The Lord redeems His servants; no one who takes refuge in Him will be condemned." *Psalm 34:17f*.

A Taste of Life

We Begin

Leader (L) and Group (G)

- L: I will extol the Lord at all times;
G: His praise will always be on my lips.
L: My soul will boast in the Lord;
G: Let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

We Search Scriptures - Psalm 34:8-10,15-19

Three Readers: (1), (2), (3)

- 1: Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.
2: Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.
3: The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
1: The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
2: The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.
3: The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- Food festivals: taste and enjoy
- Care for a taste of flour? Crisco? Pepper?
- Ingredients + proper mix + cooking = tasty food
- Some events in life seem "hard to swallow"
- The pits
- Life: a blend of bitter with the sweet, which helps us appreciate the sweet
- Helps us sympathize with others
- Helps us draw closer to God, our Helper

We Respond

- L: O taste and see that the Lord is good.
G: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
L: The Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
G: Who comforts us in all our afflictions,
L: So that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction
G: With the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

We Pray

O God of all comfort, sometimes our troubles overwhelm us. Sometimes they cause us to forget the abundance of goodness we have received from You. Give us wisdom to accept the bitterness of life as it is mixed with the sweetness of Your loving blessings. Enable us to trust the truth of Your Word which says that You work all things "for the good of those who love" You. Amen.



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3. A "Thank you" Will Do

It is good to faithfully, honestly, sincerely GIVE thanks. But it is also important that we graciously and courteously ACCEPT honest, sincere expressions of gratitude. In Acts 20:35 the apostle Paul, quoting Jesus, says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Giving AND RECEIVING, Jesus says, are BOTH blessed. While giving is MORE blessed, it is also blessed to receive. There is a graciousness in giving, but there is also a graciousness in receiving. Most of us don't know how to accept a compliment. We're like Ray. Compliment Ray on a nice piece of furniture that he has made and his immediate response will be, "Aw, I could have done better." And then he will proceed to point out areas where he should have done this, that, or the other thing. Ray - like most of us - finds it difficult to simply say, "Thank you!"

We know how it hurts our feelings when our good deeds and favors are not appreciated, perhaps even criticized. From this we ought to learn to appreciate acts of kindness shown us and to be grateful for them and to express our thanks simply and honestly.

A sincere sign of appreciation really does warm us. Those who say "I don't want any thanks" are really not being honest with themselves. It is a deep, basic human need to receive expressions of gratitude and appreciation - a few words, a warm handshake, a little hug, a letter, a card, a smile, a telephone call - all, go a long way to encourage and inspire us. I don't believe that anyone is untouched by genuine appreciation. Mark Twain once wrote, "I can live for two months on a good compliment." Most of us warm to his remark. I repeat, a compliment is a very precious gift and it should be received as such. A simple, forthright "Thank you" is sufficient and in order.

Giving and receiving words of appreciation from others is one of many reasons why people are special gifts from God. This brings up a few questions to consider:

- ➔ Are we always mindful of these special gifts of people whom the Lord gives us?
- ➔ Do we graciously accept their compliments and words of love?
- ➔ Do we let these people know what they mean to us?
- ➔ Do we faithfully thank the Lord for them?

When mindful of these special gifts of people we ask with Paul, *"How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?"*

1 Thess. 3:9

A "Thank You" Will Do

We Begin

- L: We gather together in the name of Him Who makes us one;
G: In the name of Jesus, who makes us one with Him and one with each other.

We Search Scriptures - I Thessalonians 1:2-3; 3:9 & II Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13-17

Leader (L) and Group (G)

- L: We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.
G: We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
L: How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?
G: We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.
L: But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
G: He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
L: So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.
G: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

THANK
YOU

"Tis more blessed to give than to receive" - Acts 20:35
Both giving and receiving are blessed
How to accept a compliment: A "THANK YOU" WILL DO

*Do we need gratitude and appreciation from others?
Do we graciously accept it with a "Thank you"?
Do we say "Thank you" to God for the blessings of others?*

We Respond

- L: How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,
G: That we should be called children of God!
L: And that is what we are!
G: Dear friends, let us love another,
L: For love comes from God. God is love.
G: Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.
L: In this way, love is made complete among us.
G: We love because He first loved us.

We Pray

Sometimes, Father, we forget to say "Thank you" to You and to one another. Thank You for the love You have poured on us in rich measure. Thank You also for the love we receive from our fellow believers. When they encourage us or compliment us, help us to accept their love with a gracious "Thank you." Continue to bless us as we give and receive mutual Christian love. Amen.



4. The Benediction

There is a very special Scripture text you have heard many, many times. Perhaps you have heard this text more often than any other. This text would be fitting at a baptism, confirmation, wedding or funeral. It would be fitting for any and every season of the Church Year. It's a Word of God that is spoken, chanted and sung. It's a Word of God that is frequently used in making hospital calls, calls at nursing homes, at sickbeds anywhere and everywhere. It is *Numbers 6:24-26*: "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."

A very old retired professor was no longer able to get to church, but she would call her Pastor and ask if he would stop by and, as she would say, "Lay the name of the Lord on me." She really knew the significance of these precious words of our Lord's Blessing. Briefly consider the words:

LORD, BLESS US

Every good and perfect gift comes from the Lord. Whether we're talking about the physical or the spiritual - the Lord is the source of all good. Knowing that, believing that, it makes a lot of sense to go to the Lord and to ask for His blessings, yes, to pray: Lord, bless us.

AND KEEP US

Keep us safe. Keep us in Your protection. Keep us in the faith. Keep us from temptation. Keep us faithful: faithful to You, faithful to Your Word, faithful to one another. Keep us faithful in prayer. Keep us as Your very own for time and for all eternity.

LORD, MAKE YOUR FACE SHINE UPON US

According to the Scriptures, when one's face is upon us or toward us - that signifies pleasure, satisfaction and approval. But when the Scriptures speak of one's face being against us, or turned away from us, that signifies displeasure, dissatisfaction, disapproval. Relying solely upon His amazing grace, mercy and love - with the Psalmist we say: "God be merciful to us and bless us and cause Your face to shine upon us." *Psalm 67:1*.

AND BE GRACIOUS UNTO US

Lord, we have experienced Your gracious call, Your gracious invitation. We know about Your gracious will and work and words. Surround us with Your gracious presence. Continue to bestow upon us Your gracious love. Enfold us in Your gracious arms. Undeserving though we are, Lord, be gracious unto us.

LORD, LIFT UP YOUR COUNTENANCE UPON US

By countenance is usually meant the expression on one's face. A person's face often reflects his or her feelings. Displeasure is apt to cast a shadow over one's face - cause a frown. On the other hand, approval, assent, good news, will light up one's face. Now, we know that there is nothing in us or about us that is so great and wonderful as to light up the face of God. And yet, because of Jesus Who, through His suffering and death has made atonement for us, has cleansed us in His shed blood, and has made us, once again, God's very own, we can rest assured that God smiles on us. We ask that He continue to do so as we pray: Lord, lift up Your countenance upon us; look upon us with favor -

AND GIVE US PEACE

By peace, here, is meant peace between God and us brought about by Christ, the Prince of peace. This peace is rooted in the knowledge that in Jesus, God and sinners are reconciled, and that "God loves us dearly, grants us salvation." Knowing this, believing this, resting on this - our hearts are filled with wonderful peace, peace that passes all understanding, peace that knows no measure.

Let us boldly and daily pray the Aaronic Benediction!

The Benediction

We Begin

- L:** This day, dear Lord, is lived in your Name.
R: Yours is the power and the glory forever. Amen.

We Search Scriptures - Numbers 6:22-27

- L:** The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:
R: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift His countenance upon you and give you peace."
L: "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

"Lay the Name of the Lord on me!"

- Bless us
- Keep us
- Make your face shine upon us
- Be gracious unto us
- Lift up your countenance upon us
- Give us peace

We Respond

- R:** Lay the Name of the Lord on us.
L: **Lord, bless us.**
R: Lay the Name of the Lord on us.
L: **Lord, keep us.**
R: Lay the Name of the Lord on us.
L: **Lord, make your face shine upon us.**
R: Lay the Name of the Lord on us.
L: **Lord, be gracious unto us.**
R: Lay the Name of the Lord on us.
L: **Lord, lift up your countenance upon us.**
R: Lay the Name of the Lord on us.
L: **Lord, give us peace.**

We Pray

So many times, our heavenly Father, we've heard these most familiar words. So many times they trigger in us the sense of an ending. So many times our minds are consumed by other thoughts as the Name of the Lord is laid on us. We pray for awareness, for boldness, for thoughtfulness. As your word of peace is proclaimed, help us to hear and see it as a beginning, a sending forth in your protection, your mercy, your grace, your atonement and your peace.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.



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5. Dashes

Two neighbors who were discussing television. One said, "Name me two good things on your TV." His friend thought for a few moments and then said, "A clock and a book I've been reading." Since there is nothing on top of our TV I guess I would have to say that there is nothing good on ours. And yet, from time-to-time there are some interesting and worthwhile productions that come across the screen.

The other evening we were watching Jeopardy. One of the questions put before the three contestants went something like this: What punctuation mark is used to indicate the continuation of a sentence? One contestant gave "semicolon" as the answer. Another contestant said it was a "comma". The answer they were looking for was a "dash" (-).

I began thinking about the "dash". Our telephone directory is full of "dashes" placed between the numbers. If I were to call the U.S. Secret Service, I would dial: 1-317-269-6444. The three "dashes" tell me that the numbers belong together and all must be dialed if I'm to reach the U.S. Secret Service. Now, if I had the following: 332- I would immediately know that I do not have a complete number. The "dash" tells me something is to follow before it's complete.

All of which reminds me of the "lines" or "dashes" that one sees on the grave markers and tombstones out in a cemetery. I'm referring to the "dash" between the dates - the birth date and the day of death. Here, too, the little line or "dash" could stand for life, our earthly sojourn. Now, we have nothing whatever to do with those dates. Those dates are entirely in the hands of another, namely, our heavenly Father. I, for one, am most grateful for that. Leaving them in His hands we know that there will never be a mistake. David, the psalmist, said it: *My times are in Your hand*. As David looked back upon his life he saw the loving, guiding and protecting hand of the holy Lord God in every situation and circumstance. And as he looked forward, he knew that the omnipotent hand of his heavenly Father would guide and guard him until his final date was recorded. No small wonder he could write confidently, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Should we not have the same confidence and assurance? Nothing, nothing can happen to us without His permission. He is Lord. Our lives are in the hands of Him who lived and died that we might live eternally. Not only did the Almighty decide on our first date - the date of our birth, but He will also record our final date.

The important question is, What are we doing with the "dash" between the dates? In other words, what are we doing with the time allotted to each of us here and now? What are we doing with our lives? What is the purpose of our lives here on earth?

In His Great Commission He commands and promises: "Go...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

May we, in the power and strength of the Lord our God, resolve anew to make this life count as we live each day - not for ourselves, but for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. How important is the "dash" between the dates!

Dashes

We Begin

L: This day, these minutes, Lord, we will spend in Your Name.

R: Our times are in your hands.

We Search Scriptures - Mark 6:53-56

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went --into villages, towns or countryside --they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- What's on TV?
- How about a game of Jeopardy?
- What a dash tells us
- The dash for life
 - √ *My times are in your hand*
 - √ Nothing can happen without His permission
- What are you doing with your personal dash?

We Respond

L: When my life seems to be so busy every second -

R: Help me remember, *my times are in your hands*.

L: As the minute hand sweeps around our clocks so swiftly -

R: Help me remember, *my times are in your hands*.

L: During long hours of sleepless nights -

R: Help me remember, *my times are in your hands*.

L: As we begin each new day -

R: Help me remember, *my times are in your hands*.

L: While celebrating each year of life on my birthday -

R: Help me remember, *my times are in your hands*.

L: At the close of life, when you are calling me home -

R: Help me remember, *my times are in your hands*.

We Pray

Today, dear Lord, is among the days You have given each of us. It is part of the "dash" that represent the years on earth you allow us. Grant to each of us the joy of living each of these days in full assurance of Your resurrection. May we respond to your grace by showing love and caring to those near and far. In the name of the Timeless, Gracious Savior. Amen.



6. Depend on the Lord

An ancient Hebrew fable goes like this:

Once there was a small leaf attached to the upper limb of a tall tree. The leaf was very content with its good life until it saw the birds flying above the forest. The leaf, then, yearned to be "free like the birds," free to fly and experience many different things. The leaf struggled and struggled to be free - just to be free. Then one morning, just at sunrise, a strong gust of wind jerked the leaf from the limb and sent it sailing above the forest. It was free! At last it was free! It could now flit about as it pleased! It finally got its way! How exhilarating it was for the leaf to see all the strange, new sights! It was great! What an experience! What a life! Soon, however, the leaf began its journey downward and, eventually, it joined the other dead and dying leaves on the forest floor. There the sun's lethal rays struck the leaf. As the leaf withered and died, it cried out, "This is not freedom! This is not freedom! This is death!" Too late the leaf realized that freedom does not mean SEPARATION AND COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE. How wrong it was!

There are people and groups of people who think that only complete liberty with license to do anything one desires is freedom. They are set on doing "as they please." They will listen to no one. They are only interested in "doing their own thing." They are proud, conceited, stubborn and selfish. They will trample others to get their way. They will lie, cheat, betray, slander. "Each one must be free to do his/her thing," they insist. And this kind of "freedom" - independence from the holy Lord God, His way, His will, His Word - always marks the beginning of the journey downward. It cannot be otherwise. *Galatians 6:7f* reminds us, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that he will also reap. Those who sow to their own flesh will reap corruption; but those who sow to the Spirit will reap eternal life."

As people of God, we know that the answer to real freedom is definitely not in "doing our own thing". True and lasting freedom does not mean complete INDEPENDENCE, but rather complete DEPENDENCE on the Lord our God - having a heart that cries out, "Lord, what would YOU have me to do?" Only as we DEPEND on God for His love, mercy, grace and strength, which He gives us through Christ Jesus, do we have freedom - especially the forgiveness of all our sins.

Only when we DEPEND on the Lord God to provide us with spiritual food, His Word and Sacraments, do we have the strengthening of our faith in His Son our Savior who reminds us, "If you continue in My Word, then are you MY disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you FREE." *John 8:31*. Only as we DEPEND ON THE LORD can we hope for that life which can never be separated from God, that life in Him Who declares, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believes in Me though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." *John 11:25, 26*.

In *John 8, 36* we are reminded, "If the Son therefore shall make you FREE, you shall be FREE indeed." Oh yes, Christ Jesus FREES us so that now we can live to Him, with Him and for Him and "we can do all things through Him Who strengthens us."

Depend on the Lord

We Begin

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: We begin in the name of our loving Lord Jesus,

G: On Whom we depend for strength and forgiveness, life and love.

We Search Scriptures - John 8:31-36

Three readers: Narrator, Jesus, Jews

Narrator: To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said,

Jesus: If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Jews: We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?

Jesus: I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- An ancient Hebrew fable
- Freedom
 - to do "whatever you want" is not true freedom
 - from God's will is not true freedom
- Dependence on God
 - is not independence from God
 - is true freedom
- We have freedom to live with Christ and for Christ.

We Respond

L: O God, we pride ourselves on our independence.

G: Help us to depend on You always.

L: In our pride and self-seeking we pull away from You.

G: Help us to depend on You always.

L: Through Your Son, Jesus, You have set us free,

G: Free from our sinful selfishness and pride,

L: Free from the punishment for all our sinfulness.

G: Help us to depend on You always.

We Pray

Father in heaven, in times of trouble we've been told, "You're not in this alone." How comforting this is! What a relief it is to know that we can depend on You at all times. What assurance it gives to know that You are with us always, our "ever-present help in trouble." Lord, we need You and we know it, and this is not a disgrace. Give us the humility to cast our cares upon You and to lay our lives in Your hands. As we depend on You we will not be disappointed. Amen.



7. Have a Good Day...Unless

There is no question that many who use the familiar phrase, "Have a good day", speak it *mechanically*, as a mere habit without even thinking - much less feeling what they are saying. But before we're too hard on such folks we might want to pause to examine some of our prayers, especially the old familiar mealtime and bedtime prayers - and also that prayer of prayers, the Lord's Prayer. Could it be that at times these are spoken by us mechanically - a mere habit with little or no attention on our part? The Lord gives us a warning about this in *Matthew 6:7* when He says: "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases..."

There is an interesting variation of that well-worn phrase that reads: Have a good day. It is, "Have a good day - **unless you've made other plans**. Do we at times actually keep ourselves from having a *good* day by having other plans? We can, indeed, have plans of our own that will actually result in a miserable day - a ruined day.

What are some things that can ruin a perfectly good day? We can decide to continue to hold a grudge, to have an unforgiving heart, to harbor resentment. We can decide to load ourselves down with worries, cares, fears. We can go along - always expecting the worse to happen. Then we have put ourselves in the same camp with Job who said, "The thing that I greatly feared has come upon me." *Job 3:25*.

What can we do so as not to spoil a good day? It's important that we examine our lives to see what's cluttering them up - starting with our attitudes. Are they sound, good, positive? Are they attitudes that are pleasing to the Lord Whose children we are? Are they in accord with the holy will of God? It is essential that we, in the strength of the Lord, determine to live each day close to Him, walk with Him, talk to Him. It is vitally important that we join the Psalmist praying: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you." *Psalms 51:10-13*.

Oh yes, away with all resentment, displeasure, anger, wrath, envy, greed, selfishness, bitterness, revenge, jealousy, hate. Each day is a special gift from God - a miracle. With the Psalmist declare: "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." *Psalms 118:24*.

Listen again to how the Apostle Paul, inspired by God, puts it: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you." *Philippians 4:4-8*

In the "Beatitudes" (*Matthew 5*) Jesus has given us a pattern not only for a blessed day, but a blessed life! There is beauty all around us when our days include our "Beautiful Savior, King of Creation." In His name and with His help, **PLAN TO MAKE IT A GOOD DAY!**

Have a Good Day...Unless

We Begin

- L: This is a day which the Lord has made.
R: We will rejoice and be glad in it.

We Search Scriptures - Philippians 4:4-8

- L: Rejoice in the Lord always;
R: again I will say, Rejoice.
L: Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand.
R: Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.
L: And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
R: Finally, brethren, whatever is true,
L: whatever is honorable,
R: whatever is just,
L: whatever is pure,
R: whatever is lovely,
L: whatever is gracious,
R: if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
L: What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- "Have a good day!"
- Unless you've made other plans.
 - ✓ Things that can ruin a perfectly good day.
 - ✓ Things we can do as not to spoil a good day.
- Each day is a miracle
- Things to think about to have a good day.

We Respond

- L: This is a day which the Lord has made.
R: We accept it as a gift from God.
L: This is a day which the Lord has made.
R: We ask for forgiveness for the times we've spoiled this day.
L: This is a day which the Lord has made.
R: We plead for a clean heart, a renewal, a right spirit
L: This is a day which the Lord has made.
R: We will rejoice and be glad in it.

We Pray

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Amen.



8. I Love You, Jesus

The Pastor had just finished distributing the Lord's Supper. He spoke the words of dismissal, "Depart in peace", when Fred, one of the communicants, with eyes focused on the cross whispered, "Thank You, Jesus! Thank You, Jesus! I love You, Jesus!" The Pastor shared that beautiful experience with his wife. They talked about it for some time, especially the phrase, "I love You, Jesus." We say to each other, "I love you." We say to our children, "We love you." Our children tell us that they love us. But what about, "I love You, Jesus?" Could He be waiting to hear us say that? Would He be pleased to hear those words from our hearts?

Our hymns are full of love. We sing of tender love, fervent, ineffable love. We sing of boundless, perfect, redeeming, wondrous love. We sing of amazing, holy, gracious love. We sing of creating, pardoning, patient, everlasting love. Furthermore, we sing that the Lord would teach us love; that He would crown our lives with love and keep us in His love. In our songs we ask that we would bring forth fruits of love; that we would be moved by His love; that we may give Him love.

Love is not a mere emotion, an idle feeling or sentiment. Rather, love is an active, working principle, a motive power. Love is an action word. Ask a little child, how much do you love me? The child will immediately go into action. The bigger the hug, the harder the squeeze, the more the child is trying to express its love.

So it was and is with the Lord our God. Note the words of action in the following: *John 3:16*, "God so loved the world that He **GAVE** His one and only Son." Jesus did not love us and then stay in heaven. Because He loved us He **CAME** to planet earth and **GAVE** Himself a ransom for us all. He **MADE** the supreme sacrifice. He **PAID** our debts.

- "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." *Isaiah 53:5*
- "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down His life for His friends." *John 15:13*
- "Above all things, have fervent love among yourselves." *1 Peter 4:8*
- "By this shall all know that you are My disciples if you love one another." *John 8:35*

No question about it, love is the badge of our faith.

"Thank You, Jesus! Thank You, Jesus! I love You, Jesus!"

I Love You, Jesus

We Begin

L: We begin in the name of the God, who is Love.

We Search Scriptures - I Corinthians 13

Leader (L) and two groups (1 & 2)

- L: If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.
- 1: If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
- 2: If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.
- L: Love is patient, love is kind.
- 1: It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
- 2: It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
- L: Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
- 1: It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
- 2: Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.
- L: For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.
- 1: When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.
- 2: Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.
- All: And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- "Depart in peace."
- Hymns full of love
- Love means action
 - ✓ Isaiah 53:5
 - ✓ John 15:13
 - ✓ I Peter 4:8
 - ✓ John 8:35

We Respond

- L: You promised to Send a Savior, dear Father.
- R: Love means action!
- L: You lived and died for me, dear Jesus.
- R: Love means action!
- L: You give me power to believe and trust, dear Spirit.
- R: Love means action!

We Pray

Thank You, Jesus!
Thank You, Jesus!
I love You, Jesus! Amen.



9. Jesus is Lord

Could you guess how many names and titles are given to the Lord Jesus Christ in the Bible? A resident of the Lutheran Home in Frankenmuth, Michigan went through the King James version of the Bible and, would you believe it, came up with one hundred and three names and titles given our blessed Savior! A few of these include: Advocate, Author, Bread of Life, Captain of Salvation, Chief Shepherd, Creator, Dayspring, Elect of God, Forerunner, Governor, Great High Priest, Head of the Church, Immanuel, Judge, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Lamb of God, and eighty-six others. As one ponders this long list of names and titles we begin to understand more fully Who Jesus really is, and that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have everything.

On the south edge of Bloomington, Indiana, there is a silo on which is painted in large letters: JESUS IS LORD. "Jesus" means Savior. An angel of the Lord instructed Joseph, "Do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will SAVE His people from their sins." *Matt. 1:20f*.

JESUS IS LORD. If we look up the word, "Lord" in a dictionary, it is defined as: one in authority, ruler, the head, supreme, one who has power, one in charge. No question about it, JESUS IS LORD. He Himself declares: "I am *THE LORD*; that is My name." *Isaiah 42:8*. Our friend from Frankenmuth lists four different titles in which our Savior is referred to as LORD.

Lord of All - *Acts 10:36*,

Lord of Glory - *1 Cor. 2:8*

Lord of Lords - *1 Tim. 6:15*

Lord of Our Righteousness - *Jer. 23:6*.

Ponder what the following Scripture passages tell us about the LORD.

- "The LORD is the true God, He is the living God and an everlasting King." *Jer. 10:10*.
- "LORD, Thou hast been our Dwelling Place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art, God." *Ps. 90:1, 2*.
- "I am THE LORD, I change not." *Mal. 3:6*.
- "LORD, You know all things." *John 21:17*: The fact that the Lord knows all things is quite a warning for us. We can't get by with anything. He knows and sees all. But at the same time, what wonderful comfort and strength for us! He knows when our hearts ache. He counts the tears that fall on our pillow at night. Nothing is hidden from Him. What is more, He is everywhere present at one and the same time.
- "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD." *Jer. 23:24*. Furthermore, He says, "I, the LORD, your God, am holy." *Lev. 19:2*. He is good, kind and desiring our welfare.
- The Psalmist reminds us: "The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." *Ps. 145:9*.
- Jesus, Who is LORD is gracious, showing undeserved kindness, forgiving. "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." *Ex. 34:6, 7*.

JESUS IS LORD which, by the way, was the first Christian Creed. He is LORD of heaven and earth, LORD of the nations. He is supreme. He is in charge. He rules all things in heaven and on earth. He declares, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth." *Matthew 28:18*. And He has relinquished none of His power and authority. It's so easy to use that name without giving it much thought and consequently we miss so much, for example, when we pray: "Come LORD Jesus..." "O give thanks unto the LORD for He is..." "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray Thee, LORD..."

With the Psalmist I say, through the power of the Spirit, "Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will dwell in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust in Him, and He will act." *Psalms 37:3f*
Oh, yes, JESUS IS LORD!

Jesus is Lord

We Begin

L: We begin in the name of the Lord, the true God, the everlasting King.

We Search Scriptures - Psalm 90

Leader (L) and Group (G)

- L: Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.
G: Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
L: You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.
G: You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning -- though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered. We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.
L: You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.
G: All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. The length of our days is seventy years -- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
L: Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.
G: Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
L: Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
G: Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.
L: May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.
G: May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us -- yes, establish the work of our hands.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- Names and titles of Jesus: How many are there in the Bible?
- Jesus is LORD.
 - √ Jeremiah 10:10 √ Jeremiah 23:24
 - √ Psalm 90:1&2 √ Leviticus 19:2
 - √ Malachi 3:6 √ Psalm 145:9
 - √ John 21:17 √ Exodus 34:6, 7
- Trust...take delight...commit

We Respond

- L: Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised!
R: Our God is the Lord of Glory.
L: Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised!
R: Our God is the Lord of All.
L: Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised!
R: Our God is the Lord of Lords.

We Pray

We come to you, dear Lord, because you've invited us to call you "Lord." We have difficulty turning our lives completely over to anyone or anything, but your Lordship requires that kind of submission. Help us to seek your way in our lives and in our work. We pray for the Spirit's power in the name of Jesus. Amen.



10. Keeping in Touch

Without a doubt, today our main means of communicating is by telephone rather than letter-writing. Then to be sure we don't miss some communication, many of us have added the telephone answering machine? What about this aid to communications?

Our initial experience with these may "turn us off." When asked to leave a message, we may hang up rather than talk into a machine "after you hear the beep." However, folks with answering machines are really saying something like this: "It's not possible for me to sit here and wait for your call and I know that it's difficult for you and others to contact me, so instead of you dialing my number over and over again without an answer - and becoming frustrated by it all - just let me know that you want to get in touch with me by leaving a message - and I'll call you because, you see, I'm grateful that you thought of me and - like you - I want to make a connection."

All of which reminds me of another "connection" that is far more important than the telephone, namely, making a "connection" with the holy Lord God - talking to Him in humble, fervent prayer. With Him we never get the busy signal, and we never have to think about whether He is available. We know that He is. "Before they call", He says, "I will answer. And while they are yet speaking, I will hear." *Is. 65:24*. The Line is always open to Him. Just think of it, anytime - day or night - we can talk to Him about anything! "What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!"

Are we faithfully calling upon the Lord? He bids us, **"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things which you have not known."** *Jeremiah 33:3*.

Then, too, are we always available when the Lord wants to talk to us, or does He get a busy signal or no answer? As you know, the means by which the Lord talks to us is through His holy, precious, sacred, saving Word. Are we available to Him or are we too busy to listen to Him?

Regarding the blessed Savior, our Heavenly Father declares: "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased, LISTEN to Him." *Matt. 17:5*. Let us faithfully listen to Him with fellow-believers on Sundays, and let us faithfully listen to Him in our daily devotions.

Keeping in Touch

We Begin

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: We know You are with us, Lord, for You said:

G: "Where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them."

We Search Scriptures - Matthew 7:7-11; Isaiah 65:24

Three readers: (1), (2), (3)

- 1: Ask and it will be given to you;
2: seek and you will find;
3: knock and the door will be opened to you.
1: For everyone who asks receives;
2: he who seeks finds;
3: and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.
1: Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?
2: Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?
3: If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!
ALL: Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- ➔ Telephone answering machines: making a connection
- ➔ Prayer: our open line of connection to God
- ➔ God's Word: His connection to us.
- ➔ Are we listening to Him?

We Respond

G: Our Father Who art in heaven,

L: We pray to You with complete confidence just as children speak to their loving father.

L: Hallowed be Thy name.

G: We call on You in prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

L: Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

G: Help us not to neglect Your Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.

L: Give us this day our daily bread.

G: And help us to receive our daily bread with thanks.

L: And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

G: For we sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment.

L: And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil.

G: Watch over us and keep us, so that the devil, the world and our sinful self may not deceive us. Save us from every evil to body and soul, and take us to heaven.

L: For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

G: Amen means, "Yes, it shall be so." Amen.

We Pray

O God, what a privilege prayer is, talking to You anytime, anywhere, about anything. What a comfort prayer is, knowing You are always listening to us. What an honor it is to have Your Word, for in it You tell us Your message of truth, life and love. Keep us connected to You by Word and prayer. Amen.



11. Move Closer to the Light

During the early days of trains, a flagman would take his place in the middle of the street - stopping all traffic as a train approached. During the day he would hold up a STOP sign. At night he would wave a lantern. There is an old story about a flagman and his lantern that goes like this.

There was an accident one dark night at a railroad crossing. A lawsuit followed, and during the proceedings the flagman was called to take the witness stand. The prosecuting attorney asked the usual questions. Then followed an important one. He asked, "On the night of the accident, when you saw the car approaching, did you wave the lantern?" The flagman answered, "Yes, I waved the lantern." The attorney for the prosecution continued with other questions, but before long he came to the same one, "Did you wave that lantern?" "Yes," answered the flagman, "I did wave the lantern." The case seemed to hinge on this bit of testimony. The prosecutor realized it, and so once more he thundered, "I ask you again, when you saw the car approaching the crossing, did you wave the lantern?" Once again, the flagman answered, "I did. Yes, I waved the lantern." The railroad company won the case. No damages were allowed. Later, the defense attorney was talking to the flagman. He said, "The prosecuting attorney really had me worried when he kept asking, 'Did you wave the lantern? Did you wave the lantern?' "Well", said the flagman, "What worried me was that he might ask, **'Was the lantern lit?'**"

There is so much waving of dead lanterns. What about ours? The purpose of lanterns and lamps is to give light - to shine. The Bible has some important things to say about lights and about shining. It speaks of God's own Word as "a LAMP unto our feet and a LIGHT unto our path." *Ps. 119:105*. Our precious Savior refers to Himself as "THE LIGHT", and He says of us, His followers, "You are the LIGHT of the world." As lights, we are not to be like that flagman's dead lantern, but rather, we are to shine - not as a flickering flame, but as a steady light. How did it happen that we, who were once in darkness, the darkness of unbelief and separation from God, are now lights? This is a miracle of God's grace. We are "the light of the world", not because of "any merit or worthiness in us", not because of our shrewdness or our intellectual acumen or our scientific genius, but we have become the "light of the world" only because we have been touched and transformed by Christ. He it is Who has "called us out of darkness into His marvelous light to show forth His praises."

When children are doing home work or working on some project, they invariably sit on the floor in the most dimly lit part of the room. Parents may say, "Move closer to the light." Even so the challenge to each of us is, "Move closer to THE LIGHT!" And this by faithfully, diligently reading, meditating and searching the Word of God. And through the Word of God the Holy Spirit keeps us in direct contact with Him Who is the source of all light, Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us resolve anew to keep close to Christ, the true and only Light.

When we get right down to it, however, we do not possess light in and of ourselves. Rather, we are more like reflectors which do not have light in themselves. Even as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so we are to reflect the light of God's Son, Jesus. Yet, Jesus calls us "lights." "You are the light of the world". *Matt. 5:14*, He says. And as such we are to shine. An unlit lantern is not serving its purpose. Jesus says, "A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house." *Matt. 14:15*. Then He goes on to say, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven." *Matt. 14:16*.

What is the ultimate purpose of our lives? "To show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." *1 Peter 2:9*. Not all of us can be chandeliers in important and conspicuous places. Some of us must be satisfied and thankful to be 40-watt bulbs on the back steps somewhere. There, too, we have a singular purpose - to shed forth the glorious gospel light in order to keep people from slipping and falling.

Move Closer to the Light

We Begin

L: We begin in the name of Jesus, the true and only Light.

We Search Scriptures - John 8:12; Matthew 5:14-16

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: Jesus declared about Himself:

G: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

L: Jesus described us, His followers:

G: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- Flagmen at railroad crossings
- What happened when one flagman neglected his job
- Jesus is the Light of the world
- We are the light of the world
- How we "Move closer to THE LIGHT"
- How we reflect the Light of Jesus

We Respond

L: Our world is filled with the darkness of evil.

R: Jesus, we need Your Light to protect us.

L: Our lives are filled with the darkness of our own sin.

R: Jesus, we need Your Light to forgive us.

L: Our lives are filled with the darkness of confusion.

R: Jesus, we need Your Light to protect us.

L: Our lives are worthless without the Light of Light.

R: We praise You, O Jesus, for You have put your Light within us.

We Pray

O Lord, indeed we need Your powerful and loving Light. Keep us from being frightened or overcome by the darkness of evil. Help us to *Move closer to the Light* by turning daily to Your Word, for it is "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path." Keep Your Light burning bright for us, in us, and through us, to the glory of our Father Who is in heaven. Amen.



12. On Being Grateful

Perhaps one of the most frequently asked questions is, "How are you?" Some common responses are: Ok, Pretty good, Fine, Doing all right, Can't complain. Then there are those who, when asked how they are, go on and on telling you more than you expected to hear or really cared to know.

When asked, "How are you?" why not try this answer, "**I'm grateful!**" You may be hurting, you may be troubled, you may be carrying a heavy burden, but there is always something for which to be grateful. There is, for example, the love of Jesus that doesn't change, the forgiveness that He freely offers, and all of His wonderful promises that never fail. Then, of course, there are family, friends, and many other rich blessings. Yes, you can be grateful for what you have, but you can also be very thankful for what you do not have. Let me explain.

A number of years ago a married couple approached their pastor about a special gift of money that they wanted to give to the Lord for some specific project at the church. As they explained, "We want to give this gift to the Lord for what we do NOT have." Not only were they mindful of the manifold blessings that they had received from the hand of the Lord, but they were also very mindful of many things from which they had been spared. They were grateful and wanted to express their gratitude with a gift of love to the Lord Who had kept them from experiencing certain crosses, losses or whatever.

All that we need to do is, like these two, look around us and within ourselves and it soon becomes very apparent that we have been spared from so very much. Let's be thankful also for what we do NOT have. For example, consider the following questions from a General Medical History Form. Let the questions fill your heart with gratitude for things you do not have:

- How is your general health? Good Fair Poor
- Are you diabetic?
- Have you ever had a bleeding problem?
- Have you ever had high blood pressure?
- Have you ever had trouble with: Ears, Nose, Throat,
Stomach, Digestive Tract, Heart, Circulation, Kidney
or Urinary Tract, Liver, Lungs, Teeth, Gums, etc.
- Are you allergic to any medication or food?
- List any and all previous surgeries and complications
- List all infections you have had.
- Do you use crutches or walker?
- Do you use wheelchair or cane?

The Apostle Paul encourages us in Ephesians 5:20: "Give thanks always for all things..." To which we might add, things that we have and things that we do not have.

It might be an interesting and most profitable experience to thank God for some things you DO NOT HAVE. Make a list. Thank God!

When asked, "How are you?", consider giving the answer: "**I'm grateful!**"

On Being Grateful

We Begin

Leader (L) and Group (G)

- L: O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good;
G: For His mercy endures forever.

We Search Scriptures - Ephesians 5:19-20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 3:17

Three Readers: (1), (2), (3)

- 1: Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
- 3: And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

"How are you?" Fine? Okay? Grateful?
A special gift "For what we do NOT have."
From what health problems has God spared you?
Make a list - and be grateful
How are you? Grateful? Yes, grateful!

We Respond

- G: Praise the Lord, O my soul.
L: All my inmost being, praise His holy name.
G: Praise the Lord, O my soul.
L: And forget not all His benefits!
G: Who forgives all your sins,
L: And forget not all His benefits!
G: Who heals all your diseases,
L: And forget not all His benefits!
G: Who redeems your life and crowns you with love and compassion,,
L: And forget not all His benefits!
G: Who satisfies your desires with good things,
L: And forget not all His benefits!

We Pray

Gracious God, it is truly fitting that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You. Thanksgiving is not just a national holiday for us; it is a way of life for us. As we humbly acknowledge the blessings You have showered upon us, we praise You that our "cup runneth over." We also are thankful for the many problems and pains from which You have spared us. We give our gratitude to You, loving Father, for the things we have and the things we do not have. Amen.

PRAISE AND GLORY AND THANKS BE TO OUR GOD FOREVER AND EVER!



13. Pray and Keep On Praying

As one of the special projects in a congregation, members were being encouraged to select certain missionaries for whom they would faithfully pray each day over a certain period of time. As different ones were volunteering, Gordon and Sue were discussing between themselves as to whether or not they should make such a commitment. It wasn't that they didn't want to - rather, would they be able to live up to their promise? Obviously they were taking the whole matter very seriously. They wanted to make certain that they would faithfully follow through. The two points they were questioning were: Would they remember to pray for the missionary family each day, and would they have the time?

What a wonderful privilege is ours to be able to go directly to the holy Lord God anytime, day or night with anything in humble, fervent prayer. As in all other matters, if we would pray successfully, we would do well to follow Jesus' example.

Jesus prayed in **PUBLIC**. He made it a practice to go to the synagogues and take part in the public worship. And His Word to us is not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together." *Hebrews 10:25*. He tells us that where two or three are gathered in His name, He's right there in their midst.

Jesus also had the habit of **PRIVATE** prayer. We are told in *Matt. 14:23*, "After He had dismissed the crowd, He went up into the hills by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone." As Jesus loved private prayer, so He bids and encourages us: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father. Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." *Matthew 6:6*.

Jesus' prayer life was also very **PERSONAL**. As a model, our wonderful Savior gave His disciples of all time the brief and beautiful, "Our Father." Only seventy words, but how all inclusive!

Also, Jesus was instant in prayer, insistent and **PERSISTENT** as when He pleaded to His Father in Gethsemane's Garden. We are urged to "continue instant in prayer." *Romans 12:12* Pray and keep on praying.

Furthermore, we have so very much for which to give all praise and **THANKS** to God from "Whom all blessings flow." Take inventory and see what great things God has done for you and give thanks. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him." *Col. 3:17*.

Jesus prayed for His **FRIENDS**, and He continues to pray for His friends - for you and for me. Just think of it, Jesus, the holy Son of God prays for us! John, chapter 17, is the prayer in which Jesus intercedes for us to the heavenly Father. Part of that prayer was our Scripture reading.

Jesus not only prayed for His friends, but also for His **ENEMIES** - for those who hated Him, who mocked and taunted Him and finally nailed Him to the gory beams of a cross. From the cross we hear Him pray: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!" *Mark 23:34*. As Jesus, so it must be with us, His followers. He bids us in *Matt. 5:44f*, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." And we will soon discover that we cannot continue to dislike, to hate or have any ill-will toward those for whom we pray. Faithful prayer helps to adjust and to cleanse our own hearts.

Prayer, what a beautiful subject to contemplate! What a privilege to be able to go to Jesus in prayer anytime, with anything, day or night! What a very special blessing is ours!

Pray and Keep on Praying

We Begin

L: Our Father, Who art in heaven,
G: We come to You in prayer and devotion.

We Search Scriptures - John 17:1-2 & 20:26)

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

G: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him."

L: He first prayed for His disciples, then He prayed for us:

G: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- Jesus' prayers were:
Public • Private • Personal • Persistent
For thanks, for friends, for enemies
- Following Jesus' example of prayer
- Prayer: our 24-hour-a-day privilege
- Prayer: what a blessing!

We Respond

L: O God the Father in heaven, our Creator and Preserver,
G: We praise Your glorious name.
L: O God the Son, our Savior and Friend,
G: We praise Your glorious name.
L: O God the Spirit, our Comforter and Counselor,
G: We praise Your glorious name.

We Pray

We pray to You, Lord God, at Your invitation. In times of trouble we call to You for help. In times of weakness or illness we call to You for strength and health. In times of joy we call to You with praise. Help us to pray to You at all times, and to keep on praying, for You have promised to hear and answer our every prayer. We praise You, God, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.



14. Remember Your Baptism

When you were born into a family, you took on a name. You had nothing to do with your birth. It was something that happened to you. You were born. So in Holy Baptism, you were not baptized into a congregation or a denomination, but into the name, the family, of the one, true, holy, triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As you had nothing to do with your physical birth, so also you had absolutely nothing to do with your new birth in Holy Baptism. You were baptized. It was something done to you and in you. You were the object of God's grace. It was divine action upon you.

Baptism is not simply a symbol or a hollow ritual. Rather, it is a glorious means of grace - a means by which the holy Lord God comes to us and blesses us. Not only do the Holy Scriptures teach, but we firmly believe that "Baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe." (Luther's Small Catechism) The Bible says, "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins." *Acts 22:16* As water cleanses our bodies, so the water of Baptism, used with the Spirit-filled Word of God cleanses our souls. Through Holy Baptism you became God's very own children, members of His household, taking on His blessed name. Listen: "You are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." *Galatians 3:26, 27*.

By baptism you have become heirs and joint heirs with Christ. In baptism your names were not only inscribed in the church records and on a baptismal certificate, but in God's own Book of Life. Peter declares: "Baptism also now saves us." *1 Peter 3:21*. And so you not only belong to your earthly family, but through the washing of the water and the Word you belong to the holy Lord God, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of saints.

What does your Baptism mean to you? How often do you think of your Baptism? Do you faithfully apply your Baptism to your every day living? Is your Baptism a source of peace and joy and strength? Let me quickly point-out a couple of ways in which your Baptism can be a special source of wonderful help and comfort to you.

Let us say that things aren't going well for you in the home or at work or wherever. You feel pressured and perplexed. You become discouraged and despondent. You begin to feel alone, helpless, deserted. But wait a minute! You have been baptized into the family of God! You are His! He loves you! He is going to see you through. He has promised that and He keeps His promises. You are His child. He has laid down His life for you. Take heart, in Christ your Lord and Savior there is help and there is hope. Remember, you have been baptized into His name most holy.

And here is another way in which your Baptism can be a wonderful source of help and strength. Let us say that you are tempted to think or to say or do something that is not in accord with the holy will of God. But then you recall your Baptism. You remember who you are and to Whom you belong. Recalling your Baptism, in the strength of Him Who has all power in heaven and on earth, you resolve: "I cannot do that or say that or even think that. I am God's child. I belong to Him." In humble, fervent prayer you enter His outstretched arms pleading for His mercy and strength and you know "God will take care of you, God will take care of you."

Remember your Baptism. Don't forget who you are and to Whom you belong through Holy Baptism. When you hear those opening words at a worship service: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," remember your Baptism, for those were the exact same words spoken at your Baptism as water was applied.

Would you like to relive your Baptism every day? Each time you wash your hands, recall your Baptism. It could prove to be a wonderful blessing!

Remember Your Baptism

We Begin

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: We begin in the name of the God into Whom we were baptized,

G: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We Search Scriptures - Galatians 3:26-29

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

You were born into a family
You were baptized into a family

Baptism: the Father's way of forgiving us and saving us
Baptism: the Father's way of choosing us

What does your Baptism mean to you...
During times of trouble?
During times of temptation?

Times to remember your Baptism
The Invocation ("In the name of ...")
Hand-washing

We Respond

L: Lord, when I get discouraged by my troubles in life,

G: Remind me of my Baptism.

L: Lord, when I am tempted to doubt Your love for me,

G: Remind me that I am Yours.

L: Lord, when I sin against You and then seek Your mercy,

G: Remind me of my Baptism.

L: Lord, when I am tempted to go against Your will,

G: Remind me that I am Yours.

L: Lord, as long as I live,

G: Remind me of my Baptism. Remind me that I am Yours.

We Pray

Dear heavenly Father, Your love for us is so great. You chose us to be Your children. You brought us into Your holy family through Holy Baptism. You thus gave us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Help us to remember our Baptism and bask in its blessings every day.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



15. Stop! Look! Listen!

In the early railroad decades of this century, it wasn't unusual for four different railroad companies to have trains - freight and passenger - passing through towns in the midwest. Those big steam engines always got attention. It was exciting to watch them take on water and coal, build-up steam and then tug away with their long string of cars.

Each locomotive had its own distinct steam whistle sound. Whether working in the fields in the spring and summer, or cutting wood in the winter, people would always know the time of day as they learned to recognize the whistle sounds of the various trains.

Out in the countryside where the train tracks and roads crossed, there would only be the familiar white railroad crossing sign. However, in town there were additional safety installations. One railroad company installed a clanging bell that would be set-off by the approaching train. Of course, on each engine there was a highly polished bell as well as the familiar steam whistle that could be heard for miles away providing the wind was in the right direction. One of the crossings had a sign with the words: STOP! LOOK! LISTEN! At another multi-crossing, as a train was approaching, a man would emerge from a nearby booth with his familiar STOP sign by day and a lantern at night. He was simply referred to as the "Flag Man". Later, of course, electric flashing lights and automatic gates replaced the flag man and the silent signs and, eventually, the old steam engines were replaced by the diesels.

STOP! LOOK! LISTEN! This type of sign would never work today. People wouldn't see it, let alone read it. And yet, it is good advice. It might be well for us to briefly consider those three words: STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!

We must STOP to take inventory...to see what great things God has done for us...to make certain we have our priorities straight, lest we be going on the dead run...STOP to make sure we are on the right track...STOP for rest and contemplation...STOP to consider possible dangers and pitfalls that may be lurking on our path...STOP to gain spiritual rest for our soul...STOP to commune in prayer with our heavenly Father...STOP to drink of the water that quenches all thirst.

Not only must we STOP, we must also LOOK. We must LOOK ahead...about us and within ourselves...LOOK up to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith...LOOK to the Lord for guidance, strength, comfort, peace, companionship, hope, assurance, forgiveness and salvation. Heed the holy writer who says, "Let your eyes LOOK directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Take heed to the path of your feet, then all your ways will be sure." ..."LOOK to me", the holy Lord God declares, "and be saved." May the language of our hearts be, "As for me, I will LOOK to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my Salvation; my God will hear me." *Micah 7:7*.

STOP! LOOK! LISTEN! We must faithfully LISTEN to our heavenly Father Who says to us, "This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; LISTEN to Him". *Matthew 17:5*. There are all kinds of voices out there in the world trying to get our attention. LISTEN to Him who created us, redeemed us and sanctified us. LISTEN to the holy, Spirit-filled, power-packed Word of our Lord. We must faithfully, diligently LISTEN for the purpose of discovering: What's the Lord Jesus telling me about Himself?...about myself?...What warning, admonition, instruction is there for me?...What does He want me to do or not do?... LISTEN to hear ever anew what He has done for us on the cross at Calvary; that He took our place, paid our price, that in Him we have eternal life.

How important it is that we pause from time-to-time; that we take inventory of our lives; that we make certain that we know from where we have come, why we are here, and above all, that we know where we are going. To that end it is vitally important that we STOP! LOOK! and LISTEN!

Stop! Look! Listen!

We Begin

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.

G: Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.

We Search Scriptures - John 10:14-16,27-28

L: Jesus said "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me -- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father -- and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

Trains in "the old days"

Steam whistles and bells

Signs, such as "Stop! Look! Listen!"

Stop! Look! Listen!: good advice for all of us:

STOP! - for rest and refreshment from God

LOOK! - for guidance, comfort, forgiveness
and salvation from Jesus

LISTEN! - for words of warning and
messages of mercy from God's Spirit
through His Word

From where have we come? Where are we going?

STOP! LOOK! and LISTEN! to find out

We Respond

L: God, our lives are always so busy.

G: O Father, help us to slow down, STOP, and be refreshed by Your ever-present love.

L: Everywhere we look we see sin and trouble--even within ourselves.

G: Help us to LOOK to You, O Jesus, for solutions and salvation.

L: We hear so many people promising us happiness through the things of this world.

G: Help us to LISTEN to Your Spirit-filled Word, O God, for it teaches that the only way to lasting joy is through You.

We Pray

Lord, what a privilege it is to be Your sheep. What a joy to have the gift of faith, by which we recognize Your voice as that of our Good Shepherd. Guard and guide us so that we may follow You all the days of our lives and then dwell with You in Your house forever. Amen.



16. That Little Gem

A law student, enrolled in an adult membership class, expressed his delight and excitement over the contents and the format of the Catechism. The teachings were expressed so clearly. He was greatly impressed. At about every session he had something to say about the Catechism, such as: "This is such a fantastic little book! It leads one right into the Bible! This is a gem! This is a jewel!" And then one evening he asked, "Do the people of your congregation realize what they have in this precious book?" Isn't it true, so often we simply take things for granted. We don't realize what we have until someone "from the outside" comes along and reminds us.

Dora was in her 80's and her eyes were failing quite rapidly. One day, when her pastor stopped by, Dora was ironing clothes. On the ironing board was an open Catechism. When the pastor asked Dora about it, she said, "In my early years I learned by heart many Bible passages. So I thought I would go over them and store them up just in case I lose my sight altogether."

How beautiful! And note, she didn't say *I committed to memory Bible verses*, but "*I learned by heart Bible passages*." In your youth, you may have "learned by heart" many of the "passages" and the Six Chief Parts of Christian doctrine in Luther's Small Catechism. *Colossians 3:16* exhorts: "Let the word of Christ *DWELL* in you richly in all wisdom." To have it *dwell there* we had better "*learn it by heart*."

The Catechism contains the Bible teachings we believe. But did you ever note that the Catechism is also about *relationships*? We call ourselves Children of God. So we are. We have a *relationship* with God like the *relationship* between a good father and his child.

The First Chief Part, the Ten Commandments, give the pattern for the ideal or perfect *relationship* with God (Commandments 1-3) and our neighbor (Commandments 4-10). The Commandments teach us that we are not what God wants us to be, and that if we are to be His children He must establish the *relationship* because we cannot.

The Second Chief Part, the Apostles Creed speaks of the Triune God with whom we live in the father-child *relationship*. It emphasizes all that He has done for us as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

The Third Chief Part, the Lord's Prayer, teaches us how this *relationship* is exercised and developed. It is not merely a prayer to pray, but a pattern for all of our prayers.

The Fourth Chief Part of Christian doctrine is the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Here we are taught that it is God Who creates the *relationship* between Himself and us. It also teaches that we live in that *relationship* daily in repentance and faith.

The Fifth Chief Part, the Office of the Keys speaks about how God keeps the *relationship* healthy through confession and absolution and reminds us that the Holy Ministry was established to aid us in this father-child *relationship*.

Finally, the Sixth Chief Part, the Sacrament of the Altar teaches us how our *relationship* with God is nourished and strengthened.

So the Catechism is more than a textbook of doctrine. It is a handbook to help and guide us in our *relationship* with God. It is a valuable aid to develop a growing and healthy faith that is fruitful in love. Above all, it firmly fixes our attention on God and His Son, Jesus, with Whom we live in a vital and enduring *relationship*.

The Apostle John says: "Nothing gives me greater joy than to hear that my children live in the truth." 3 John 4. The Catechism, which leads into the truths of Scripture, will help you *'live in the truth.'*

That Little Gem

We Begin

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: How sweet are Your words to my taste,

G: Sweeter than honey in my mouth!

We Search Scriptures - 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

G: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

Thoughts of two people:

A law student: "The Catechism is a gem!"

Dora: "Learning by heart!"

The Catechism is about our *relationship* with God:

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| ✓ Ten Commandments | How to live in it |
| ✓ Apostles' Creed | The Trinity is involved in it |
| ✓ Lord's Prayer | Prayer develops it |
| ✓ Holy Baptism | God started it |
| ✓ Office of the Keys | Confession helps it |
| ✓ Holy Communion | God keeps it going and growing |

We Respond

L: Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

G: O Lord, we need Your Word daily.

L: Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

G: It teaches us, guides us, corrects us, and saves us.

L: Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

G: Help us, Holy Spirit, to read, study, inwardly digest and learn by heart Your Word of truth, that it may refresh us throughout life.

We Pray

Father in heaven, we praise You for the rich treasure You have bestowed on us with Your Word. We also thank You for Luther's Small Catechism, for it contains the truth of Your Word, showing the loving relationship You have established with us. Help us to find joy in learning by heart Your Holy Word. Wherever we go, whatever we do, may Your Word go with us - in our hearts and in our minds - and through us, as we speak its message of love to others.



17. The Difference That Made a Difference

It hardly seems possible that it should be Christmas-time already! When parents have a new baby, for some reason they believe their baby is going to be different from any other baby. But once there was a baby born who really was different - very different from all others. His parents didn't even choose His name. God did. Through an angel His name was announced to be JESUS. Jesus means Savior, for He would save people from their sins.

This baby's *birth* was different. His birth was announced centuries before He was born. Many people thought He would be born amid wealth, and of persons of high social standing. Not so. He was born in a stable because "there was no room for them in the inn."

Oh, yes, His *birth* was really different. He was born without a human father. His father was God Himself. He was and is God's own Son. His mother was a human being with a very common name, Mary. Jesus was, then, born as God and man, the God-Man. He was conceived and born without sin....not for Himself...but for the salvation of all people. It had been foretold, "Unto US a Child is born, unto US a Son is given." The angels announced it: "Unto YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord." Indeed, His birth was different - really different.

And, of course, His *life* was also different from the ordinary. This baby grew to manhood. Other people fought, hated, argued, cheated, and deceived because they were born in sin. Not so the Savior, Christ the Lord. He obeyed, loved, helped, taught, gave and forgave. His life was different. He performed numerous miracles - not in another's, but in His own power. Most astonishing of all, He lived to keep the commandments for us. His life was, to say the least, radically different.

Not only this baby - His birth and His life, but also His *death* was different. Oh, yes, He died. He really died. He was put to death - crucified. Because He did good, people hated Him. The Bible tells us why they hated Him: "Because THEIR deeds were evil." Because He was Light and "men loved darkness rather than light" they got rid of Him - at least for a while. Men put Him to death on a cross. They hated His goodness because they were evil. They hated Him so much that they put Him to death by crucifixion. And yet, He did not die because He had to, but because He wanted to. You see, He came into this world, "to seek and to save that which was lost", and this could only be accomplished through His suffering and death on the cross. And so He willingly, lovingly paid the supreme sacrifice. He paid the wages of sin - death. "Upon Him was laid the iniquity of us all." For all mankind He died; for all people of all time - and for you and for me. His death was different. Not infrequently men die cringing, cursing, blaming, begging. Jesus died as He had lived - loving, giving and forgiving.

Up to this point all of this makes little more than an interesting, touching story. But thank God there is more! The Christ of Christmas is different also in that He *rose* from the dead! Babies are born. Some grow to maturity, but all eventually die. Here was a baby that was different. How and why could He rise again? Because He was different. He was and is the one, eternal God "Whom earth and heaven adore." The Bible teaches that it was "not possible for Him to be held by death." He had power to take up His life again. On the third day He did just that; He rose from the grave - alive! He lives! Our Jesus, the Christ of Christmas, *lives*! The cradle, the cross and the tomb - all are empty.

And to all who believe in Him He promises: "Because I live you shall live also." Oh, yes, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The Difference That Made a Difference

We Begin

L: L: Unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given.

G: O come, let us worship Him.

We Search Scriptures - Isaiah 53:3-7,9-10

Leader (L) and Two Groups (1) and (2)

- L: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- 1: Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.
- 2: But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.
- L: We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- 1: He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
- 2: He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.
- L: Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

Parents think, "Our baby will be different."

Jesus really was different:

- ✓ In His unique birth
- ✓ In His perfect life
- ✓ In His loving death
- ✓ In His powerful resurrection

We Respond

- L: Knowing You by faith, Lord, we rejoice in the excitement of the first Christmas.
- 1: We share the joy of Mary, your mother
- 2: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."
- 1: We share the joy of the angels:
- 2: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."
- 1: We share the joy of the shepherds:
- 2: The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for the things they had heard and seen.
- 1: We share the joy of Simeon:
- 2: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

We Pray

We praise You, dear Jesus, for coming down as one of us, same but different. We thank You for living, dying, and rising as our Savior from sin. As we celebrate Your birth, give us renewed joy in having You as the Christmas gift that keeps on giving, and Who keeps us living - forever! Amen.



18. The Touch of Jesus

One Sunday morning while welcoming visitors and guests, a pastor ended his little greeting with the encouragement, "Just put out your hand and someone will grab it." The pastor was thereby encouraging something beyond a nod, a few words and a smile. He was encouraging us to use the God-given sense of **touch**. In the explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed we confess: I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them." As the ability to hear, see, taste and smell are special gifts of God, so also is the sense of **touch**.

I want to draw your attention to the Scriptures which reveal somewhat of a touch-magnetism that went on between our blessed Savior, when he walked here on earth, and the people. In fact, our Lord seems to have relished touching and being touched. As we scan the Gospel of Mark, one of the sidelights and details which he presents concerns the "touch" of Jesus.

- For example, Mark tells of the incident when a deaf-mute was brought to Jesus for healing. We are told, *And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue.*
- Another incident in which Mark pictures our blessed Savior as extending His hand to touch was when He took the mother-in-law of Peter by the hand and healed her of a fever. We read, *And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them.*
- And then there was the leper whose plea, *If you will, you can make me clean*, moved the Savior to compassion. We are told that Jesus *put forth his hand and touched him and cleansed him of his leprosy.*
- Jesus entered the death room of Jairus' daughter, took her by the hand, and raised her from the dead. Mark records that Jesus was so hindered by unbelief in Nazareth that he could do no greater works than to *lay His hands upon a few sick folk and heal them.*
- When Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they brought to Jesus a demoniac boy. While the lad was writhing in the grip of the devil, Jesus, *took him by the hand*, lifted him up and completely freed him of demon possession.
- When mothers brought their children to Jesus, *He took the children up in His arms, put His hand upon them, and blessed them.* The frequent repetition in the gospel of Mark that Jesus "touched" people certainly accents the importance of Christ's "touch."

Why did Christ touch these people? Mark doesn't explain, and we can only cite the obvious. Certainly he wanted to teach that all help comes from Him; that all things are in His hands; that He has all power over sickness, sadness and death itself. Furthermore, Christ's "touch" expresses tenderness, pity, sympathy; it assures us that He is true Man, and while HE was without sin, He is touched by man's infirmity and expresses His tenderness, kindness, compassion, and solicitude by touching the needy whom He came to seek and to save. His "touch" expresses the swift sympathy and heart of compassion that Jesus had for all human suffering, and still has for our suffering today.

Not only does the "touch of Jesus speak to us of a Savior who is true Man, but who is also true God. And as the true God, with a heart full of love He bends down from His throne and extends His hand to clasp us to Himself; to cure us of the fever, the leprosy of sin and to give us spiritual health, sight and life. His pity and compassion will not permit our spiritual foulness to turn Him away. He continues to come to us and with outstretched arms He bids us to come to Him that He might touch us.

The Touch of Jesus

We Begin

L: As we begin, dear Lord, touch us.

R: Touch us with your Word and your love.

We Search Scriptures - Mark 6:53-56

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went --into villages, towns or countryside --they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- Just put out your hand
- The Gospel-writer Mark describes the touch of Jesus
 - ✓ the deaf mute
 - ✓ Peter's mother-in-law
 - ✓ the leper
 - ✓ Jairus' daughter
 - ✓ a demoniac boy
 - ✓ the children
- The touch of the true Man
- The touch of the true God

We Respond

L: Lord, when I seem so worried about things in life

R: Touch me with your assurances.

L: Lord, when I hurt in my body, mind or spirit

R: Touch me with your healing.

L: Lord, when it seems like I have no one to talk to that understands me

R: Touch me with your invitation to talk to you..

L: Lord, when my last days give me moments of doubt

R: Touch me with your resurrection.

We Pray

O Lord Jesus. how wonderful it must have been for those people who received healing through Your touch of love! How special those children must have felt when You took them up in Your arms, put Your hands on them, and blessed them! We might wish, "If only Jesus would touch me like that!" Remind us, precious Savior, that indeed You do touch us today. You heal us through doctors, medicines, surgeries. You bless us through the loving touch of our families and friends. Best of all, You touch us through the Holy Spirit. As we hear Your Word our hearts are touched. As we taste Your body and blood in Holy Communion, our souls are touched. We praise You for reaching out to us constantly with Your love. Keep touching us, Lord, keep touching us. Amen.



19. Wait Three Days

On a beautiful Easter Monday, an old *flower lady* was sitting in her usual place inside a small archway. At her feet, corsages were spread on open newspaper. She was smiling, her wrinkled old face alive with some inner joy. On impulse, a passer-by said to her, "My, you look happy this morning!"

"Why not?" she answered. "Everything is good." She was dressed so shabbily and seemed so very old that she was asked, "Don't you have any troubles?"

"You can't reach my age and not have troubles," she replied. "Only it's like Jesus and Good Friday. When He was crucified on Good Friday, that was the worst day for the whole world. When I get troubles I remember that, and then I think of what happened only **THREE DAYS LATER**...Easter, and our Lord arising. So when things go wrong, I've learned to **WAIT THREE DAYS**...and somehow things get better." She smiled goodbye.

Troubles, troubles, who of us hasn't experienced troubles of one kind or another? Actually, no one escapes troubles. The Bible says, "Hardship does not come from dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground; but man is born to trouble..." *Job 5:6f* The unholy trinity, the devil, the world, and our very own sinful nature is the source of all trouble.

What can we do when troubles come? We can heed the advice given in the second stanza of the familiar song, "What a Friend we have in Jesus!" The song asks, "Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?" And then it goes on and we sing the answer, "We should never be discouraged, take it to the Lord in prayer."

We would do well to join the Psalmist in praying: "Turn to me, and be gracious to me; for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins." *Ps. 26:16f* And in *Psalm 88:1f*, "O Lord, my God, I call for help by day; I cry out in the night before You. Let my prayer come before You, incline Your ear to my cry! For my soul is full of troubles."

There's a line in an old Negro spiritual: "Nobody knows the troubles I've seen, nobody knows but Jesus." And whatever our troubles may be, and whenever they come - whether by day or by night - through the power of the Spirit, let us strive to take our hearts and minds off our troubles and instead *focus them on Jesus*, Who not only knows our troubles, but is able and willing and anxious to help us in every time of need. With out-stretched arms and a loving heart He bids us: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor Me." *Psalm 50:15* Without question, "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." *Psalm 9:9*

The old flower lady knew - whatever troubles we have are seen in perspective when we consider the three days that the first disciples waited for the resurrection. We wait, too, and the Risen Lord takes all of our troubles and assures us that He will never leave us or forsake us.

Having troubles? Wait three days!

Wait Three Days

We Begin

Leader (L) and Group (G)

- L: We begin in the name of Him Who is the Resurrection and the Life,
G: In the name of Jesus, our Savior.

We Search Scriptures - Psalm 25:1-5,(15-16),20-21

Two individuals or groups= (1), (2)

- 1: To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.
2: Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.
1: My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.
2: Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

The flower lady's wisdom: "WAIT THREE DAYS"
Good Friday through Easter: what a three-day change!
Troubles are common to us all
How to deal with troubles:
 "Take it to the Lord in prayer."
 "Turn to me and be gracious to me."
 "Let my prayer come before you."
Jesus promises to hear us and help us:
 "Call upon Me in the day of trouble."
 "The Lord is a refuge."
Having troubles? **WAIT THREE DAYS!**

We Respond

- L: It is not easy to wait.
G: I wait for the Lord, and in His Word I put my hope.
L: We want answers, we want help, and we want them NOW!
G: I wait for the Lord, and in His Word I put my hope.
L: Like the disciples on the first Easter, there is joy awaiting those who wait for the Lord's blessings.
G: I wait for the Lord, and in His Word I put my hope.
L: Best of all, we have the blessings of heaven awaiting us.
G: I wait for the Lord, and in His Word I put my hope.

L: Give us patience and trust to wait for Your will to be done.
G: I wait for the Lord, and in His Word I put my hope.

We Pray

We come to Your throne of grace with confidence, dear Lord. We know that You overcame sin, Satan, and death itself on that glorious third day after Your death. We know that You also have the power and the desire to help us in our times of need. We trust Your promises, loving Lord, and we praise You for keeping them. Amen.



20. Wait Until You Get to the Corner

A young pastor called an older pastor for help. The young pastor was going through a time of discouragement, uncertainty and disappointment. He was anxious, restless, unsettled and impatient. He was impatient with the members of his congregation, impatient with himself and with the Lord. He asked, "What does the Lord have in mind for me? How long does He want me to be here in this place? Why doesn't He give me some sign, some clue?"

The older pastor thought of *Isaiah 28:16*: "He that believes shall not make haste." In his opinion the young pastor was "making haste." He went on to say, "You are asking all kinds of questions. Why don't you **wait until you get to the corner**?" After a long pause the young pastor asked, "What do you mean that I should **wait until I get to the corner**?"

Asked if there was an envelope within his reach, he said, "You won't believe this, but I have one in my hand." The older pastor said, "Look at the top left hand corner. That's where you started when you were called and installed as pastor of your congregation. Now, run your hand along the top edge of that envelope from left to right. I don't know how far along the path you have come, I only know that you haven't reached the corner as yet. You wonder what the Lord has in store for you. Again, I say, **wait until you get to the corner**. You see," he went on to say, "when the Lord gives us a task He need not grant us additional guidance until we have finished the task at hand. It was a divine call that placed you where you are. You may think that you are finished, but the Lord obviously does not. So, don't "make haste", but wait until you get to the corner. In the meantime, "Take the task He gives you gladly, let His work your pleasure be."

All of us, at times, grow weary of waiting and we become anxious, troubled, impatient and discontented. We get in a hurry. There is such a thing as holy waiting that is good, essential and necessary. Maybe we are like the Apostle Paul who wrote, "I have LEARNED....to be content." *Philippians 4:11*. Patience and contentment wasn't something that came naturally; it was something that Paul had to learn. Let us pray for patience and strive to learn to be content. The Psalmist gives us some good, sound instructions when he says, "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord!" *Ps. 27:14*. And here's a great reminder, *Psalms 37:7*: "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; fret not yourself." The holy writer reminds us, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength." *Isaiah 40:31*. "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him." *Lamentations 3:25*. May the language of our hearts be that of the prophet of old, "I will wait for the Lord....and I will hope in Him." *Isaiah 8:17*.

All of us must be patient and **wait until we get to the corner**, and when we do, the Lord will, then, let us see the next part of our life's pathway. There's a line in a song, "I will go, Lord, where you want me to go." We might add, "And I will stay, Lord, where you want me to stay." And when we know that we are at a place and in a position because God has put us there, it takes a lot of stress out of it. In the meantime, it is best that we proceed without hurry or worry. Work the works of Him who placed us where we are. Faithfully serve Him where we are and we will not be led into foolishness nor fanaticism. And when we get to the corner the Lord will point which way to turn, and he will walk beside us all the way. Let us, then, **wait until we get to the corner**!

Wait Until You Get to the Corner

We Begin

L: We gather in the name of God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
G: We gather as His children.

We Search Scriptures - Lamentations 3:21-26

Leader (L) and Group (G)

L: Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
G: I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."
L: The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

We Meditate

Follow this outline as the meditation is presented

- † An impatient young pastor's question.
- † A wise older pastor's advise.
- † Wait patiently.
- † Without hurry or worry, do God's work where you are.

We Respond

L: Because of the Lord's great love
G: We have help from Him when we are discouraged.

L: Because the Lord's compassion never fail
G: We have rest from Him when we are restless.

L: Because the Lord is faithful
G: We have assurance from Him when we are doubting.

L: Because the Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him
G: We can wait patiently for Him.

L: Because of the Lord's great love
G: Therefore we have hope in Him.

We Pray

Sometimes we get so impatient, God, that our attitude is, "Give me patience, Lord, and I want it NOW!" We usually are in such a hurry that we don't like to wait - not for anything or anyone, including You. Help us to wait patiently for Your help, Your comfort, Your strength, Your answers, and finally, Your gift of salvation. And help us to trust You while we wait. Amen.

