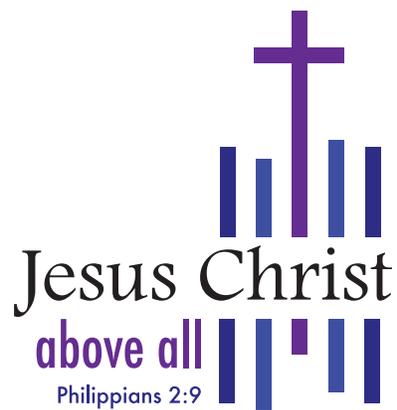


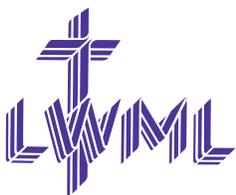
2017-2019

reSOURCEs

for Planning Programs



Two years of monthly ideas :
Icebreakers, Devotions, Bible Studies, Sketches,
Mission Servants Projects, and Mission Grant References



reSOURCEs for Planning Programs **2017-2019**

We hope you will find this planner to be helpful. The monthly structure for this biennium includes

- a theme and Bible verse;
- an icebreaker suggestion;
- in most cases, an opening and closing short devotion chosen from the many existing Mustard Seed devotions; in many cases the alternative of a new devotion;
- some new sketches;
- a suggested Mission Servants project;
- reference to the abundance of material on the website for each Mission Grant for the biennium;
- October and November 2017 emphasis on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, including Bible studies. **For other months, in an effort to encourage the use of new available resources, users of the planner will select a Bible study from the current issue of the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*.**

The beginning of each planner resource will tell you if something is needed – Bibles, musical accompaniment, etc. Its main purpose is to give you, as a leader, assistance in providing interesting, Spirit-filled, meaningful, and productive programs in a timely manner. The hope is that you, the user, and those with whom you share this material, will be enabled to focus on what is important to LWML – spiritual growth, service to others, fellowship with LWML sisters, and spreading the Word personally and through mission projects supported by mites. And – **“THE TIME IS NOW”** to engage additional women in your congregation in these goals!

Additional resources you will find:

- pages on *Planning Purposeful Programs* and *Program Planning*, and a *Basic Meeting Program* outline;
- the LWML Mission Statement and Pledge and three LWML Songs – *Lutheran Women One and All*, *Serve the Lord with Gladness*, and *Praise, Love, Serve*;
- two new mite devotions on pages 147-148;
- numbered pages; resources – except Bible studies – indexed chronologically on pages 149-151.

How you can use this planner effectively:

- Keep *reSOURCEs* in a three-ring binder; share it with the next leaders.
- Review the entire planner to become familiar with the contents.
- Use the resources during the month listed or when they best fit your program needs.
- Choose all or part of a monthly suggestion, depending on your objectives and time available.
- Determine theme, target group, and objectives for your meeting or event.
- Complete a *Program Planning Page* on page 5 for each meeting or event and make copies of the completed page for your committee.
- Use in combination with *Planning Purposeful Programs* and *Basic Meeting Program* on pages 4 and 7.
- Implement your plan; review the result using the Response Card on page 6.
- Don't forget that trying something new can be a good thing!

Planning Purposeful Programs

We all like to do our best when planning a program. When planning your program, please keep in mind the following:

■ **PRAY.** Always begin with prayer. Prayer was an important part of the work of the Christian Resources Editors Committee as these program materials were assembled. Asking the Lord for His guidance and direction as you plan your program will help assure that His purpose for your group will be the focus as you proceed.

■ **PREPARE.** Interesting, Spirit-filled, meaningful, and productive programs don't just happen! They take preparation. Ask yourself: "What is our purpose for this program?" Consider the women who will be attending. Consider new women whom you would like to engage. Remember, an event is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.

■ **SET GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** Assemble your board, team, or committee to set goals and objectives complementary to the mission of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. Then select activities to meet these goals and objectives. Use a variety of approaches. This resource will assist you. Balance in-reach and outreach. Develop a timeline to ensure planning is completed.

■ **SELECT AND INSTRUCT NECESSARY PERSONNEL.** Determine the personnel needed and then choose women to lead the various program components, according to their talents and gifts. Provide them with a job description if appropriate. Remember that vague instructions frustrate people. Choose leaders far enough in advance so preparation can occur. Train them, if necessary. Pair newer members with more experienced leaders to help them grow in their leadership skills. Invite women who do not normally volunteer and perhaps uncover previously undiscovered talents. Let your team sense your commitment to the job at hand. Communicate enthusiasm and encouragement!

■ **PUBLICIZE.** In order to participate, women must know when and where an event will occur. Use all means available to publicize upcoming events including your church website, posters, bulletin announcements, email, social media, texting, and, most importantly, invitations in person or by phone. Start early!

■ **PRACTICE HOSPITALITY.** Acts of hospitality gain members! Help make participants feel welcome and included with special touches such as name tags, ice breaker activities, door prizes, group participation activities, and refreshments. Allow and encourage women to use their gifts in ministry in their group, church, community, and the world.

■ **FOLLOW-UP.** A response card is beneficial for feedback and follow-up after an event. It helps you to evaluate the event, and it gives an opportunity to tell those who attended "what's next?" Response cards should include open-ended responses such as: "A highlight of this event was ..."; "An idea for a future event is ..."; "I would like to help with ..." Be sure to include space for contact information – responder's name, address, phone number, email address, or whatever you need – especially if you have new attendees. See a sample on page 6.

Program Planning Page

Program Date/Time _____ Planning Meeting Date _____

Theme _____

Target Participants _____

Objective _____

Icebreaker _____ Leader _____

Devotion _____ Leader _____

Music _____ Leader _____

Bible Study _____ Leader _____

Speaker _____ Topic _____

Sketch/Panel/Etc. _____

Participants _____

Mission Grants/Mite Box Devotion _____ Leader _____

Unfinished/New Business _____

Announcements _____

Closing Devotion _____ Leader _____

Mission Servant Project _____

Refreshment Committee _____

Special Projects _____

Zone Event: Date _____ Place _____

Our Responsibilities _____

District Event: Date _____ Place _____

RESPONSE CARD

Name of the event: _____

A highlight of this event was: _____

An idea for a future event is: _____

I would like to help with: _____

Your name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

RESPONSE CARD

Name of the event: _____

A highlight of this event was: _____

An idea for a future event is: _____

I would like to help with: _____

Your name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Basic Meeting Program

Agenda refers to business items at a meeting. Program may include speakers, etc. The president should begin the meeting on time and determine whether a quorum is present.

1. **Call to Order** (One tap of the gavel.)
“The meeting will please come to order.” President welcomes and introduces guests.
2. **Opening Devotion and/or Bible Study**
3. **Roll Call** (optional)
4. **Reading and Approval of Minutes**
“The secretary will read the minutes of the last (or September, etc.) meeting.” (Secretary stands and reads.) “Are there any corrections to the minutes? (Pause.) If not, they stand approved as read.” If there are corrections, they are usually accepted by general consent (everyone in agreement, but no formal vote taken), and the president then declares, “The minutes stand approved as corrected.” The secretary may read any correspondence.
5. **Financial Statement**
“We will now have the treasurer’s report.” OR “The treasurer will give the financial statement.” (Treasurer stands and reads. The treasurer need only state the beginning balance, the receipts, the disbursements, and the ending balance.) “Are there any questions for the treasurer? (Pause.) The report will be filed.”
6. **Reports of Other Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees**
Report in the order listed in the bylaws, the president reporting first.
7. **Unfinished Business/General Orders**
Unfinished business is business brought over from a previous meeting because adjournment occurred before the agenda was completed. General orders are items that were postponed to the present meeting for action.
8. **New Business**
“Is there any new business?” The president introduces new items of business requiring action. Members may also make motions as long as no other question is pending. Out of courtesy, a member should notify the president if she intends to present an item of new business. The President may ask, “Is there any further new business?”
9. **Announcements** (placed here or after the program)
The president reads from a prepared list, including the time, date, and location of the next meeting and then asks, “Are there **any** further announcements?”
10. **Program**
The program is usually presented before the meeting is adjourned. Some groups have the program before the business portion of the meeting. The president says, “The program chairman will present the program (speaker).” At its conclusion, the program chairman states, “Madam Chairman, that concludes our program.” The president thanks the chairman and the speaker. She then guides the assembly to the next **item of** business.
11. **Adjournment**
There may be a formal motion to adjourn but it is not required. The president may ask, “Is there any further business? (Pause.) Since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned.” (Single tap of the gavel.)
12. **Closing Prayer/Hymn**

Additional information at www.lwml.org/bylaws-and-meeting-helps.

Calendar and Themes for September 2017 – August 2019

The page numbers listed after the monthly theme correspond to the numbers found at the bottom of each page. If no Bible translation is indicated, the English Standard Version (ESV) was used.

Two Mustard Seed devotions which relate to the monthly theme are included to be used at the program's/meeting's opening and closing for most months. Approximately half of the months include a new devotion option. In order to promote the coordinated use of available LWML resources, Bible studies for this biennium are to be used from the current issue of the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, except for two special occasions.

The Mission Servant Projects are based on the four E's – Engage, Encourage, Equip, and Enjoy. Selection of the 2017-2019 LWML Mission Grants takes place at the 2017 LWML Convention. Please see the LWML website each month for the featured Mission Grant project and resources.

SEPTEMBER 2017	JESUS CHRIST ABOVE ALL pp. 19-21
Theme Bible Verse	<i>The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad</i> (Psalm 126:3).
Icebreaker	Greatest Thing – What is the greatest thing anyone has ever done for you?
Devotion – Opening	Living in the Spirit ... Gives Me Joy
Devotion – Closing	Rock Solid
Devotion – New	Jesus Christ Above All
Bible Study	Select from the <i>Lutheran Woman's Quarterly</i> , Fall 2017. If copies of the printed <i>Quarterly</i> do not arrive in time for the society's meeting, consult the LWML website to download the online version of one of the Bible studies from that corresponding <i>Quarterly</i> magazine.
Mission Servants Project	ENJOY the great things God is doing among the women in your congregation by composing a special prayer of joy that lists various ways God is working in their lives. Pray this prayer at a society meeting, ask your pastor to include it in prayers during a church service, and/or print it in your church newsletter.
Mission Grant #, Resources (www.lwml.org/mission-grants)	

OCTOBER 2017	STANDS FOREVER pp. 23-46 (500th Anniversary of the Reformation)
Theme Bible Verse	<i>"The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever"</i> (1 Peter 1:24b-25a).
Icebreaker	Forever – Name something that you think will last a lifetime.
Devotion – New	The Forever Word
Devotion – Closing	Pure Praise
Bible Study – New	From Fear to Faith + The Reformation Story
Bible Study	Select from the <i>Lutheran Woman's Quarterly</i> , Fall 2017.
Sketch – New	A Chat with Katharine von Bora

Mission Servants Project **ENCOURAGE** women to think of their favorite Bible verse and share it at the end of emails, on their Facebook page, as a header on their personal stationery, or as a reference after signing their name at the ends of notes and other correspondence.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

NOVEMBER 2017 **BE READY** pp. 47-58
(500th Anniversary of the Reformation)

Theme Bible Verse *But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15-16a).*

Icebreaker **Be Prepared** – If you put together a “faith preparedness” kit, what would be in it?

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Bible Study – New

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

Be Ready

An Unchanging God

Blessed to be a Blessing

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Fall 2017.

EQUIP women to be ready to share with others the message of salvation in Jesus by hosting a witness workshop. Check out LWML online witnessing tools and resources to guide your event.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

DECEMBER 2017 **GOD'S GIFT** pp. 59-63

Theme Bible Verse *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:11-12).*

Ice Breaker **All I Want for Christmas** – What is the best Christmas gift you remember receiving as a child?

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Bible Study

Away in a Manager

Living in the Spirit ... Is God's Gift

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Winter 2017. If copies of the printed *Quarterly* do not arrive in time for the society's meeting, consult the LWML website to download the online version of one of the Bible studies from that corresponding *Quarterly* magazine.

Sketch – New

Mission Servants Project

It's a Boy!

ENJOY sharing God's gift of Jesus with a gift collection for a ministry in your area. If possible, include with each gift a printed copy of Luke 2:1-20 in a decorated envelope.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

JANUARY 2018

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

*(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)***NEW CREATIONS**

pp. 65-66

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

You've Got Talent – If you could choose a new talent or skill, what would it be?

Count Him In**Simple Trust (Make Us Whole)**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Winter 2017.

ENGAGE in a project that repairs or renews something in your church building. Paint a wall or room, construct a new bulletin board that will feature a different Bible verse each month, restock a Sunday school supply cabinet, or ...

FEBRUARY 2018

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Devotion – New

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

*(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)***GOD'S FAMILY**

pp. 67-70

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are (1 John 3:1a).

Memories – Share your favorite family story or memory.

Remembering Whose We Are**Faith****God's Family**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Winter 2017.

ENCOURAGE your church family to join in a game night. As you come together as God's children, include an opening devotion based on 1 John 3:1a, board games, group games, a time of singing, and some snacks.

MARCH 2018

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – New

Devotion – Closing

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

A SPOT OF GREEN

pp. 71-72

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures (Psalm 23:1-2a).

It's Good to be Green – How do you waste energy, and how do you replenish your vitality?

Green Pastures**A Spot of Green**

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Spring 2018. If copies of the printed *Quarterly* do not arrive in time for the society's meeting, consult the LWML website to download the online version of one of the Bible studies from that corresponding *Quarterly* magazine.

EQUIP the homebound members of your congregation by giving each person a small potted green plant to remind him or her of God's care. When you deliver the plant, share one of this month's devotions, "Green Pastures" or "A Spot of Green,"

and offer a prayer of thanks for God's continued care in their lives.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

APRIL 2018

Theme Bible Verse

HE LIVES/WE LIVE

pp.73-76

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another"
(Job 19:25-27a).

Ice Breaker

Face to Face – How do you imagine you will act and feel when you see Jesus face to face?

Devotion – Opening

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Devotion – Closing

Faith Is ... Living Life as a Procession of Triumph

Devotion – New

He Lives/We Live

Bible Study

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Spring 2018.

Mission Servants Project

ENJOY the glorious resurrection victory we have in Jesus with "victory ribbons." Cut 1-inch by 8-inch lengths of smooth white ribbon. Use a permanent gold metallic marker to write "VICTORY" on each one. Hand out the ribbons as people arrive for Easter services to remind them we have victory over sin, death, and Satan because of Jesus' death and resurrection for us.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

MAY 2018

Theme Bible Verse

BE FAITHFUL

pp. 77-78

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life
(Revelation 2:10b).

Ice Breaker

Faithful – What does "faithful" look like to you?

Devotion – New

Be Faithful

Devotion – Closing

Living in the Spirit ... I Receive Direction

Bible Study

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Spring 2018.

Mission Servants Project

EQUIP the widows and widowers in your congregation with a visit on the anniversary of their spouse's birthday. Bring a small treat to enjoy, reminisce about the loved one, especially concerning the faithfulness of the individual to Jesus. Pray together and ask for God's continued comfort and strength until they are united with their loved one in heaven.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

JUNE 2018

Theme Bible Verse

OUR FATHER'S CARE

pp. 79-81

You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16).

Ice Breaker

Your Hands – Look at your hands. What do you see? Strong hands, aging hands, or the hands of a servant? Share a time when your hands cared for another.

Devotion – Opening

The Always-Open Hand

Devotion – Closing
 Devotion – New
 Bible Study

**God is in Control
 Our Father’s Care**
 Select from the *Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly*, Summer 2018. If copies of the printed *Quarterly* do not arrive in time for the society’s meeting, consult the LWML website to download the online version of one of the Bible studies from that corresponding *Quarterly* magazine.

Mission Servants Project **ENGAGE** your congregation in a collection of food items for a local food pantry. In the summer months pantry supplies often run low. As God uses our hands here on earth, your collection will help satisfy the physical needs of those in your community.

Mission Grant #, Resources
 (www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

JULY 2018 **FREE INDEED!** pp. 83-84
 Theme Bible Verse *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”*
 (John 8:36).

Ice Breaker **Freedom** – When did you first realize how blessed you are to live with the freedom to share Jesus?

Devotion – Opening **Joy in Christian Freedom**
 Devotion – Closing **Living in the Spirit ... Means Freedom**
 Bible Study Select from the *Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly*, Summer 2018.
 Mission Servants Project **ENJOY** the freedom from sin we have through faith in Jesus by assisting in a neighborhood or community clean-up project. As you work, make the most of opportunities to share with others the joy of the clean hearts we have through faith in Jesus and the freedom we have to live for Him because He has freed us from sin, death, and Satan.

Mission Grant #, Resources
 (www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

AUGUST 2018 **HEAR, LEARN, GROW** pp. 85-91
 Theme Bible Verse *Let the wise hear and increase in learning* (Proverbs 1:5a).
 Ice Breaker **Remembering School** – Did you have a favorite teacher as a child? Share why he/she was your favorite.

Devotion – Opening **God Knows Me**
 Devotion – Closing **Forever a Student**
 Bible Study Select from the *Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly*, Summer 2018.
 Sketch – New **Ready, Set, Grow!**
 Mission Servants Project **EQUIP** preschoolers and pre-readers in your community to hear, learn, and grow in the knowledge of God by planning a story hour on a Saturday before the school year begins. Read out loud several stories from Arch Books or other Concordia Publishing House Bible story resources. Serve a light snack and perhaps plan a craft project that coordinates with the Bible story.

Mission Grant #, Resources
 (www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

SEPTEMBER 2018

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Devotion – New

Bible Study

Sketch – New

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

*(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)***LUTHERAN WOMEN IN MISSION** pp. 93-99*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).***Why LWML?** – What prompted you to become a Lutheran Woman in Mission and to serve the Lord with gladness?**Deborah – Encourager****Dorcas – A Woman of Charity****You Look Like Your Father**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Fall 2018. If copies of the printed *Quarterly* do not arrive in time for the society's meeting, consult the LWML website to download the online version of one of the Bible studies from that corresponding *Quarterly* magazine.**Serve the Lord with Gladness****ENCOURAGE** the volunteers in your congregation with thank you notes. Consider making an extra mite donation in their names (e.g., The Volunteers at Peace Lutheran Church).**OCTOBER 2018**

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Bible Study

Sketch – New

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

*(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)***UNCHANGABLE** pp. 101-103*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).***Change** – What is the best “change” that ever happened in your life?**Light in the Darkness****How Lord ... Can I Cope with Hardships?**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Fall 2018.**Myths of LWML****ENGAGE** your group to provide care giving services to those in your congregation or community who are caregivers for a child with a special physical or developmental need. As safety circumstances allow, give the caregivers an hour or two of free time while you care for their loved one. Pray with the caregivers for God's strength in the situations they face.**NOVEMBER 2018**

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

PRAISE HIM! pp. 105-106*Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; tell of all His wondrous works! (Psalm 105:1-2).***Sing Praises!** – Share your favorite song of praise. What are your favorite words in that song?**Now Thank We All Our God****Total Praise**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Fall 2018.**ENJOY** remembering the wonderful works of God with a “thanksgiving tree.” Secure a large bare tree branch in a pot.

Cut out colorful leaf shapes from construction paper. Punch a hole in the top of each leaf and tie a string so the leaf can be hung from a tree branch. Hand the leaves out at the end of a worship service and ask individuals to write on the leaf a work of God for which they want to thank Him. Hang completed leaves on the tree branch. Ask your pastor to include these joyful prayer thoughts in a Thanksgiving worship service.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

DECEMBER 2018

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening
Devotion – Closing
Devotion – New
Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

THE PERFECT GIFT

pp. 107-110

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).

Best Gift – Christmas is a time for giving and receiving gifts. What is the best gift you have ever given or received?

The Perfect Gift

It's a New Day

God's Perfect Gift

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Winter 2018. If copies of the printed *Quarterly* do not arrive in time for the society's meeting, consult the LWML website to download the online version of one of the Bible studies from that corresponding *Quarterly* magazine.

ENGAGE with nursing home residents by hosting a birthday party for Jesus. Sing carols, read the Christmas story from Luke 2, then ask residents to tell about the best Christmas gift they ever received. Next, read this month's opening devotion, "The Perfect Gift." Serve a birthday cake decorated in Jesus' honor.

JANUARY 2019

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening
Devotion – Closing
Devotion – New
Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

WORKING WITH JOY

pp. 111-114

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31b).

Brings You Joy – Think of what brings you the most joy. Share how that can give glory to God.

Working for His Glory

How, Lord ... Can I Work with Joy?

Working with Joy

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Winter 2018.

EQUIP middle school, junior high, and high school students to see how they can serve God in any career by hosting a career fair during a Sunday school hour. Invite individuals from your congregation and community to tell students about their jobs and how they share Christ and serve Him through their work.

FEBRUARY 2019

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Devotion – New

Bible Study

Sketch – New

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

*(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)***OVERFLOWING LOVE**

pp. 115-123

*And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all (1 Thessalonians 3:12a).***God's love is** – Finish this sentence: To me, God's love is ...**Joy in God's Love****Begin with God ... So We Can Love Others****Abounding in Love**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Winter 2018.**Overflowing Love****ENCOURAGE** your pastor(s) by making valentine cards for him with heart-felt expressions of appreciation for the love he shows and for the love of Christ he shares through sermons, Bible studies, devotions, and visits.**MARCH 2019**

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Devotion – New

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

*(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)***ATONING SACRIFICE**

pp. 125-127

*This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10 NIV).***Sacrifice** – What words come to mind when you hear the word "sacrifice"?**God Loves Me Dearly****Forgiven and Free****Love's Atoning Sacrifice**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Spring 2019. If copies of the printed *Quarterly* do not arrive in time for the society's meeting, consult the LWML website to download the online version of one of the Bible studies from that corresponding *Quarterly* magazine.**ENGAGE** in a time of sacrifice at your monthly meeting. Give a special mite offering or give-up the refreshments you might usually serve.**APRIL 2019**

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

RESURRECTION JOY

pp. 129-130

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).***Easter Traditions** – Share an Easter tradition that focuses on Christ.**Faith is ... Relying on Our Heavenly Father's Grace and Mercy****Simple Trust (No Need to Cheat)**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Spring 2019.**ENJOY** and celebrate the resurrection of our Lord with some Easter caroling. Visit a group or individual homes. Sing Easter

hymns to joyfully proclaim the sure and certain hope we have in Jesus, our risen Savior.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

MAY 2019

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Devotion – New

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

GREATEST LOVE

pp. 131-134

For Your steadfast love is great above the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds (Psalm 108:4).

Greatest Influence – Name one person that has had the greatest influence in your life.

The Joy of Being Loved by God

Kindness

The Greatest Love

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Spring 2019.

ENCOURAGE the police officers and firefighters in your community with cards of thanks for the care they provide. Prepare a meal or some dessert items and drop them off with the cards at your local stations. At your society meeting include a special prayer for God's continued presence with these community servants.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

JUNE 2019

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Devotion – New

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

JOYFUL CELEBRATION

pp. 135-137

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24).

Celebrations – Share a joyful celebration that has happened in your life.

What Day is This?

Noisy Love

Joyful Celebration

Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Summer 2019. If copies of the printed *Quarterly* do not arrive in time for the society's meeting, consult the LWML website to download the online version of one of the Bible studies from that corresponding *Quarterly* magazine.

ENGAGE your congregation and community with a "Celebration Day" festival. Choose any Saturday you like and plan a number of activities that praise God for His love, His salvation, His creation, and for all that He does for us. Include games, snacks, perhaps a Bible story puppet show, and be sure to include an area where this month's opening devotion, "What Day Is This?" can be presented. To maximize your message, try to plan your celebration in a local park where families gather for ballgames or other activities.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

JULY 2019

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

*(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)***PEACEFUL REST**

pp. 139-140

*For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from Him (Psalm 62:5).***Peace and Quiet** – What relaxing activity do you enjoy after a long and stressful day?**The Restless Soul****Peaceful Rest**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Summer 2019.**EQUIP** the women in your congregation with a variety of LWML resources to help them carry out quiet times with the Lord. Select and purchase LWML resources such as Mustard Seed packets, "A Sparrow's Worth" devotional journal, and "God's Grace for Growth" flip calendar. String a hammock in a prominent place in your church and place the items in it for women to take and use. Label the hammock, "Resources for Peaceful Rest."**AUGUST 2019**

Theme Bible Verse

Ice Breaker

Devotion – Opening

Devotion – Closing

Devotion – New

Bible Study

Mission Servants Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

*(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)***JOY IN THE JOURNEY**

pp. 141-143

*Set your minds on things that are above (Colossians 3:2a).***Travels** – If you could travel anywhere, where would you go?**Faith is ... Setting Our Minds on Things Eternal****Simple Trust (The End is Just the Beginning)****Journey**Select from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, Summer 2019.**ENCOURAGE** women on their personal faith walk by hosting a "Joy in the Journey" salad luncheon or supper. Provide babysitting for women with young children. Ask several women from your society to share some experiences from their own faith walks. Use one of the devotions for this month. Pray for one another's needs.



Living in the Spirit ... Gives Me Joy

Opening Devotion

But the fruit of the Spirit is ... joy (Galatians 5:22).

Vacations. Vacation homes. Jobs. Better jobs. TVs. Bigger TVs. Parties. More parties. Shopping, shopping, shopping. Boats. Cars, etc., etc. The list of things we think will bring us joy is endless. But the time, energy, and money spent on the pursuit of happiness are wasted because the material things we want today are not a source of everlasting joy. They will not bring comfort when troubles or sorrows enter our lives.

True joy comes to us as the Holy Spirit leads us into living with Jesus Christ. Through Him we have the precious gift of eternal life. Knowing this helps us to walk through the dark times into the Light of Christ's love. The things of life are only temporary but God's promises will last forever. Joy is God caring for us. *The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy (Psalm 126:3 NIV).*

Let us shout with loud voices, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!" Jesus has come to give us this message: *"For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day"* (John 6:40).

Prayer: Lord, what comfort we have knowing the pursuit of spiritual things will never be time wasted. Thank You for the joy You have put in our lives through Your Spirit and Your Son. In His name. Amen.

Living in the Spirit ... Gives Me Joy
Mustard Seed: Living in the Spirit, 22/30
Written by 2005-2007 Mustard Seeds Task Force
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Rock Solid

Closing Devotion

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
(Psalm 95:1)

Jesus ends His Sermon on the Mount with the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24-29). He likens those who hear His Word and obey it to the man who built his house on the rock. When battered by wind and rain, it stood firm because it had a solid foundation.

The foolish man was compared to those who hear Christ's Words and choose not to obey them. This man's house, built on the sand, was also battered by wind and rain. Having no foundation, it fell flat!

We, like the houses in Christ's parable, also need a strong foundation. Learning, believing, and putting into practice the message of the Bible gives us the substance we need to withstand the storms of life. Through God's gift of His Holy Spirit, we are able to put our full confidence in Jesus Christ, our Rock, our Lord, and our Savior. When the winds and rains of life come our way – as surely they will – we will still be standing solid. God will see to that!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we forever boldly proclaim "On Christ the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand." In His redeeming name we pray. Amen.

Rock Solid
Mustard Seed: Comfort from the Psalms, 20/30
Hymn Text: LSB 575
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Jesus Christ Above All

Devotion

The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad (Psalm 126:3).

I was a teacher in the United States and wanted to do mission work during the summers when I was not teaching. My first trip was planned. I was very excited about it. I was excited to see another country and to find out what it was like to be a missionary. The trip was a week long. We flew to Guatemala, then traveled around the country to see the work done by Wycliffe Bible Translators.

While there, I felt God impress upon my heart the importance of teachers for missionary kids (MKs). Some families have to leave the mission field and return to the U.S. because there is no one to teach their children. I didn't want that to happen. I knew I could do something to help those MKs, but I did not want to leave my home. During the few remaining days there I prayed that if God really wanted me to go, He would make me want to go. I was in crisis wanting my own way. I needed His help to let go of what I wanted to make room for the blessings God wanted to give me. *For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too (2 Corinthians 1:5).*

By the power of the Holy Spirit, in faith I put Christ above all else. By the time my plane landed in the United States, I wanted to go back. Two years later when I arrived in Guatemala to teach at a school for MKs, I could see that God had gone before me and prepared a way and a home for me in a foreign land. There were many details I saw that He took care of before I had even thought of coming to Guatemala. I found out that two years before I arrived others had been praying for someone to come. I saw the blessings God wanted to give me. *The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad (Psalm 126:3).*

As the months passed if I had a concern or worry that came up, I thought, "Hasn't God already met so many of my needs? Won't He take care of this need as well?" When I remembered the great things He did for me in the past, it was easier to trust Him for the present and the future. *"I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope" (Acts 2:25b-26).*

Is God nudging you to do something out of your comfort zone? Recall times in your past when He has taken care of you as you stepped out in faith to do something in His name. God promises, *"... I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5b).*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for always being with us. For Jesus' sake, forgive us for the times we have stubbornly tried to do things on our own and in our own way. Open our hearts so that we may see Your good and perfect will for our lives. Help us to follow You and to see all the blessings You work in our lives in every situation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Jesus Christ Above All
Written by Jill Kohlert, Ashton, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



The Forever Word

Devotion

[Please provide: if singing the hymn, musical accompaniment and hymnals or copies of page two for attendees.]

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever
(Isaiah 40:8).

“Forever” is a big word, isn’t it? It defies our human understanding because our human perspective often thinks in limited and timely terms about years, days, and hours. In our minds, most everything perishes, withers, and fades. However, the prophet Isaiah uses the word “forever” in connection with the Word of God.

We know that our Savior – the Word of God – was sent into the time of this world to live a perfect life, suffer, and die to bear the punishment for our sins and the sins of all. John 1:1 and 14 remind us: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* The wonderful hope our saving Lord gives is that He did not stay dead, but rose to eternal life, so that we might also live forever with Him in heaven.

We are reminded once again in 1 Peter that ... *you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ... And this word is the good news that was preached to you* (1 Peter 1:23, 25b). God nurtures the faith of His children throughout our years through the Word of God, the forever Word that the Holy Spirit uses to enlighten and sanctify His own. The Word reveals our sinfulness and the realization that we need our Savior. The Word reveals God’s plan of salvation for us in and through His Son. This Good News of salvation in its truth and purity has been taught to us through the generations.

As we reflect on the past, we see that the Lord has blessed the preaching of His Word. He has sent leaders in our church to teach us and to remind us not to “... despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, Meaning to The Third Commandment). He has guided the teaching of His Word throughout the years and kept His Church in the one, true faith.

What could be your response to these blessings from God? Identify those teachers of God’s Word in your life. Praise and thank God for them and for all those leaders and martyrs throughout the years who have preached the forever Word of God. Share the Good News of salvation with those around you. Encourage your pastors and teachers of God’s Word. Read and inwardly digest God’s Word daily, and thank Him for all He has done.

Yes, God promises that ... *the word of our God will stand forever* (Isaiah 40:8b). We believe by faith in this forever promise. We look forward with hope to our forever home in heaven with our Lord and Savior. We rejoice in God’s Word ... forever!

Closing Prayer: Pray together or sing "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage" LSB 582, TLH 283, LW 333.

God's Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way,
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations.

Faith Talk: Share with a partner or the entire group about those men and women who have been instrumental in your faith life as pastors or teachers of God's Word. Thank God specifically right now for those special people.

The Forever Word
Written by Shari Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Pure Praise

Closing Devotion

... judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time, each will receive his praise from God (1 Corinthians 4:5 NIV).

Paul's instruction to Corinthian believers gave them a practical way to maintain a strong and healthy relationship with their pastor. His advice applies equally well to relationships among all God's people.

Our Lord, the ultimate judge of all words and actions, has inside information. Inside the heart, that is. He sees the motivation behind words and actions. We cannot, so we judge by appearances. In judging, He uses the right measurement – His Word – while we let opinions, preferences, and feelings determine how we view the behavior of ourselves and others. In addition, God judges with His eyes on eternity. We judge focused on today's circumstances and the insight of current thinking.

At the appointed time, God will judge. Let Him find His people attentive to His will and His Word, examining themselves by the light of Scripture. Let Him find us mindful of our motives as we praise Him and serve each other. At the appointed time let Him find us faithful.

Prayer: Grant us the gift of purity of heart and soul and mind; Then when You come in triumph, Lord, faithful servants find. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Pure Praise
Mustard Seed: Living in Praise, 22/32
Written by Patricia Mitchell
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



From Fear to Faith + The Reformation Story

Bible Study

[Please provide: if singing, musical accompaniment; Bibles and copies of the first seven pages of the Bible study for attendees; a copy of pages 8-15 for the leader.]

On October 31, 2008, the world began a decade-long celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Germany in 1517. The pinnacle of the celebration will be Reformation Day, 2017, celebrated worldwide with ecclesiastical and cultural events, conferences, and large exhibitions.

In this Bible study let us turn to God's Word and the history books to learn about Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, and, especially, about Jesus Christ and the value of the Reformation for our lives today! Let's celebrate!

Opening Prayer

We praise You and adore You, O God, for Your overwhelming grace for us in Jesus Christ, made known to us in Your Holy Word, that we may, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit, believe in Jesus and be saved. Bless our study of the Reformation and of Your servant Martin Luther this day, and give us joy as we celebrate Your working in our lives. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Fear

The people were afraid.

There was the fear of purgatory, for the church taught that after death virtually every Christian went to purgatory on account of his or her sins. The sufferings of purgatory, they were told, were as intense as those of hell, except that they were not of eternal duration. Remission of time in purgatory could be obtained by indulgences granted for good works, pilgrimages, fasting, and prayers.

There was the fear of the priest, for the priest had power over the souls of people. He taught the law with all its fierce wrath and anger. He could grant forgiveness of sins or withhold it. He was the channel of sacramental grace: to be denied the sacraments was to be denied salvation. So the priest held a position of enormous power over peoples' souls.

There was also the fear of Christ, for at that time our Lord was depicted chiefly as a terrible judge, not a compassionate Savior. The way to find mercy at the hands of Christ, people were told, was to pray to Mary; she would intercede with her Son for sinners. So Mary was called the Refuge of Sinners.

All this fear was the result of ignorance: ignorance of the Bible. The Bible was a closed book to priest and people alike. Many priests did even not know the Lord's Prayer or the Ten Commandments or where in the Bible to find them, and so could not teach the people. Instead they preached about the legends of the saints and the duties of the people to the church.

Into this extremely tense world, Martin Luther (originally “Martin Luder”) was born on November 10, 1483. Luther, too, was afraid. He struggled with the awareness of his sinful nature. He only saw an angry and condemning God. He could not believe that God loved him or that he could love God enough to save himself or deserve God’s forgiveness. He thought that, perhaps, if he could inflict enough pain on himself, he could become worthy. He worked to save his own soul by being sorry, constant penances, and trying to literally beat the “Hell” out of himself, all to no avail.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

Consider these Bible passages:

Mark 12:30-31: “‘ ... love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘ ... love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Galatians 3:10: *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”*

Romans 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death ...*

Left by ourselves, do we have reason to be afraid?

Do you know anyone who is really afraid of God? Why are they afraid?

Holy Scripture

Terrorized by fear, in the summer of 1505, during a lightning storm, Martin Luther pledged to become a monk. Luther called himself “a monk without reproach,” and went about his monastic duties at the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, Germany, with a fervor to make things right between himself and God, but he could not. Finding no merit and no relief in his own efforts, Luther turned to the Word of God. He studied, then taught, then preached God’s Word. There he found the answers and the peace he was seeking. In fact, Luther said he felt as if the gates of paradise had opened for him when he made life-changing discoveries in God’s Word.

On October 31, 1517, when Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the Castle door in Wittenberg calling for theological debate, he did not set out to found a new church or denomination. His hope was to reform the Roman Catholic Church of its errors and to help return the church to the true Word of God.

In April of 1521 at the Diet of Worms, when Luther was called to recant or take back his writings, he reaffirmed his belief in the unending value of Holy Scripture for doctrine and for life. He said:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason ... I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of

God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen (trans. Roger A. Hornsby, *Luther's Works*, eds. George W. Forell and Helmut T. Lehmann, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958, 32:112).

For many months in exile at Wartburg castle, under the care of Frederick the Wise, the ruler of Saxony, Luther busied himself translating the New Testament into German so that the people could study God's Word in their own language. Before he died on February 18, 1546, Luther completed his German translation of the Bible.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

A key Reformation concept is that the Bible is God's inerrant and infallible Word, in which He reveals His Law and His Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the only rule and norm for Christian teaching.

Read these passages and talk about what each one tells us about the power and effect of God's Word:

John 8:31-32

2 Timothy 3:16-17

1 Peter 1:24b-25a

Romans 1:16

In a sentence (or maybe two), what does the Reformation concept *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) mean to you?

Martin Luther expressed the power of Holy Scripture over fear in his "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" this way:

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us
We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

LSB 656, verse 3, TLH 262, LW 298

Grace

"**G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense" and "giving us more than we deserve" are simple ways that some use to define God's grace.

Through Luther's study of Holy Scripture, he learned that being declared "just" and "right" before God, and receiving forgiveness and life and salvation, were not the result of man's works or efforts. They were not earned or deserved by "poor, miserable sinners" who were "dead in their trespasses and sins."

Luther wrote, in his explanation to the second article of the Apostles' Creed, "... Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person ... not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death ... "
(*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*).

Another key Reformation principle is that only because of His grace, does God love and forgive the people of the world, even though they are sinful, rebel against Him, and do not deserve His forgiveness or His love. He sent Jesus, His Son, to love the unlovable and save the ungodly.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

Read these passages and talk about what each one tells us about the amazing grace of our God:

Ephesians 1:7

Ephesians 2:8-9

Romans 5:8

Give an example from earthly life to help those in your group better understand God giving a free gift, no strings attached, by grace.

In a sentence (or maybe two), what does the Reformation concept *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone) mean to you?

Faith

Faith has been described as the hand that receives the gifts of God. Faith itself is a gift from God, created and fostered in us through Word and Sacrament, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit.

A third Reformation teaching is that only by faith in Jesus Christ, by trusting in God's promises, not our own efforts, do we receive God's justification (His declaration that we are sin-free). Our faith, which is also God's gift, is the hand by which we take hold of the promises of God.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

Read the following passages and discuss how by faith we receive what God promises:

Romans 5:1-2

Romans 3:21-25a

In a sentence (or maybe two), what does the Reformation concept *Sola Fide* (by faith alone) mean to you?

Reformation Responses

When Martin Luther made his “great discovery,” he said, “Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through gates that had been flung open. The whole of Scripture gained a new meaning. And from that point on the phrase the ‘justice of God’ no longer filled me with hatred, but rather became unspeakably sweet by virtue of a great love” (*The Story of Christianity*, Justo L. Gonzalez, New York: Harper One, Harper Collins Publishers, 2010, 2:25).

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

In a sentence (or maybe two) what does it mean to you to know from God’s Word that you are saved by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, your Savior and Lord?

Reformation Today

Reformation Day 2017 will be the highlight of the Luther decade, but it will not be the end of our encounter with Luther’s life and efforts or with God’s reforming, transforming work in the hearts and lives of His people and in His Church.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

What reformation still needs to be done in our world, in the Christian Church, in your heart and life?

Perhaps these passages will be helpful in your discussion:

Ephesians 6:13-18

Acts 1:8

Psalm 51:10-12

What good news do you have to share with others that God can use to move them from fear to faith?

Conclusion

When Teddy was three years old he loved Halloween with all the excitement and the children. But he was not quite old enough to go trick-or-treating out on the streets, so he would stay home with his parents and help with the candy when the children in costume came to their door.

One time the door-bell rang, and Teddy ran to the door to open it before his mother or father could reach it. There, outside the door, were three of the scariest creatures Teddy had ever seen. He screamed a blood-curdling scream which alerted his dad who came right to his side.

When Dad stood at the door beside him, even with the goolies on the other side of the door, little Teddy was not afraid. One who loved him and cared for him was with him. Teddy knew that his dad was bigger than anything on the other side of the door and that nothing would happen to him as long as Dad was with him.

The message of the Reformation is that God, our Refuge and Strength, our ever-present Help in trouble, is bigger. No matter what is going on outside our door, He is bigger. He is bigger than our sin, big enough to deal with it by forgiving it. He is bigger than death, big enough to deal with it by giving us life. Big enough to hold us by our feeble, trembling hands and set us free, free from fear, by His grace to be His people of faith!

Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for moving us from fear to faith by Your grace through Your powerful Word! Continue to reform us as You forgive our sins for we fall short and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to keep growing in the true faith, and then to stand, against all odds, on the firm foundation of Holy Scripture! Bless Your Church and all who preach and teach and lead and hear and serve and believe, that we may tell the good news about Jesus to everyone, everywhere, at every opportunity that You provide, that hearing, they, too, may believe in Jesus, our Savior! In His name we pray. Amen.

“A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

Stand up, sing, hum, read, meditate on Luther’s “Battle Hymn of the Reformation” (based on Psalm 46) and celebrate with the world God’s work, proclaimed in His Word, saving us, by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ! Rejoice in God’s mercy that in Christ there is no need to be afraid, for by His mighty power He has moved us from fear to faith!

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

1. A mighty fortress is our God, A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need That hath us now o'ertaken.
The old evil foe Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

2. With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is,
Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.

4. The Word they still shall let remain Nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain With His good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife,
Though these all be gone, Our vict'ry has been won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

LSB 656, verses 1, 2, 4, TLH 262, LW 298

From Fear to Faith + The Reformation Story
Written by Rev. Larry Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



From Fear to Faith + The Reformation Story

Leader's Guide
Bible Study

On October 31, 2008, the world began a decade-long celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Germany in 1517. The pinnacle of the celebration will be Reformation Day, 2017, celebrated worldwide with ecclesiastical and cultural events, conferences, and large exhibitions.

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There was the fear of purgatory, for the church taught that after death virtually every Christian went to purgatory on account of his or her sins. The sufferings of purgatory, they were told, were as intense as those of hell, except that they were not of eternal duration. Remission of time in purgatory could be obtained by indulgences granted for good works, pilgrimages, fasting, and prayers.

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nature. He only saw an angry and condemning God. He could not believe that God loved him or that he could love God enough to save himself or deserve God's forgiveness. He thought that, perhaps, if he could inflict enough pain on himself, he could become worthy. He worked to save his own soul by being sorry, constant penances, and trying to literally beat the "Hell" out of himself, all to no avail.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

Consider these Bible passages:

Mark 12:30-31 “ ... love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘... love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Galatians 3:10 *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”*

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death ...*

Left by ourselves, do we have reason to be afraid? – Yes! To face a just God with only our own “righteousness” would be a frightening thing.

Do you know anyone who is really afraid of God? Why are they afraid? – Answers may vary. Some may say that the reason they are afraid is that they do not know the love of God for us in Jesus.

Holy Scripture

Terrorized by fear, in the summer of 1505, during a lightning storm, Martin Luther pledged to become a monk. Luther called himself “a monk without reproach,” and went about his monastic duties at the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, Germany, with a fervor to make things right between himself and God, but he could not. Finding no merit and no relief in his own efforts, Luther turned to the Word of God. He studied, then taught, then preached God's Word. There he found the answers and the peace he was seeking. In fact, Luther said he felt as if the gates of paradise had opened for him when he made life-changing discoveries in God's Word.

On October 31, 1517, when Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the Castle door in Wittenberg calling for theological debate, he did not set out to found a new church or denomination. His hope was to reform the Roman Catholic Church of its errors and to help return the church to the true Word of God.

In April of 1521 at the Diet of Worms, when Luther was called to recant or take back his writings, he reaffirmed his belief in the unending value of Holy Scripture for doctrine and for life. He said:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason ... I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of

God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen (trans. Roger A. Hornsby, *Luther's Works*, eds. George W. Forell and Helmut T. Lehmann, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958, 32:112).

For many months in exile at Wartburg castle, under the care of Frederick the Wise, the ruler of Saxony, Luther busied himself translating the New Testament into German so that the people could study God's Word in their own language. Before he died on February 18, 1546, Luther completed his German translation of the Bible.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

A key Reformation concept is that the Bible is God's inerrant and infallible Word, in which He reveals His Law and His Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the only rule and norm for Christian teaching.

Read these passages and talk about what each one tells us about the power and effect of God's Word:

John 8:31-32 *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*
– God's Word has the power to set people free, and does!

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* – The Word is inspired by God; His gift to us; valuable for teaching and equipping His people.

1 Peter 1:24b-25a *"The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever."* – God's Word and the truth expressed in it lasts ... forever!

Romans 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* – God saves through His Word!

In a sentence (or maybe two), what does the Reformation concept *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) mean to you? – Answers will vary. God's Word alone is the source and foundation for what the Church teaches and what I believe.

Martin Luther expressed the power of Holy Scripture over fear in his "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" this way:

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

LSB 656, verse 3, TLH 262, LW 298

Grace

“**G**od’s **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist’s **E**xpense” and “giving us more than we deserve” are simple ways that some use to define God’s grace.

Through Luther’s study of Holy Scripture, he learned that being declared “just” and “right” before God, and receiving forgiveness and life and salvation, were not the result of man’s works or efforts. They were not earned or deserved by “poor, miserable sinners” who were “dead in their trespasses and sins.”

Luther wrote, in his explanation to the second article of the Apostles’ Creed, “ ... Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person ... not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death ... ”
(*Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*).

Another key Reformation principle is that only because of His grace, does God love and forgive the people of the world, even though they are sinful, rebel against Him, and do not deserve His forgiveness or His love. He sent Jesus, His Son, to love the unlovable and save the ungodly.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

Read these passages and talk about what each one tells us about the amazing grace of our God:

Ephesians 1:7 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ...* – Because of God’s free gift of grace we have forgiveness and salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* – Not our own works or merit, but God’s grace!

Romans 5:8 *... God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* – Simply amazing!

Give an example from earthly life to help those in your group to better understand God giving a free gift, no strings attached, by grace. – Answers may vary. Flowers on any old day. A note in a child’s lunch bucket to remind her how special she is. A huge pay raise, just because we could.

In a sentence (or maybe two), what does the Reformation concept *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone) mean to you? – Answers may vary. Forgiveness and life and salvation as a free gift of God through Jesus alone. I have hope, peace, and joy because of God’s free gift of grace!

Faith

Faith has been described as the hand that receives the gifts of God. Faith itself is a gift from God, created and fostered in us through Word and Sacrament, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit.

A third Reformation teaching is that only by faith in Jesus Christ, by trusting in God's promises, not our own efforts, do we receive God's justification (His declaration that we are sin-free). Our faith, which is also God's gift, is the hand by which we take hold of the promises of God.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

Read the following passages and discuss how by faith we receive what God promises:

Romans 5:1-2 *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* – Believing God's promises we receive justification and peace, God's grace and hope.

Romans 3:21-25a *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.* – Although, because of our sin, we do not deserve His gifts, believing God's promises we are justified and receive God's righteousness through Jesus and what He has done for us and our salvation.

In a sentence (or maybe two), what does the Reformation concept *Sola Fide* (by faith alone) mean to you? – Answers may vary. Believing God's promises we receive what He promises.

Reformation Responses

When Martin Luther made his "great discovery," he said, "Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through gates that had been flung open. The whole of Scripture gained a new meaning. And from that point on the phrase the 'justice of God' no longer filled me with hatred, but rather became unspeakably sweet by virtue of a great love" (*The Story of Christianity*, Justo L. Gonzalez, New York: Harper One, Harper Collins Publishers, 2010, 2:25).

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

In a sentence (or maybe two) what does it mean to you to know from God's Word that you are saved by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ your Savior and Lord? – Answers may vary. I have the assurance that God loves me, and because of His great love I have no reason to fear!

Reformation Today

Reformation Day 2017 will be the highlight of the Luther decade, but it will not be the end of our encounter with Luther's life and efforts or with God's reforming, transforming work in the hearts and lives of His people and in His Church.

What does this mean? How is this done? Is this most certainly true? Time to discuss!

What reformation still needs to be done in our world; in the Christian Church; in your heart and life? – Answers may vary. A return to the use of God's Word in its truth and purity in our churches and homes; renewed zeal for carrying out the mission of the Church; standing firm in the faith in the face of persecution and opposition in the culture and society.

Perhaps these passages will be helpful in your discussion:

Ephesians 6:13-18 *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. – We, as believers and the Church, as Christ's body can stand firm on the truth of God's Word and need to do so especially today in light of the evils and dangers of the world and our culture. We need the truths of God's Word as much today as ever.*

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*
– We and the Church have a mission and purpose to carry out by God's blessing and the power of the Holy Spirit. Now is the time!

Psalm 51:10-12 *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a 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. – We believers need the constant work of God reforming us each from the inside out!*

What good news do you have to share with others that God can use to move them from fear to faith? – Answers may vary. We are forgiven and saved and dearly loved by God's grace, His free gift, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ which God the Holy Spirit works in our lives through the Word of God! Through God's riches at Christ's expense we will never be the same, for eternity.

Conclusion

When Teddy was three years old he loved Halloween with all the excitement and the children. But he was not quite old enough to go trick-or-treating out on the streets, so he

would stay home with his parents and help with the candy when the children in costume came to their door.

One time the door-bell rang, and Teddy ran to the door to open it before his mother or father could reach it. There, outside the door, were three of the scariest creatures Teddy had ever seen. He screamed a blood-curdling scream which alerted his dad who came right to his side.

When Dad stood at the door beside him, even with the goolies on the other side of the door, little Teddy was not afraid. One who loved him and cared for him was with him. Teddy knew that his dad was bigger than anything on the other side of the door and that nothing would happen to him as long as Dad was with him.

The message of the Reformation is that God, our Refuge and Strength, our ever-present Help in trouble, is bigger. No matter what is going on outside our door, He is bigger. He is bigger than our sin, big enough to deal with it by forgiving it. He is bigger than death, big enough to deal with it by giving us life. Big enough to hold us by our feeble, trembling hands and set us free, free from fear, by His grace to be His people of faith!

Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for moving us from fear to faith by Your grace through Your powerful Word! Continue to reform us as You forgive our sins for we fall short and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to keep growing in the true faith, and then to stand, against all odds, on the firm foundation of Holy Scripture! Bless Your Church and all who preach and teach and lead and hear and serve and believe, that we may tell the good news about Jesus to everyone, everywhere, at every opportunity that You provide, that hearing they, too, may believe in Jesus, our Savior! In His name we pray. Amen.

“A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

Stand up, sing, hum, read, meditate on Luther’s “Battle Hymn of the Reformation” (based on Psalm 46) and celebrate with the world God’s work, proclaimed in His Word, saving us, by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ! Rejoice in God’s mercy that in Christ there is no need to be afraid, for by His mighty power He has moved us from fear to faith!

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

1. A mighty fortress is our God, A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev’ry need That hath us now o’ertaken.
The old evil foe Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

2. With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is,
Of Sabaoth Lord, And there’s none other God;
He holds the field forever.

4. The Word they still shall let remain Nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain With His good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife,
Though these all be gone, Our vict'ry has been won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

LSB 656, verses 1, 2, 4, TLH 262, LW 298

From Fear to Faith + The Reformation Story
Leader's Guide
Written by Rev. Larry Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



A Chat with Katharine von Bora

Sketch

[Please provide: five actresses and five copies of the sketch for the actresses.]

[Please note: There are several German words used within this skit. “Guten Abend” (pronounced “goo-ten ah-bendt”) means “good evening.” “Ja” (pronounced “yah”) means “yes.” “Auf wiedersehen” (pronounced “owf veedersayin”) means “until I see you again.”]

Cast:

Emcee

Gina, Laura, Carol – attendees at an LWML meeting

Katie – dressed in period costume as Katharine von Bora, Martin Luther’s wife

Props: Three chairs in a row facing the audience to resemble attending a meeting. A fourth chair is placed to the left of the other three. This chair is slightly turned to face the other three, but placed so the skit audience can still see the skit character’s face.

Setting: An LWML meeting. Gina, Laura, and Carol sit in the three chairs facing the audience. The Emcee stands to their right and is turned partially toward the chairs and partially toward the audience.

Emcee: Ladies, we have a very special guest speaker at our LWML meeting tonight – Katharine von Bora!!

Gina: [Whispers loudly to her friend **Laura.**] Oh, my goodness! Isn’t she the wife of the great reformer, Martin Luther?

Laura: [Whispers back loudly] It can't be! She's been dead for hundreds of years!

Emcee: Katharine, or Katie, as you may know her, has made arrangements to come to us from the 16th century to comfort us in these troubling times. Help me to welcome Katie Luther. [Polite clapping.]

Gina: [Again whispers loudly] This has got to be a hoax!

Katie: *Guten Abend*, that is, “Good Evening,” ladies. It is my privilege to speak with you. If you don't mind, let's make this an informal chat. [Sits down on the fourth chair.] I can see by the wondering looks on your faces that there are questions you'd like to ask me?

Gina: [Raises hand and blurts out in a doubtful tone.] Are you really Martin Luther's wife?

Katie: *Ach, ja*, 'tis true! Let me tell you about that. It started as a marriage of convenience, and for Dr. Luther, as a way to prove a point. But let's back up a bit. Since the age of nine, I had grown up in a convent. My mother died when I was five years old. My step-mother and I did not get along so I was placed in the Nimbschen Convent.

Carol: What was it like in the convent in those 16th century days?

Katie: Though I loved God and wanted to serve Him, I felt like I wasn't free. We were affected by the unrest in the church at the time. Eleven other nuns and I secretly sent a message to Dr. Luther, asking him to "spring us," as you might say in your century. [Smiles.]

Carol: Was he able to help you?

Katie: *Ach, ja*, he did, though it was dangerous for him and us. Martin had nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg church in 1517 when, as a monk, he had questioned indulgences. He never really wanted to leave the church, but he had studied the Scriptures ardently and he had discovered a great truth: we are saved by grace through faith, not by works. I'm sure you are aware of Ephesians 2:8 and 9.

Laura: We learned those verses in confirmation class!

Laura and Carol together: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Katie: Martin had always been so troubled by his sins, and his study of the testaments finally brought him peace – especially Romans 1:16-17. St. Paul wrote: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Carol: We learned in history class at school that the 95 Theses your husband pounded on the door at Wittenberg were denouncing indulgences, money that was paid to the church to assure salvation. The belief was that "works" could get people into heaven.

Katie: Very good, Carol! As I said before, Martin really only wanted to correct faults in the church at the time; he didn't want to leave it! But as you well know, he was excommunicated and thus began a whole new movement which became known as the Protestant Reformation.

Gina: [Crosses her arms in front of her and leans back in her chair.] Not to be disrespectful, but who are you, anyway? Are you some sort of impersonator trying to play with our minds? If you are who you say, tell us about the real man – surely Martin Luther was not all that perfect!

Katie: *Ja*, Gina, even though Martin was one of the "movers and shakers" of the western world, he was also just a man – a sinful man, as he was well aware. But I loved him even though he could be stubborn, rigid, and moody. Despite his faults, he was such a good father. He loved our children so well. He taught them little songs about Jesus and prayed with them.

Laura: I think Martin Luther wrote a hymn that we always sing at Christmas, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come."

Katie: *Ja*, he did! He wrote "kaboodles" of songs, including that great anthem of the Reformation: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

Carol: Let's get back to your personal story – how did a confirmed old bachelor like Martin Luther end up with a nun who was sixteen years younger than he?

Katie: And what a story it is! After Martin received our plea for help getting out of the convent, he devised a plan. He sent a delivery man who carried twelve herring barrels in his cart. After dark we sneaked from the convent and ran to a nearby road and hid in a clump of trees. When the delivery man came, we climbed into the barrels. WHOOEEE! Did those barrels ever stink! We were a smelly mess when we climbed out a few hours later. But we were so glad to be free that we didn't even mind smelling like fish! We danced around that delivery man and thanked him over and over. And we praised God, of course!

Laura: What became of you nuns after that?

Katie: Oh, several returned to their homes. Most of us became governesses and eventually everyone got married – except me. Dr. Luther was very concerned for our well-being and even arranged some of the marriages himself. But I was a problem – I was 24 years old and an old maid in those days. What's more, I was very strong-minded and I wasn't about to marry just any man. The good doctor thought that I was proud and haughty.

Laura: So how in the world did you end up marrying Martin himself, especially since he thought that you were a difficult person?

Katie: [Chuckles] Well, Martin kept insisting that I should marry a certain Pastor Glatz. He just kept pushing the idea, and finally, I stamped my foot and told the good doctor that I would rather never wed than to marry someone I didn't care for.

Laura: I don't blame you! We women of the twenty-first century in America would never marry a man we didn't love!

Katie: In our day, women needed a man for safety and protection, so Martin finally decided to propose to me himself, and I said "Yes!" He was 42 years old and I was 26. I think part of his decision was to make a point that marriage is pleasing in the eyes of God. Also, he felt responsible for me. But let me tell you, he really needed a wife to look after him! His life was so full of study and writing and translating the Scriptures that he didn't eat or sleep at regular hours. He would just tumble exhausted onto filthy sheets night after night. And his living quarters were a mess! You can be assured that changed after I became his wife!!

Carol: Since this was sort of an arranged marriage, were you two happy together?

Katie: *Ach, ja!* He may have had other motives when he took me for a wife, but I truly believe that he came to love me deeply, and I, him. His affectionate name for me was "Kitty, my rib." Other times he referred to me as "Katie, my chain" or "my lord."

Carol: Why did he call you "my lord"?

Katie: Well, perhaps I did "lord it over him" at times. I worked my "tail" off managing our lives. I was in charge of the farm, the fish pond, and the cattle. He never worried much about his debts or where his next meal would be coming from. He always said, "God will provide." Indeed, and it goes without saying that I was part of God's provision! But that being said, I want you to know that truly Martin was the spiritual head of our family, and in our marriage, he loved me as faithfully and tenderly as Christ loves the church.

Laura: You both worked so hard! Didn't you ever have any fun?

Katie: Most certainly we did. Martin loved music and he would gather our family and friends about him for a song fest. We had many happy hours singing hymns and popular songs with Martin's booming voice leading us. I can just hear him now and my heart sings again. [Crosses her hands over her chest.] My LWML friends, music is such a pleasing and healthful thing. Martin also loved nature, the birds, the meadows, flowers, and trees. We enjoyed hikes and picnics in the lovely German countryside.

Carol: Katie, with all your cares, hard work, and trials, and especially with the deaths of two of your daughters, didn't you get "down" yourself?

Katie: Ah, the Lord was the strength of my life through it all. The death of our children ripped our hearts apart with grief. I remember Martin's prayer at Maggie's bedside. He prayed: "I love her so much, dear God. But since you have chosen to call her away from here, I willingly let her go so that she may be with You."

Carol: I can only imagine how wonderful it will be in heaven!

Katie: *Ach, ja*, my dear friends! You will have trials and tribulations here on earth, but be assured that God **does** live and His promises are true. He will be with you just as He was with Martin and me 500 years ago.

Gina: [In a kindly tone.] Before you go, Katie, I just want to apologize. I realize now that you are real, and the life you lived on earth was real. Your story has been written in the pages of books, just as the names of all of us are being recorded in the books of heaven.

Katie: Bless you, Gina, for hearing and understanding, and I beseech you all to keep reading about the heroes of faith and reading the Bible, for therein will your faith be nurtured and given growth by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Emcee: Thank you, Katie, for being our special guest today. Your example of faith will inspire us in the days ahead. *Auf Wiedersehen!*

Katie: *Auf Wiedersehen!* And farewell!

Information in this sketch was taken from *Kitty, My Rib* by E. Jane Mall, Concordia Publishing House, 1970; and *Martin Luther: Hero of Faith* by Frederick Nohl, Concordia Publishing House, 1962.

A Chat with Katharine von Bora
Written by Marcia Schwartz, Falls City, Nebraska
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Be Ready

Opening Devotion

... But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect ... (1 Peter 3:15).

Over the years, past LWML President Ida Mall was blessed to lead workshops in which women learned to share their faith in Christ. To allow people an opportunity to talk with one another, each woman worked with a partner. On one occasion a young woman was without a partner, so she and Ida became a team. As they talked, Ida learned that the woman had come at her grandmother's invitation. To Ida's surprise, the young woman said, "I don't know this Jesus that you are talking about." How wonderful it was for Ida to share Jesus' love with her, telling her what He had done for her throughout her life!

To this day, it is with thanksgiving and joy that Ida remembers the young woman seated next to her grandmother on the last pew of the church. It is her prayer that the woman has learned to know Jesus and that she is now sharing her faith with others. St. Paul writes to Philemon and his message is the same for us: *... And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ (Philemon 1:6).*

Prayer: Father, we rejoice with thanksgiving that You have called us to be Your children now and forever. Give us the desire and courage to readily share our faith in You with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Be Ready
Mustard Seed: Living as a Woman in Mission, 15/32
Written by Ida Mall
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



An Unchanging God

Closing Devotion

Forever, O LORD, Your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations (Psalm 119:89-90a).

Isn't it amazing how many things have changed in our lifetimes? Travel that may have taken our grandparents days or weeks can now be done in hours. We can be almost anywhere in the world within minutes, thanks to the Internet. Things don't even look the same as they did when we were growing up. Televisions, appliances, and the car in the driveway have all undergone dramatic changes.

Change doesn't come easily to us. We may yearn for a slower pace, a simpler lifestyle, or an uncomplicated telephone!! We sometimes ask, "Why can't things just stay the same?" But change is inevitable!

With all that is changing around us, how wonderful it is to know that God's Word is the same for all time. What He said yesterday still stands today. His promises to love us, grant us peace, and never leave us are still in effect. God hasn't changed His plan of salvation for us, and it won't be any different tomorrow.

"The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever"
(1 Peter 1:24b-25a).

Prayer: Loving Father, we are grateful that Your unchanging Word and love are always there to give us strength. Help us to cling to it in all of life's situations. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

An Unchanging God
Mustard Seed: Comfort from the Psalms, 17/30
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Blessed to be a Blessing

Bible Study

[Please provide: Bibles and copies of the first four pages of the Bible study for attendees; a copy of pages 5-10 for the leader.]

Make a list of all the physical blessings that you have been given by Your Creator God. Share with the entire group.

During this Bible study, we will look at our God – Father, Son, and Spirit – Who blessed Abraham and blesses us both physically and spiritually. He has blessed us in the past, blesses our present, and will bless us eternally in the future. Our God promises that we, His redeemed people, will be a blessing to those around us through the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All praise and thanks to God!

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are our awesome God! You have made each one of us with great care. You daily sustain our lives here on earth. You have made us Your children through Holy Baptism. We are sorry for the times when our sin has separated us from You and we praise You for sending Your Son to redeem us and re-create us once again by forgiving our sins for His sake. You have made us unique with unique gifts and talents. Help us to use these blessings by the power of the Spirit and help us to be a blessing to others in our unique circumstances. Send Your Spirit today as we study Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Blessed!

Read together **Genesis 12:1-3:**

¹Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This passage indicates God's covenant with Abraham to bless him and make him a blessing. Look up the following Bible verses to see how God specifically blessed Abraham and made him a blessing to those around him:

Genesis 13:2

Genesis 13:14-17

Genesis 14:18-20

Genesis 17:1-8

Genesis 18:1-5

Genesis 18:32-33

Genesis 22:11-18

Genesis 24:1

Hebrews 11:8-12

Ephesians 1:3 states, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.* Ponder about how the Lord has blessed you spiritually. Look up and identify specific examples in the following Bible passages:

Psalm 103:8-13

John 1:1, 14

Romans 6:3-5

Ephesians 2:8-9

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Titus 3:4-7

1 Peter 3:18

1 Corinthians 10:16

Be a Blessing!

God blessed Abraham (“exalted father”) with faith. He became a blessing to those around him, as well as the exalted father of many and, ultimately, the line from which Jesus Christ was born. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. By faith in Jesus, believers are daughters and sons of Abraham, and thus receive the same promise which God made to him. God’s Church on earth will be a blessing to the world! See **Galatians 3:7, 9, and 14**.

As **Romans 1:16** boldly proclaims, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power [Greek: “dunamis” or “dynamite”] of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Throughout the years, God’s Church on earth has been blessed with the gift of God’s true Word, and with martyrs and preachers who have not been ashamed to share the Gospel. They have been steadfast and have used their God-given gifts to spread the Good News of Jesus to a world that needs to hear it.

Read **Ephesians 4:11-12, 16b**. Why does the Spirit provide spiritual leaders to His Church?

According to **Romans 12:4-8**, who is the body of Christ? How does this body work together?

List the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in **Galatians 5:22-23**. (Note: The word “fruit” is singular; the Spirit gives each believer in Christ the entire fruit package.)

Identify which are weaknesses and which are strengths for you.

Faith Talk: Share with a partner or the small group if time permits.

Read **1 Peter 3:14-15**. What are believers in Christ asked to be ready to do?

What practical advice is given in God’s Word for ways that His children can be a blessing to one another and to the world around us? See **Colossians 3:12-17**.

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* **Titus 3:1c** urges Christians to ... *be ready for every good work.* Compile a list of “good works” that could be among those that God prepared in advance for people to do.

Faith Talk: How can your group (or church) specifically be a blessing in your church and community?

Faith Walk: Identify how the Lord has gifted you for service. Prayerfully make a list of things that you can personally be involved in for the spread of the Gospel – in your family, in your church, in your community ... and into the world.

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us time in Your Word and for blessing our fellowship. You have blessed us with gifts and talents so that we can be a blessing to others. We ask that You daily continue to forgive us when we have done wrong for the sake of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit, embolden us to daily tell the Good News of salvation to a hurting and needy world, as we use the blessings He has given to us. We pray in the name of Jesus, who showed His radical love for each of us all the way to the cross! Amen.

Closing Litany

[Psalm 1:1-2; 119:12; 28:6; 32:1; 18:46; 34:8; 33:12; 68:35; 66:20; 41:13; 144:15; 106:48]

Leader: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.

Group: Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes!

Blessed be the Lord! For He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation –

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!

Awesome is God from His sanctuary; the God of Israel – He is the one who gives power and strength to His people. Blessed be God!

Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer or removed His steadfast love from me!

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.

Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord!

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, “Amen!”

All: Praise the Lord!

Blessed to be a Blessing
Written by Shari Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2017



Blessed to be a Blessing

Leader's Guide
Bible Study

Leader's Note: Please adapt materials provided to your time frame.

Make a list of all the physical blessings that you have been given by Your Creator God. Share with the entire group.

- Answers will vary. Encourage all to participate. Could include: air we breathe, family, friends, home, food, clothes, government officials and workers, peace in the homeland, gadgets that make life easier.

During this Bible study, we will look at our God – Father, Son, and Spirit – Who blessed Abraham and blesses us both physically and spiritually. He has blessed us in the past, blesses our present, and will bless us eternally in the future. Our God promises that we, His redeemed people, will be a blessing to those around us through the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All praise and thanks to God!

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are our awesome God! You have made each one of us with great care. You daily sustain our lives here on earth. You have made us Your children through Holy Baptism. We are sorry for the times when our sin has separated us from You and we praise You for sending Your Son to redeem us and re-create us once again by forgiving our sins for His sake. You have made us unique with unique gifts and talents. Help us to use these blessings by the power of the Spirit and help us to be a blessing to others in our unique circumstances. Send Your Spirit today as we study Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Blessed!

Read together **Genesis 12:1-3:**

¹Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This passage indicates God's covenant with Abraham to bless him and make him a blessing. Look up the following Bible verses to see how God specifically blessed Abraham and made him a blessing to those around him:

Genesis 13:2 - Rich in livestock, silver, and gold, possessions

² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Genesis 13:14-17 - Land, property

¹⁴ The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, ¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. ¹⁷ Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

Genesis 14:18-20 - Enemies were defeated.

¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)
¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;
²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

Genesis 17:1-8 - Old age, father of nations, everlasting covenant, many descendants

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."
³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

Genesis 18:1-5 - The Lord ate with him.

¹And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said."

Genesis 18:32-33 - The Lord granted Abraham's request to save Lot and family.

³² Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."
³³ And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

Genesis 22:11-18 - The Lord provided the sacrifice for Abraham, innumerable descendants.

¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."
¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."
¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."
¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Genesis 24:1 - Old age, all things

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

Hebrews 11:8-12 - Blessed with faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Ephesians 1:3 states, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.* Ponder about how the Lord has blessed you spiritually. Look up and identify specific examples in the following Bible passages:

Psalm 103:8-13 - Forgiveness, mercy, grace, love, compassion – all from the Lord

⁸ The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹ He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. ¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

John 1:1, 14 - Jesus Christ – true God and true Man; our Savior

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Romans 6:3-5 - Baptism; resurrection, eternal life

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - Faith

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 - The inerrant, living, and saving Word of God

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Titus 3:4-7 - Salvation through Jesus, the Holy Spirit, eternal life

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

1 Peter 3:18 - Christ suffered and died for the unrighteous.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit ...

1 Corinthians 10:16 - The Lord's Supper and the assurance of sins forgiven

¹⁶ *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*

Be a Blessing!

God blessed Abraham (“exalted father”) with faith. He became a blessing to those around him, as well as the exalted father of many and, ultimately, the line from which Jesus Christ was born. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. By faith in Jesus, believers are daughters and sons of Abraham, and thus receive the same promise which God made to him. God’s Church on earth will be a blessing to the world! See **Galatians 3:7, 9, and 14**.

⁷ *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.*

⁹ *So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

¹⁴ *so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

As **Romans 1:16** boldly proclaims, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power [Greek: “dunamis” or “dynamite”] of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Throughout the years, God’s Church on earth has been blessed with the gift of God’s true Word, and with martyrs and preachers who have not been ashamed to share the Gospel. They have been steadfast and have used their God-given gifts to spread the Good News of Jesus to a world that needs to hear it.

Read **Ephesians 4:11-12, 16b**. Why does the Spirit provide spiritual leaders to His Church?

- They are given to share the Gospel, to prepare God’s people for works of service, and to build up the body of Christ. The Gospel motivates and energizes us for service.

¹¹ *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,* ¹² *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,* ¹⁶ *... when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

According to **Romans 12:4-8**, who is the body of Christ? - All believers in Christ How does this body work together? - Each has different gifts which complement one another.

⁴ *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,*

⁵ *so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.* ⁶ *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

List the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in **Galatians 5:22-23**. (Note: The word “fruit” is singular; the Spirit gives each believer in Christ the entire fruit package.)

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

²³ *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

Identify which are weaknesses and which are strengths for you. - Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control

Faith Talk: Share with a partner or the small group if time permits.

- Answers will vary. Encourage all to participate.

Read 1 Peter 3:14-15. What are believers in Christ asked to be ready to do? - Be ready to share the Good News of the Gospel with those around you.

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ...

What practical advice is given in God's Word for ways that His children can be a blessing to one another and to the world around us? See **Colossians 3:12-17**. - Be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, put up with one another, forgiving, loving, peace of Christ rule in your hearts, thankful, teaching, admonishing in wisdom, singing, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* **Titus 3:1c** urges Christians to ... *be ready for every good work.* Compile a list of "good works" that could be among those that God prepared in advance for people to do.

- Answers will vary. Encourage all to participate. List could include: visiting the sick or impoverished; visit and serve those who are grieving; visiting and praying with another sister in Christ; raising children in a God-fearing way; listening to a co-worker and sharing the hope you have in Christ; telling friends and family about Jesus; giving your time, talents, and treasure in the spread of the Lord's Gospel message; helping keep up the church property; helping in the church office; supporting missionaries; praying for one another daily.

Faith Talk: How can your group (or church) specifically be a blessing in your church and community?

- Answers will vary. Encourage all to participate.

Faith Walk: Identify how the Lord has gifted you for service. Prayerfully make a list of things that you can personally be involved in for the spread of the Gospel – in your family, in your church, in your community ... and into the world.

- This activity is intended to be something that the participant would do on her own – homework.

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us time in Your Word and for blessing our fellowship. You have blessed us with gifts and talents so that we can be a blessing to others. We ask that You daily continue to forgive us when we have done wrong for the sake of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit, embolden us to daily tell the Good News of salvation to a hurting and needy world, as we use the blessings He has given to us. We pray in the name of Jesus, who showed His radical love for each of us all the way to the cross! Amen.

Closing Litany

[Psalm 1:1-2; 119:12; 28:6; 32:1; 18:46; 34:8; 33:12; 68:35; 66:20; 41:13; 144:15; 106:48]

Leader: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.

Group: Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes!

Blessed be the Lord! For He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation –

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!

Awesome is God from His sanctuary; the God of Israel – He is the one who gives power and strength to His people. Blessed be God!

Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer or removed His steadfast love from me!

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.

Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord!

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, “Amen!”

All: Praise the Lord!

Blessed to be a Blessing
Leader's Guide
Written by Shari Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Away in a Manger

Opening Devotion

[Please provide: musical accompaniment, hymnals or copies of this devotion for attendees.]

Begin by singing together “Away in a Manger” LSB 364, LW 64.

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

Verse 1

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:11-12).

Jesus our Lord came down from His heavenly throne to be born in a humble manger, to live here on earth as a man, and to experience the same temptations we have. He was sinless, yet died on the cross for the sins of the world. He rose again and lives and reigns in heaven. He is with us and blesses us with His guidance and protection each day of our lives.

Though most often sung at Christmas, this hymn can be used throughout the year in praise to the Savior. This favorite children’s hymn closes with the beautiful prayer [sing together]:

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,
And take us to heaven to live with Thee there.

Verse 3

Prayer: Jesus, Emmanuel, thank You for coming in the flesh, as a humble baby, to be our exalted Savior! Move us, in response to Your love, to live joyfully for You and for others. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

Away in a Manger
Mustard Seed: Joyful, Joyful, 3/31
Hymn Text: LSB 364
Written by Rev. Larry and Shari Miller
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Living in the Spirit ... Is God's Gift

Closing Devotion

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

Lights on the dashboard signaled trouble, and she was many miles from home. Slowly she rolled into a farmyard, hoping that someone was there. The farmer came out, assessed the problem, and offered a ride to the nearest town. Several hours later when the car was once again drivable she offered fervent thanks and a cash gift. The farmer warmly accepted her gratitude but vehemently refused her money. "Helping you was my gift to you," he insisted. "If I take your money, my help isn't a gift anymore."

So it is with God's grace; it is a gift. Grace is not earned. It cannot be bought for any price in any currency by any individual. It is a gift, a precious gift given by a loving God.

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God (1 Corinthians 2:12).

It is impossible to comprehend a holy God who would freely give the gift of His grace to sinful people who turn their backs on Him. Only by His Spirit can we believe the good news that His gift is ours.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the gifts of faith and salvation. When our faith weakens, strengthen us with Your Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Living in the Spirit ... Is God's Gift
Mustard Seed: Living in the Spirit, 8/30
Written by 2005-2007 Mustard Seeds Task Force
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



It's a Boy!

Sketch

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11-12).

[Please provide: two actresses, one sign-carrying announcer (Sign is on the last page of the sketch.), and three copies of the sketch for the actresses and announcer.]

Sketch notes: Use this sketch as part of a Gifts from the Heart collection for a local pregnancy resource center, food pantry, or shelter. Baby shower invitations could be sent to the women at church or a shower invitation might be extended in whatever way your church communicates. Ingathering suggestions could be to gather diapers, baby wipes, blankets, clothing, or other baby items.

Cast: Maggie
Lizzie
Sign-carrying announcer

Props: Two woven baskets (one each for Maggie and Lizzie to carry), several oranges and pomegranates (or other Bible fruits) placed in Lizzie's basket.

Setting: On a road on the way to the market.

[**Maggie** walks toward **Lizzie**, who is moving toward **Maggie**. Both women carry woven baskets. **Lizzie's** basket is filled with fruit as she returns from the market.]

Maggie: Hello, Lizzie. [Peers into **Lizzie's** basket.] It looks like you got some good bargains at the market today.

Lizzie: Well, hello to you, Maggie. Yes, I certainly did.

Maggie: By the way, did you get the baby shower invitation for Mary, our niece?

Lizzie: I got the invitation, but I'm not sure I'm going to go.

Maggie: Why not?

Lizzie: Because of all the scandal of course! It's so embarrassing with Mary getting pregnant before she actually married Joseph. [Whispers.] Rumor has it that it is not even Joseph's baby. My word! [Fans herself as if she is going to faint.]

Maggie: Do you **really** believe that our lovely niece Mary has done such horrible things?

Lizzie: The facts speak for themselves, don't they?

Maggie: Hmmmmm ... I don't know. It just doesn't seem like our Mary. She loves the Lord so much and has always been a faithful servant of God.

Lizzie: Well, what do you think about Mary saying she's still a virgin? She was obviously pregnant when she came back from Elizabeth's home **and** she says she **knows** the baby is a boy and he will be named Jesus! What kind of name is that? It's not even a family name. Besides, no one really knows if they are having a boy or a girl until it's born.

Maggie: Well, I've been thinking about all of that. If we believe what the Scriptures say, it seems to fit.

Lizzie: What do you mean?

Maggie: In Isaiah 7:14b it says, "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*"

Lizzie: So?

Maggie: That would explain Mary saying she is a virgin.

Lizzie: I guess.

Maggie: Then, in Micah 5:2, it says, "*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*"

Lizzie: So what does Bethlehem have to do with Mary? We all live here in Nazareth.

Maggie: Don't Mary and Joseph need to travel to Bethlehem for the census soon? Unfortunately, she will probably deliver in Bethlehem or even on the journey.

Lizzie: You do make some good points.

Maggie: Well, I'm going to the shower. They will need many things for the journey and for their first baby. Do you want to come with me? We can sit together.

Lizzie: I don't know ... Oh, all right, I guess I'll be there too.

Maggie: I'm so happy. You'll see. You won't regret it.

[**Maggie** and **Lizzie** exit. **Sign-carrying announcer** walks across stage area as she holds the sign, "Two Months Later," for audience to see. **Sign-carrying announcer** reads the words out loud.]

[**Maggie** and **Lizzie** enter, without baskets. They walk together arm-in-arm. They stop walking and partially face the audience as they speak.]

Lizzie: Did you hear that Mary had a healthy boy and that they named him Jesus? What a blessing they made it to Bethlehem just in the nick of time.

Maggie: How do you know this?

Lizzie: Twitter ... uh, I mean, my husband's cousin twice removed has an uncle on his mother's side who is a shepherd in the hills around Bethlehem. Anyway, he was working the

night shift – you know, dusk to dawn. He said it was a quiet night until BAM!!! All of a sudden the sky was really bright like the morning. He thought he might have fallen asleep and it **was** morning.

Maggie: Really?

Lizzie: Yes, but the brightness was from an angel that talked to them!

Maggie: A real angel? Come on, you're pulling my leg. Besides, how did they know it was a real angel?

Lizzie: I guess you just know! Anyway, this angel tells them to go to Bethlehem to see a newborn baby. The angel said this baby is *a Savior, who is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:11).

Maggie: So what did they do?

Lizzie: *They went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger* (Luke 2:16). The baby was wrapped in swaddling cloths just like the angel had told them he would be.

Maggie: Wow!

Lizzie: Indeed! The shepherds told Mary and Joseph all that the angel had said to them. *Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart* (Luke 2:19).

Maggie: This must be a lot for Mary to take in.

Lizzie: No kidding! After the shepherds saw Mary's baby, they told everyone they saw the wonderful news. I found out about it all from my husband's cousin.

Maggie: I'm just so thrilled everyone is happy and healthy.

Lizzie: Me too.

Maggie: [Seriously.] You don't sound embarrassed anymore about Mary.

Lizzie: I'm not. I thought a lot about what you said, about the Scriptures and the prophecy of our long-awaited Savior's birth, and I think you are right.

Maggie: Really?

Lizzie: Yes, it all fits. What a special gift to be here at this time and place as witnesses of our Savior's birth.

Maggie: God's gift of Jesus' birth is amazing. How awesome for our Mary to give birth to her own Savior and our Savior. This gift is so much better than any we gave Mary at her shower!

Lizzie: You can say that again!

It's a Boy!

*Written by Lynn Batchelder, York Beach, Maine
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League 2017*



Count Him In

Opening Devotion

Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

As the old year closes and a new year opens, we begin to think about things we would like to do in the coming 12 months. We might start making plans to build a new home or take a dream vacation. Perhaps we'll list our New Year's resolutions, like lose weight or finish school or get a better job or read the entire Bible in a year.

Of course, we're counting on God to be there each day in the new year, just as He has been throughout the old year. That goes without saying! But are we consciously counting Him in when we look forward to everything we want to do? Deliberately counting Him in our plans by saying, "If it is Your will," shifts our focus where it needs to be: not on our desires, but on His will.

We're counted among God's beloved people because Jesus consented to be counted among us. In His birth, God invites us to count Him in as we make our plans for every new year ... and every new day.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, let all our plans work out for the best, according to Your good and gracious will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Count Him In
Mustard Seed: The Joy of Christmas, 26/32
Written by Patricia Mitchell
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Simple Trust (Make Us Whole)

Closing Devotion

We know Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall and had a great fall, but who was this egg? It is believed that Humpty Dumpty was a huge cannon from the English Civil War.

This great weapon was stuck by a cannon ball, knocked off the tower wall, and blasted into so many pieces that all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put it back together again.

Ever felt that way? Strong and secure one minute when suddenly the world just falls apart. We just can't get it back together. Others are either unwilling or unable to help, and we wonder if there is hope. Good news! We are not like Humpty Dumpty!

There is hope for us. No matter how broken or splintered life is, we can be put back together by the King of Kings Himself. His love and forgiveness heal us from the most devastating fall of all, the fall into sin. Though we are fragile, God can make us new again.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Prayer: Father, we are so fragile and sometimes broken, but You alone are our strength and salvation. Restore us, Lord, and make us Your new creations. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Simple Trust (Make Us Whole)
Mustard Seed: Simple Trust, 27/29
Written by Elaine Bickel
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Remembering Whose We Are

Opening Devotion

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are (1 John 3:1a).

The story is told of a boy who was leaving home for college. At the breakfast table his father asked God to protect him and to grant success in his career. Rising from the table, the young man expected to receive some final bit of advice or instruction. He was surprised when the older man merely placed a hand on his shoulder, looked at him with love, and said, "My boy, remember whose son you are!"

We Christians, too, are children temporarily away from our Father's house. We need to be reminded of whose we really are: His sons and daughters. With faith in Jesus we know we are adopted into God's holy family. He has given us His name in Baptism.

Faith is that wonderful father-child relationship into which God's Spirit has brought us. What a blessing for us!

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for reminding us of who we are. Help us to remember that we belong to You and that You have placed us here for Your glory. In Christ's name. Amen.

Remembering Whose We Are
Mustard Seed: Living in Faith, 29/30
Written by Rev. Darold Reiner
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Faith

Closing Devotion

[Jesus said,] *“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you”* (Mark 5:19 NIV).

Faith is defined as firm belief in something for which there is no proof. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith: *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see* (NIV). The Holy Spirit gives saving faith. Faith in Christ continues to grow and mature through the study of God’s Word and participation in the Lord’s Supper.

The challenge for Christian parents is to express their faith in words and actions that children can understand. We are thankful that the Holy Spirit directs us as we guide our families to a greater knowledge and love of Jesus our Savior.

All Christians have a faith story to tell of how Christ has worked in their lives. It is the privilege of parents to share their faith story with their family so that Christ’s work in their lives can be seen by all.

Stretch your faith-filled parenting: Write your personal faith story and share it with your child.

Prayer: Jesus, You are the center of our children’s faith stories and our own. Impact our lives with Your Holy Word so that our faith will increase daily. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

Faith
Mustard Seed: Faith-Filled Parenting, 4/32
Written by Rev. Larry and Shari Miller
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



God's Family Devotion

[Please provide: if singing, musical accompaniment; LSB hymnals for attendees.]

Sing or read the words of "Children of the Heavenly Father" LSB 725.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are (1 John 3:1a).

"I love you." Those three little words have the power to change a life. A parent speaks them to a child and nurtures their soul. A man and woman speak them to each other as they take the vow of marriage and begin a new life as one. Most importantly, God speaks them to us in His Word and makes us His child and heir to His kingdom through Holy Baptism.

... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith (Galatians 3:26).

When we are baptized, through water together with God's Word, we become God's children. No longer are we under His wrath. Instead, God honors us by making us a member of His own family. He says, "I love you" as He gives us faith and places us in an intimate relationship with Him. God becomes our Father. We are welcomed into His family of believers.

[You] *have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Colossians 3:10).*

In the beginning, God created man in His image. After the Fall of Adam, that perfect image was lost, but not forgotten by God. God sent His Son to this world to be our Savior and Redeemer. Through Jesus' loving sacrifice on the cross He made it possible for the image of man to be restored. Through faith Christ Himself transforms us.

[Jesus said,] *"For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35).*

Look around this room. You are surrounded by your sisters in Christ. Now think of the members of your congregation as you worship together on Sunday. They, too, are your family in Christ. Each Sunday across the country and around the globe the waters of Holy Baptism splash upon another soul and we welcome the newest member into God's growing family.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15)

Because of God's great love for us we now belong to Him! God invites us to come to Him daily with our prayers and petitions. He longs to hear those three little words, "I love you," spoken to Him in prayer. Our Heavenly Father also assures us in His Word that He will always hear us when we pray to Him.

... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:17).

As God's children we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Because of God's great love for us, we are forever changed. We cling to all of God's promises knowing that one day each of God's children will receive the crown of eternal life. Then our fallen image will be fully restored to perfection and we will live with God and with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ forever.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

God's Family
Written by Kristin Kaldahl, Spencer, Iowa
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Green Pastures

Devotion

Living in the desert southwest often means that “a spot of green” is in short supply. However, in a strong monsoon season, when the rains come, grass and weeds pop up in abundance. Spending time outside pulling weeds from between the rocks in a xeriscape yard can become a full-time job. Although the weeds are plentiful and sometimes painful to pull (watch out for those thorns), their roots are shallow and lack the proper soil needed for growth.

While engaging in this task, the words of Psalm 103:15-17a often come to mind: *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him ...* The Lord’s love is everlasting and He daily provides for us, His children. Psalm 23:1-2a says, *The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

No matter where we live, our lives experience times of spiritual “drought;” times when we grow weary of pulling the “weeds” that the world, the devil, and our flesh put in our path. We struggle to remain the “seed that fell on good soil” (Luke 8:8) and to produce fruit. It is so tempting to be like the seeds that spring up after the monsoons, briefly flourishing, but withering away when the hot, hard times come.

When the hot, hard times come, God helps us to cling to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 52:8: *But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.* Unlike discarded weeds, each and every one of us has been handpicked by God to be His child. We are **loved**, **redeemed**, and **forgiven** as baptized followers of Christ. We are His priceless treasures and dearly loved children who trust and believe: *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall **not** want. He makes me lie down in **green pastures*** [emphases added]. That “spot of green,” the safe pasture, is there for us in our daily walk with the Shepherd. The Holy Spirit leads us to find God’s spot of green in our study of Scripture, in Holy Communion, and in prayer. The Holy Spirit helps us to share the spot of green found in the saving love of Jesus with those around us. Through God’s Word and His means of grace, we are no longer worthless, sinful weeds, to be cast into the “dumpster.” Instead, God makes us flourishing plants in His green pasture!

Prayer: Lord, remind us daily of the “green pastures” You give us. Help us to share Your grace-filled spots of green with others. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Green Pastures

Written by Judy Gordon, Dering, New Mexico

Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2017



A Spot of Green

Closing Devotion

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures (Psalm 23:1-2a).

The radio was on as she drove to the hospital. She would spend another long day at her son's bedside.

Suddenly her ear caught familiar words, *He makes me lie down in green pastures (Psalm 23:2a).*

The speaker urged, "Look for a spot of green today. Let it remind you of your Shepherd's loving care."

As she sped down the road, she caught a glimpse of a small green field from her car window. She smiled and thanked God for His care and for the lush green reminder of it.

Do you need a tangible reminder of God's care today? Look for a spot of green – a field, a park, a flower bed – and be assured that your Shepherd knows your need and is caring for you.

Prayer: Lord God, You are our loving Shepherd, and You provide for us each day. Forgive us when we grow weary, and help us to look for those "green pastures" where we can find rest in You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

A Spot of Green
Mustard Seed: Comfort from the Psalms, 1/30
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Opening Devotion

[**Please provide:** musical accompaniment, hymnals or copies of the devotion for attendees.]

Begin by singing together:

I know that my Redeemer lives;
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my ever-living head.

LSB 461, verse 1, TLH 200, LW 264

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25-27a).

Inspired by words in Job 19, this Easter hymn reminds us that Christ has risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Christ lives to bless us with His love, to forgive us, to guide us, to calm us, to wipe away our tears, and to silence our fears. In other words, our Savior, who died for us to release us from the stranglehold of sin, is alive and with us in every aspect of life. What a wonder ... what a joy!

Sing together:

He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same;
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives:
I know that my Redeemer lives!

Verse 8

Prayer: Living Redeemer, what joy the Good News of Your resurrection brings to us! Live on mightily in our hearts and lives so that we may daily praise all You have done. In Your life-giving name we pray. Amen.

I Know That My Redeemer Lives
Mustard Seed: Joyful, Joyful, 9/31
Hymn Text: LSB 461
Written by Rev. Larry and Shari Miller
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Faith Is ... Living Life as a Procession of Triumph

Closing Devotion

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere (2 Corinthians 2:14).

When the opponents of 19th century British author, John Bunyan, were trying to silence him, they offered him the choice of renouncing his faith or serving a term in prison. He chose the latter and spent twelve years in the Bedford jail. Of that experience he said, "I have determined, the Almighty God being my help and shield, yet to suffer ... rather than violate my faith and principles." Out of Bunyan's imprisonment came the great literary work *Pilgrim's Progress*. What a blessing!

That was what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote, *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession*. That was the spirit of Paul. His life was a series of hardships, but he regarded them as blessings. He was able to remain thankful because he knew that God was leading him.

We may be facing all kinds of hardships, yet because of our faith, we can be content in spirit. Our reward: God is with us. Our life becomes a *triumphal procession* when it is lived in Christ.

Prayer: O Lord, in all situations and circumstances, give us faith that is stronger than steel and more durable than diamonds. In Christ's name. Amen.

Faith Is ... Living Life as a Procession of Triumph
Mustard Seed: Living in Faith, 21/30
Written by Rev. Darold Reiner
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



He Lives/We Live

Devotion

[**Please provide:** if singing the hymn, musical accompaniment and hymnals or copies of words on page two for attendees.]

As children, many of us learned that “April showers bring May flowers.” If you live in the U.S. desert southwest, however, “April showers” are in short supply! Despite the lack of rain, April is a month of renewal, regeneration, and resurrection as the cactus and paloverde trees flower and bloom in all their radiant beauty. What a wonderful visual God has given us during this time when we also celebrate Easter and the Resurrection of our Lord!

Remember Job? Job lived hundreds of years before Jesus was born. He was a man greatly blessed by God. Job was rich. He had ten children. Job was ... *upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil* (Job 1:1b). Yet, Job lost everything – his riches were taken from him and his children were all killed. His friends deserted him and even his wife turned against him, telling him to “*Curse God and die*” (Job 2:9b). Job was truly living in a desert of death! Yet in the midst of listing all his woes, Job made one of the greatest professions of faith found anywhere in Scripture: “*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another*” (Job 19:25-27a).

Jesus, himself, reiterates this statement in John, chapter 11, while talking to Martha about the death of Lazarus. *Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die*” (John 11:23-26). What great comfort these passages give us!

In the book of Acts, the apostles, by the power of the Holy Spirit, testify over and over again to the resurrection of Jesus. St. Paul reminds us in Romans 6:3-5: “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*” Christ died on that cross on Good Friday for **you** and **me**. **He lives** so that we, His baptized, believing children, still struggling in this desert called “life,” will also rise on that last day! May we, like Job of old and all the saints who have gone before us, proclaim in faith to those around us: I know that my Redeemer lives!

In closing, let us **pray or sing** together “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” verses 1, 7, and 8, LSB 461, TLH 200, LW 264.

He Lives/We Live

Written by Judy Gordon, Dering, New Mexico

Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2017

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

LSB 461, TLH 200, LW 264

1. I know that my Redeemer lives;
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives my ever-living head.
7. He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.
8. He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same;
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives:
I know that my Redeemer lives!

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

LSB 461, TLH 200, LW 264

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Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives:
I know that my Redeemer lives!



Be Faithful Devotion

"Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10b).

These are among the most familiar words in the Bible, written by John to the Christians of the church at Smyrna to encourage them through their "ten days" of tribulation. We hear these words of comfort and encouragement at funerals, at sick bed visits, at confirmations, and at times when life is a struggle. They are, however, words that definitely fall under the category of "easier said than done." Wouldn't it be nice if we could just have the crown and skip the suffering and death part? For too many, persecution for being Christian is a reality today, as it was for the early church of the first century.

It is also tempting to conclude that what John is saying has more to do with **our** faithfulness throughout life than anyone else's. "A + B = C." However, the crown of life is not a prize for us for remaining faithful, but the conclusion of God's plan of redemption. Giving credit where credit is due, it is God who works faith in us. But more importantly, He is the perfectly faithful One. He is the one whom we trust to open heaven's doors to all who have run the race, no matter how poorly we finish. For St. Paul says, ... *and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith ...* (Hebrews 12:1b-2).

The fact of the matter is Satan was, and is, defeated by Jesus Christ and will be judged by Him at the Second Coming. We continue to daily fight the powers of evil as long as we are on the earth. Our comfort is in the knowledge and assurance that whatever trials come to us in this life, God is faithful in His promise of life eternal in heaven's bliss.

Paul also tells us in Hebrews 11:1, *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Hmm ... like God and heaven? Definitely like sitting at the throne of God, crowned in His majesty, and in His presence forever. St. Augustine said it this way: "Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of faith is to see what you believe" (<http://www.quotesigma.com/50-powerful-quotes-by-saint-augustine/>, accessed 4/29/2016). The words of Revelation assure us of God's constant and continual work in our lives especially when it does not seem like God is in control of what is going on around us.

The hymn "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me" (LSB 715, TLH 649, LW 513) ends with this comforting thought: "Then, while leaning on Thy breast, May I hear Thee say to me, 'Fear not, I will pilot thee.'" God faithfully leads us. God alone will crown us with life eternal after remaining faithful to His Word. In sharp contrast to the world, we, who are God's people, live life as an offering to Him. Our witness to His promise stands out as a light in an ever-darkening world. Faithfulness is our calling. And, in the end, we will receive a crown of righteousness from our faithful God. I can only imagine how awesome all the faithful believers will look!

Prayer: Lord God, continue Your faithful leading throughout our lives. Guide us as we run the race You have set before us here on earth. By faith, help us look to Your Word for sufficient strength and assurance for the finish. As we head home to heaven, keep us ever focused on the crown of life in Jesus Christ our Redeemer. For in His name we pray. Amen.

Be Faithful
Written by Nancy Kohrs, Lake City, Minnesota
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Living in the Spirit ... I Receive Direction Closing Devotion

[Jesus said,] *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”* (John 14:26).

Do you remember the names of all the U.S. states and capitals? Can you go to the supermarket without a list if you need more than five items? Many joke about having “senior moments” when memory fails, but forgetting can be quite aggravating at times. God knew how fallible human memories are, so He gave us His Word. He promised that the Holy Spirit would teach it to us and remind us of it daily.

Geography facts and grocery lists are totally unimportant compared to the knowledge that the Spirit imparts to us.

[The LORD said,] *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine”* (Isaiah 43:1b).

[Jesus said,] *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20b).

[Jesus said,] *“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Revelation 2:10b).

The Holy Spirit opens God’s Word to us so we can learn of Him and experience His faithfulness daily.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for sending the Spirit to teach and remind us of Your promises. Your words are true, bringing us direction, comfort, and joy. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Living in the Spirit ... I Receive Direction
Mustard Seed: Living in the Spirit, 1/30
Written by 2005-2007 Mustard Seeds Task Force
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



The Always-Open Hand

Opening Devotion

You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16).

A child takes food from a parent's hand. An aged parent is fed with a spoon held in the hand of a loving caregiver. A family pet eats from the hand of its master. Each is evident of a bond, a connection, a trust relationship.

We are fed daily by the hand of our Heavenly Father. He provides seeds for the farmer who plants and harvests. He has equipped the skilled cooks who prepare the food. From His hand to our mouths, God provides. We join the Psalmist in saying, *"You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing."*

When families gather for a meal, it is important to thank God for all He has provided. He wants us to have that intimate trust relationship with Him. We can share more than food; we can share the hope we have in Jesus Christ as a redeemed child of God.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for opening Your hand and satisfying our needs. Remind us that You are always at our tables. Help us to focus on Your goodness and to trust You for all things. In Your gracious name we pray. Amen.

The Always-Open Hand
Mustard Seed: Everyday Celebrations, 8/28
Written by Elaine Bickel and Jan Struck
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2015
Adapted by CREC, 2017



God is in Control

Closing Devotion

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

Anyone who has children in their lives has probably uttered “Be still!” on more than one occasion for any number of reasons. You may even know “antsy” adults you would like to tell to “Be still!”

In Psalm 46, God is telling His children to, *“Be still. Enough already, stop spinning your wheels.”* He admonishes us. God wants us to realize that He is the One in control. No amount of worrying, fretting, or concern on our part can change anything. In fact, God views those reactions as distrust.

God is telling us, *“Be still. Turn it over to Me. I know your concerns; they are My concerns, too. What you care about, I care about. Trust Me. Believe in Me. Be still. I can handle it.”* God instructs us to bring whatever is troubling us to Him in prayer, and then His Spirit helps us to *be still* as we await His answer.

Jesus says, *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me”* (John 14:1).

Listen to verse 1 of the hymn “Be Still, My Soul:

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to your God to order and provide;
In ev’ry change He faithful will remain.

LSB 752, verse 1, TLH 651, LW 510

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us always to put our trust in You. Send Your Holy Spirit to calm our souls. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

God is in Control

Mustard Seed: Comfort from the Psalms, 22/30

Hymn Text: LSB 752

Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer

Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2009

Adapted by CREC, 2017



Our Father's Care

Devotion

The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:15-16 KJV).

These verses have special memories for me. When I was a child, my brother and I would spend part of a week each summer at my uncle and aunt's farm. This gave my brother the chance to play ball and play around in the barn all day long with his younger cousin. I "helped" my aunt take care of and play with my girl cousin who is eight years younger than I. This was our "summer vacation" without Mother and Dad!

The high point of each day was mealtimes. After my aunt would make sure we had washed our hands, we sat down to eat, and my uncle would lead the table prayer, using the words of Psalm 145. My brother and I would sneak a peek and grin at each other across the table as we thought we were listening to God!

"*The eyes of all ...*" my uncle would intone in a deeper voice than he usually used. Each phrase had a dramatic pause: "*Thou givest them their meat in due season ...*" "*Thou openest thine hand ...*" While we may not have been paying attention as we should have, his words made a strong impression on us.

As we look at this prayer, we realize that God knows every creature's need and helps everyone who calls on Him. God's love for us is so great that daily He opens His hand and satisfies our needs and the needs of every living thing.

Every day God provides for and sustains all that He has created. Nowhere is His provision, love, and care for us more evident than in His sending Jesus to suffer, die, and rise again to save us from our sins. Knowing that salvation from sin, death, and Satan are our utmost need, Jesus willingly and lovingly gave His life and rose again so that we might have forgiveness of sins and life eternal through faith in Him.

God is so great! Our human minds have difficulty fathoming His strength and might. He is our everything! By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we daily thank and praise Him for every blessing He bestows on us. Empowered by the faith He gives, may we eagerly tell others of all the blessings and care He daily gives.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for the words of David which remind us how bountiful Your blessings are to us and all creatures. Help us every day to be thankful for them. Help us to joyfully tell others about the care, love, and salvation that only You provide. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Our Father's Care
Written by Marilyn Stuckwisch, Phoenix, Arizona
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Joy in Christian Freedom

Opening Devotion

[Jesus said,] “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

When Americans are asked to state the freedoms allowed through their government, they may think of the freedoms of speech and religion guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.

As Christians we know that real freedom comes with a price – the price paid in full for each one of us through the cross of Jesus Christ. Our Christian freedom from sin, guilt, and the Law’s accusation could not be paid for by our actions, but were fully and completely paid for by Christ’s death and resurrection.

Our freedom as Christians does not give us a license to live without regard to others. *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another* (Galatians 5:13). True Christian freedom responds to God’s love by reaching out in love and service to others.

Prayer: Dear Father, we know our true freedom is a gift from You. Help us to live as Your servants, using our freedom to Your glory and for the good of others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Joy in Christian Freedom

Mustard Seed: Living in Joy, 11/30

Written by Dcs. Betty Knapp, Irene Mensing, Myrna Lou Meyer, Margaret White

Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2005

Adapted by CREC, 2017



Living in the Spirit ... Means Freedom

Closing Devotion

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2).

Freedom. What does it mean in today's society? The word is used to support both liberal and conservative ideas and philosophies. Some are God-pleasing and others are not.

What does freedom mean to a Christian? We can look at it in two ways: First, the Christian has freedom **from** sin and death. Neither has power anymore. *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:56-57).*

Second, the Christian has freedom **to** live a new life, a life in Christ. *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).*

As Christians, we have freedom **from** death; freedom **to** live for Him. Thank God for His gift of freedom!

Prayer: Lord of Life, thank You for setting us free from sin and death through Jesus Christ. Help us to live our new lives for You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Living in the Spirit ... Means Freedom
Mustard Seed: Living in the Spirit, 7/30
Written by 2005-2007 Mustard Seeds Task Force
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



God Knows Me

Opening Devotion

O LORD, You have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways (Psalm 139:1-3).

God knows us intimately. He is familiar with each one of us. He walks with us and calls us by name. The Holy Spirit knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows everything about us. He knows when we rest or work, laugh or cry, what we say and think. As humans we find this too difficult to comprehend; it boggles our minds. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it (Psalm 139:6).*

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb (Psalm 139:13). Our Father knew us before our parents knew us. From the beginning His desire was for us to be His children. Nobody loves us like God loves us.

The God who created us, loves us, and knows us will forever be at our side. Not one minute in the span of our lives will go unnoticed by Him. While we are still on this earth we will never fully understand the awesomeness of God, but we can honor Him with praise and thanksgiving for what He has done and continues to do in our lives. We can be ready to tell others of our omnipresent Father ... *who desires all people to be saved ... (1 Timothy 2:4).*

Prayer: What comfort it is, dear Lord, to know that we do not face this day alone. You are with us to protect and guide us. Thank You for being ever present in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

God Knows Me
Mustard Seed: Comfort from the Psalms, 26/30
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Forever a Student

Closing Devotion

Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance ...
(Proverbs 1:5).

As a student, did you ever close the book, breathe a confident sigh, and say, "I know it! I'm ready for the test!" Or were you the one who crammed until the last bell rang and with much fear and trepidation took the test paper from your instructor's hand?

Solomon encourages us to be life-long learners when he says, *Let the wise hear and increase in learning* (Proverbs 1:5a). How wise is wise? How much learning is enough already? Solomon indicates that even the wise, those who have knowledge and discernment, are still learning. Perhaps they even say, "The more I know, the more I know I don't know."

So what is our source for information? Do we grab the nearest newspaper or quickly check the Internet news? For learning that truly guides our ways, fills our hearts, and leads to eternal life, we go to the Source of all wisdom, God Himself. In His Book, the Bible, we learn of His grace, His power, His love.

A Point To Ponder: How can I carve out time to seek true wisdom from God?

Prayer: All-wise and all-powerful God, we come to You with humble hearts. Fill us with Your wisdom and teach us Your ways. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Forever a Student
Mustard Seed: The Word: Wisdom for Living, 29/32
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2015
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Ready, Set, Grow!

Sketch

Let the wise hear and increase in learning ... (Proverbs 1:5a).

[Please provide: four actresses, four copies of the sketch for the actresses, flowers and containers as listed in the “Props” section below, one copy of each Bible verse label found at the end of the sketch.]

Cast:

Rose Johnson – President of Hill Valley Garden Club
Violet Springer – Secretary of Hill Valley Garden Club
Marigold Hoffenstetter – Member of Hill Valley Garden Club and LWML
Ivy Woods – Guest Speaker

Props: Table with assorted potted plants or flowers as listed. Label each flower with its name and Bible verse label provided at the end of the skit: sunflower – Proverbs 1:5a, forget-me-not – Psalm 77:11 (NKJV), bleeding heart – 1 John 3:16, gladiolus – Psalm 122:1, morning glory – Psalm 92:1-2, peace lily – John 14:27. Note: If you do not have live flowers available, use artificial versions or print photographs of each flower from the Internet, cut them out, attach each to a thin dowel rod or stick, and secure in separate containers.

Setting: Scene takes place at the Hill Valley Garden Club meeting hosted in Rose Johnson’s backyard.

[Table with potted plants and flowers is center stage. **Rose, Marigold, Violet** and **Ivy** stand behind it, facing audience.]

Rose: [Claps loudly three times.] Attention, ladies! The meeting of the Hill Valley Garden Club will now come to order. [Turns to **Violet.**] Violet, will you please read the minutes of the last meeting?

Violet: Of course, Rose. [Reads from script.] The Hill Valley Garden Club met last month at the home of Marigold Hoffstetter. We viewed her beautiful collection of ...

Marigold: [Interrupts **Violet.**] Excuse me, dear, but did you spell Hoffstetter with two “f’s” and three “t’s”? People are always misspelling my last name.

Violet: Let me see ... [Checks notes.] Yes, Marigold. I spelled it correctly this time. As I was saying, [Continues to read from script.] we viewed her beautiful collection of Australian violets.

Marigold: They were African violets, dear, not Australian.

Violet: Oh my goodness! I am so sorry. I always mix up my consonants.

Rose: You mean “continents”?

Violet: Those, too. [Continues to read from script.] After viewing the flowers, a lovely lemon cake was served. Ooh! I remember that lemon cake. It was so delicious! I really need to get that recipe.

Marigold: Well, it's in our church cookbook – page 92. I'm going to make it again next week for our LWML meeting. You should come. You can feed your body **and** soul.

Violet: If you're serving your lemon cake, then count me in!

Marigold: Good! You can come as my guest.

Rose: [Turns to audience.] And speaking of special guests, would you please join me in giving a warm welcome to our guest speaker, Ivy Woods.

[**Rose, Violet, and Marigold** clap politely.]

Ivy: Thank you, ladies. It is such a joy for me to be here today surrounded by all of you in this beautiful garden. [Gestures toward plants on table.] As you can see, I brought with me today a few of my favorite plants. Each one of these flowers helps me to grow.

Rose: You mean, you help the plants to grow. That's what gardeners do. We plant the seed in good soil, water it, and make sure it gets lots of sunshine so it grows into a healthy plant.

Ivy: That's right. But we also have a little growing to do ourselves and these plants can remind us of how to grow in God's garden.

Rose: So you are saying that today we are not the gardeners, we are the seeds?

Ivy: Exactly! And the first thing you're going to need is good soil and that soil is God's Word. So let's start off with one of my favorites – the **sunflower**. If any plant knows how to grow big and strong it is the sunflower.

Rose: I once grew a sunflower that was over ten feet tall!

Ivy: Yes, the sunflower is a great example of growth. So I wrote **Proverbs 1:5a** on the back of its container. It says, *Let the wise hear and increase in learning. When we learn more about God and His Word, then we always grow in faith!*

Violet: [Points at the table.] I see you have a **forget-me-not**. That's my favorite flower.

Ivy: It reminds me of another Bible verse. Perhaps you would like to read it to us.

Violet: [Reads from container.] *I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old (Psalm 77:11 NKJV).*

Ivy: God gives us His Word and helps us remember it in times of troubles. He helps us to remember His promises and what He has done for us.

Violet: That sounds like something we don't ever want to forget.

Marigold: It is good to remember God and His Word. When I think about how He has always been there for me in the past, it helps me to trust Him with my future.

Ivy: Not only does God help us with our troubles, He also helps us show love and compassion to others. [Holds up bleeding heart flower.]

Rose: Ooh! It's a beautiful **bleeding heart** flower.

Ivy: If you have ever tried to grow one of these then you know how important it is to water it regularly.

Rose: That is so true, but I just love that flower!

Ivy: Then I think you will also love what this Bible verse has to say. [Hands container to **Rose**.]

Rose: [Reads from container.] **1 John 3:16** states, *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.*

Violet: That's quite a statement.

Ivy: Isn't it good to know how much God loves us? He sent His Son Jesus to die as punishment for our sins. His love is eternal and it never changes. We can always count on Him. Jesus is the living water that we need each day for spiritual growth.

Marigold: That's so true. God loved us first. He helps us show His love to others. God uses us to help water the whole garden of believers.

Violet: I must say this is a different type of gardening lesson than I expected to hear today, but I like it!

Marigold: I agree. Hearing God's Word proclaimed always makes me glad.

Ivy: That brings us to the next beautiful flower – the **gladiolus**. [Hands container to **Marigold**.] Here, Marigold, would you please read the next verse?

Marigold: [Reads from the gladiolus container.] *I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!" (Psalm 122:1)*

Ivy: It is good to worship God on Sunday and give Him praise as we read and study His Word. We can also do that every day at home just as this **morning glory** reminds us. [Gestures at morning glory container.] Rose, would you please read the verse on the morning glory container to us?

Rose: [Reads from morning glory container.] *It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night ... (Psalm 92:1-2).*

Ivy: My morning devotions are always like a ray of sunshine that gets me through each day. I like knowing that all creation glorifies God. This flower which blooms in the morning reminds us to do the same as we begin each day glorifying our Lord.

Violet: But what about weeds? Are there going to be weeds in our faith garden?

Ivy: Unfortunately, in this world of sin there are always weeds. But God has an answer for that, too. You will find it in the verse on this **peace lily**. [Gestures at the peace lily.] Please read it for us, Violet.

Violet: [Reads from the peace lily container.] [Jesus said,] *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).*

Ivy: God gives us a different kind of peace when He takes away the weeds of our sin with His forgiveness. We don't have to be worried or afraid. We know that God is in control and promises to care for us in this world and the next.

Rose: I think with all that I am learning about God's Word the Holy Spirit is preparing me to bloom!

Ivy: Absolutely! As you know, each flower is unique and so it is with us. God has a different plan and purpose for each one of us here. He helps us bloom as we serve Him in various ways.

Rose: That's what makes His garden so beautiful.

Marigold: God helps us to bloom where we are planted.

Violet: And the Holy Spirit helps us to continually grow in our faith.

Ivy: Cling to God's Word and with the help of His creation be reminded of His garden of faith.

Rose: Thank you, Ivy, for sharing your unique gardening tips with us today. I know I could certainly use a little more digging into God's Word.

Marigold: Why don't you all join me next week at the LWML meeting for more Bible study? It's a great place to nourish the body and soul.

Rose: It has been a while since I attended, but yes, I think I would like to come.

Violet: Count me in.

Ivy: It sounds like a great idea. I say let's get ready, get set, and GROW!

Ready, Set, Grow!
Written by Kristin Kaldahl, Spencer, Iowa
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017

Plant labels for "Ready, Set, Grow!" Sketch

Sunflower:

Let the wise hear and increase in learning. Proverbs 1:5a

Forget-me-not:

"I will remember the works of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old." Psalm 77:11 (NKJV)

Bleeding heart:

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 1 John 3:16

Gladiolus:

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!" Psalm 122:1

Morning glory:

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night. Psalm 92:1-2

Peace lily:

[Jesus said,] "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." John 14:27



Deborah – Encourager

Opening Devotion

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment (Judges 4:4-5).

“You want me to do what?” could have been Deborah’s response when Barak, commander of the army, stated, *“If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go”* (Judges 4:8b). After all, it was Barak, not Deborah, God told to go into battle! Deborah had many reasons not to go with Barak. She was a judge; she was needed by the people. She wasn’t a warrior; women didn’t go to war. She was a wife; her household came first. But she used none of these as excuses. She went with the troops, encouraging them, and God gave them victory over the enemy.

God chose Deborah to support Barak and his troops. God also gives us opportunities to support and encourage others. It may be in a card, a letter, or a phone call. It may be at a food bank or at a health center. It may be praying with someone. *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near* (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Prayer: Lord, help us answer Your call to encourage others, knowing our support is in You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Deborah – Encourager
Mustard Seed: Daughters of the King, 8/34
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2013
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Dorcas – A Woman of Charity

Closing Devotion

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity (Acts 9:36).

As a follower of Jesus, Dorcas heard the message of Jesus Christ and lived it out in her daily life. She loved her risen Lord and imitated Him by letting His light and love shine through her by sewing garments for the poor. Sadly, Dorcas became sick and died.

Her devastated friends, with hope and in faith, sent for the apostle Peter who was in a nearby town. In Dorcas' room Peter knelt and prayed. With the power of Jesus – not his own – Peter told Dorcas to arise. And she opened her eyes and sat up.

Dead in our sin, we too have been brought back to life through the saving sacrifice of Jesus, not by our good works. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection we strive to give God glory and reflect His love through the life we lead. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).*

Prayer: Dear God, may we always and in every circumstance be Your willing servants. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dorcas – A Woman of Charity
Mustard Seed: Daughters of the King, 29/34
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2013
Adapted by CREC, 2017



You Look Like Your Father

Devotion

I have been told all of my adult life how much I resemble my mother. My uncles have even told me that I sound just like her. I always thought I looked more like my father because I was more like him. But, one day recently, I looked in the mirror and realized everyone had been right all along – I do look like my mother. A family resemblance can be comforting. It provides visual confirmation that we belong; we are part of the group.

As Christians we are made in God's image. *When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God* (Genesis 5:1b). We are His children, redeemed and transformed through the death and resurrection of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, when we take the focus off ourselves and reach out to others in love and kindness, we reflect the love and kindness of Jesus. We show people a glimpse of our heavenly Father.

During Christ's time on earth He touched the lives of people of all ages, beliefs, and ways of life. He loved people. He did not care about their social standing. He cared about their needs as He cared for them physically and spiritually.

Ephesians 2:10 states, *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* God has not only created us for good works, but he has given us a model of what those good works should be. In Matthew 25 Jesus tells us that when we visit prisoners, feed the hungry, care for the sick, and welcome the stranger we are serving Him.

Our good works are not something we do to gain salvation, but something we do out of love and gratitude for God's love and gift of salvation. We love God so much we want to live and act as he would.

As Lutheran Women in Mission, we have many opportunities to reach beyond ourselves and show God's love to a lost and erring world. God has prepared good works for each of us. He equips each of us for certain tasks with unique personalities and spiritual gifts. Have you been called to serve as a short term missionary or to lead a Bible study at your church? How about making quilts or teaching Sunday school? Use the gifts and talents God has given you to care for others. But do not get stuck in a rut or reject a new area of service because it is not an area for which you feel equipped. God does not ask if we are capable, only if we are willing. He promises to always be with us and to give us what we need to serve Him.

Our faithful prayers and mighty mites allow us to make a difference in the lives of people in our communities and around the world. We care for them physically and spiritually, just as Christ has taught us.

Can people see the love of Christ through you? Be a Lutheran Woman in Mission, sharing God's love and compassion with a hurting and needy world.

Prayer: Dear Father, You have rescued and redeemed us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, Your Son. Through Holy Baptism, You have made us a part of Your

family. Daily You forgive us, renew us, and equip us to love and serve You and others. Help us to make the most of all the opportunities You give us to show Jesus' saving love. Give us willing servant hearts to share Your love and compassion with all. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

You Look Like Your Father
Written by Debbie Yocky, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Serve the Lord with Gladness

Sketch

[**Please provide:** three actresses, musical accompaniment, three copies of the sketch for the actresses, and copies of page 3 for attendees.]

Props: Small table, telephone books, church directory, Mite Boxes

[**Mary** stands by a table with a number of telephone books and church or other directories as **Marlene** enters.]

Marlene: My goodness, Mary, what are you doing with all these phone books and directories?

Mary: I'm trying to find a telephone number for Gladys Nuss, and I'm not having any luck!

Marlene: Gladys Nuss? Who is Gladys Nuss?

Mary: Well, I'm not sure. Brenda called me to say she was coming by to visit with me before our meeting about serving on the Gospel Outreach Committee with Gladys Nuss, but I don't know who she is. It must be someone new at church that's not in the directory. I've looked in the telephone books, and I even tried "people search" online, but that didn't help at all!

Marlene: [Laughs.] Oh, Mary, I don't think Brenda was asking you to serve with Gladys Nuss. I think she was asking you to serve the Lord with gladness; you know – the motto of the Lutheran Women in Mission.

Mary: Well, that makes more sense. What was I thinking, I mean hearing, anyway? I'm not sure even hearing aids would have helped me on this one. I should have understood what she was saying. After all, the Lutheran Women in Mission have been serving the Lord with gladness since the very beginning of the organization back in 1942.

Marlene: Mary, we all need to stay tuned in. When you think about it, that motto, which comes from Psalm 100:2, really does depict the women throughout the years. It is amazing when you consider all the ways in which we serve as Lutheran Women in Mission.

Mary: Helping those in need through donations of soap, quilts, and items for kits for Lutheran World Relief has always been a joyful occasion for the ladies of our society. [Other examples can be used.]

Marlene: Think about all the items Lutheran Women in Mission have brought for in-gatherings at conventions, zone events, or for their local society. These are all means by which we serve the Lord with gladness.

[**Brenda** enters carrying a handful of Mite Boxes.]

Brenda: Hi, ladies. I would have been here a little sooner, but I had to pick up some more Mite Boxes to distribute at our meeting. I want to have some extra boxes to give to the new members and visitors.

Mary: Marlene and I were just discussing how the Lutheran Women in Mission have been serving the Lord with gladness. Those Mite Boxes are also a reminder of another way we fulfill our LWML motto.

Brenda: That is most certainly true. Serving on the Gospel Outreach Committee has definitely opened my eyes to all the ways our mites make a difference in the world. We can certainly see that the generosity of the Lutheran Women in Mission is evident when you consider the mission grant projects adopted by the district and national LWML.

Marlene: It is really important that we continue to encourage the women to be joyful givers of their mites. By doing so, they are helping to bring the Gospel to people all around the world.

Mary: Did you know you can go to the LWML website for resources for our mission grant projects? Each month they feature a different project and offer mission grant calendars, prayer guides, and stories. You can download them and make them available not only to the LWML members, but to all the members of the congregation. I keep my prayer guide in my Bible to use with my daily devotions.

Brenda: If only the Mite Boxes could talk, just think of all the fantastic stories they could tell of how the Lutheran Women in Mission have been serving the Lord with gladness with their sacrificial mite-giving throughout the years! I wonder just how many hearts have been touched with the love of Jesus through our mites?

Marlene: Brenda, I don't know the answer to your question, but I do know we can continue to encourage and equip the Lutheran Women in Mission to share their faith in Jesus Christ with people around the world with their generous giving of mites.

Mary: [Looks at watch.] I suppose we need to get ready to go to our LWML meeting. We don't want to keep the women waiting.

Brenda: Oh, Mary, I just about forgot the reason I came by before our meeting. I want to ask you if you would serve the Lord with gladness on the Gospel Outreach Committee. Do you think you can serve in this way?

Mary: Brenda, I would be delighted to serve the Lord with Gladys Nuss.

Brenda: [Looks bewildered.] Gladys Nuss? Who is Gladys Nuss?

Marlene: [Laughs.] Brenda, stay tuned, that's a story for another time. I think it would be good to close tonight's LWML meeting by singing "Serve the Lord with Gladness" to remind us of our goal as Lutheran Women in Mission.

Mary: That is a good idea. Let's sing through it before we leave just to refresh our memories before we get to the meeting.

SING "Serve the Lord with Gladness!"

1. "Serve the Lord with gladness!"

It is He alone
Who redeemed us sinners,
Guides us as His own
To enjoy the blessings
Of His love and grace,
Will at last in glory
Meet us face to face.
Onward, then, for Jesus!
Let this be our aim:
"Serve the Lord with gladness!"
Glorify His name.

2. "Serve the Lord with gladness!"

He gave us command
To proclaim His Gospel
Now in every land
So that fellow sinners
May, like us, be blest.
Leading them to Jesus,
We can serve Him best.
Onward, then, for Jesus!
Let this be our aim:
"Serve the Lord with gladness!"
Glorify His name!

3. "Serve the Lord with gladness!"

There's no greater joy
Than to serve the Master,
Work in His employ.
As we build His kingdom
Angels, too, rejoice
Over every sinner
Brought to hear His voice.
Onward, then, for Jesus!
Let this be our aim:
"Serve the Lord with gladness!"
Glorify His name!

Tune: LSB 662, TLH 658, LW 518
Prof. Ernest Lewerenz

Serve the Lord with Gladness
Written by Mary Schmidt, Mt. Hope, Kansas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Light in the Darkness

Opening Devotion

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1-2).

The hill behind my house, not grand by mountain standards, is a challenge for my legs and lungs. One very dreary fall morning when my mood matched the weather, I was sitting at my kitchen table staring out into the backyard. Suddenly I was awed by “fire” in the treetops on the hill. The sun had broken through the clouds and its rays turned the trees to a brilliant orange that blazed against the black sky. It lasted only a few minutes, but what joy filled my heart as my eyes feasted on the beauty!

A greater joy came from remembering the One who made the hill, the trees, and the dark gloomy morning with its spark of beauty. Our merciful God is still in charge. The touch of His love turns darkness into light.

Time spent praying, praising God, and reading His Word helps me remember that though my days are not always sunny and fun, God is with me. His beauty, love, and mercy surround me. When my spirits start to sag, I look to my hill – or better yet, climb it. I find myself praising God for this bit of creation He has given me.

Prayer: Creator God, help us look for the beauty in the world and in the people You put into our lives. Let the joy of hope shine in us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Light in the Darkness
Mustard Seed: Living as a Woman in Mission, 12/32
Written by Barbara Carlson
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



How Lord ... Can I Cope with Hardships?

Closing Devotion

“For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:17).

Life doesn't always unfold the way it was planned. Expectant parents don't plan for babies born with birth defects or developmental challenges. Accidents that leave loved ones paralyzed were not part of the plan for their future. Loved ones living alternate life-styles so different from the way they were raised isn't part of the happily-ever-after life envisioned for them.

The complications that accompany any of these situations, along with dozens more we could name, can become overwhelming because we can't change anything! We question God: “How can I cope with this?” God knows our heartache and assures us that [we] *can do all things through him who strengthens [us]* (Philippians 4:13).

Life's challenges may not change, so we must believe that there are no limits to what God can do in and through us. We will face adversity; how we deal with it is what is important. Learning to rely on God, in good times and bad, will be our source of comfort and strength.

Prayer: Lord, forgive us for being fearful during difficult times. In our frailty, please make us strong. Lift us up, Father, so we can give You glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

How Lord ... Can I Cope with Hardships?
Mustard Seed: How, Lord? 7/32
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Myths of LWML

Sketch

[**Please provide:** three actresses, three copies of the sketch for the actresses.]

Cast: Three young women – Alison, Beth, and Stacey

Setting: The following conversation happens between two young women, walking out of church, after an LWML Sunday service.

Alison: Wow, that was an inspiring service! I think we should join LWML!

Beth: [Looks surprised] Are you sure you want to be associated with the LWML at your age? Don't you know what LWML stands for?

Alison: Yeah. They said it is Lutheran Women's Missionary League.

Beth: More like "Lutheran Women's Menopausal League." Plus, we don't even know how to become members.

Alison: Now that I think about it, I'm busy [Insert time/day/frequency that your group meets. Example: "on the third Monday night of each month"]. I won't be able to attend the meetings.

Beth: Maybe we should just take a Mite Box for now and wait to pledge our membership until we're empty nesters?

Alison: Yeah, I'm sure the LWML will still be around ...

[By this point in the conversation, the women have reached the Nave exit.]

Activity: "Stand Up If"

[Once participants stand, they should be asked to remain standing.]

Stacey: Ladies, stand up if ...

You have attended an LWML meeting OR you attend a women's Bible Study;
You donate items for the monthly mission collections OR you have dropped spare change in a Mite Box;
You are a member of [church name];
You have spiritual gifts.

If you are standing, then you are a member of the LWML!
If you are sitting, thank you for your support of these women!

[Consider adding something like "And, the (name of society) LWML meets (give meeting times). All women are encouraged to join us." OR "Currently the (name of society) is working on these projects: (add in project names). We would love to have you join us with your talents as we serve the Lord with gladness!"]

Myths of LWML

Written by Alli Bauck, Olathe, Kansas

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Now Thank We All Our God

Opening Devotion

[Please provide: musical accompaniment; hymnals or copies of this devotion for attendees.]

Begin by singing together verse 1 of “Now Thank We All Our God”:

Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, In whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mother’s arms Has blest us on our way
With countless gifts of love And still is ours today.

LSB 895, verse 1, TLH 36, LW 443

Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! (Psalm 105:1-2).

One essential part of our worship is thanksgiving. This hymn reminds us to thank our God “with hearts and hands and voices.” We offer our whole selves in thanking Him for all His blessings.

Those blessings include life, home, health, peace, grace, and guidance. Most importantly, we thank God for a new life in Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. We thankfully acknowledge His work of salvation in our lives and look forward to living with our Savior God in heaven forever.

Let us continue by singing together verse 3:

All praise and thanks to God The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns With them in highest heav’n,
The one eternal God, Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, And shall be evermore.

Prayer: We give You hearty thanks, gracious God, for Your innumerable gifts to us! Thank You for all the people You have given as blessings in our lives. Most of all, we thank You for the gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life in Jesus. In His bountiful name we pray. Amen.

Now Thank We All Our God
Mustard Seed: Joyful, Joyful, 11/31
Hymn Text: LSB 895
Written by Rev. Larry and Shari Miller
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Total Praise

Closing Devotion

I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us ... (Isaiah 63:7a).

Someone once observed, "The wise count their blessings; fools, their problems." How true! We all know a person who constantly rattles off an infinite number of problems, and another who consistently speaks of life's many pleasures and blessings. The difference? A heart of ingratitude versus a heart of thanksgiving.

A heart of thanksgiving for *all that the LORD has granted us* is not only a Biblically prescribed principle, but it is also essential to finding joy in life. First, gratitude instills in us contentment with what we have and invites us to take pleasure in those things available to us each day. Second, gratitude brings about peace of mind, and peace of mind opens us to see the best in ourselves and in others. Third, grateful people attract deep friendships and choice opportunities, which often elude complainers and problem-mongers.

Many of God's wise people begin every prayer with words of thanksgiving, while others keep a journal in which they list several "gratitude points" each day. No matter how you count your blessings, add them up – and give Him total praise!

Prayer: We will tell of Your kindness by counting our blessings in gratitude total and true. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Total Praise
Mustard Seed: Living in Praise, 25/32
Written by Patricia Mitchell
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



The Perfect Gift

Opening Devotion

For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... (Romans 3:22b-24).

No matter how well we know someone, finding the perfect gift can be a real challenge. Will we give something needed or look for a one-of-a kind gift guaranteed to bring delight? Sometimes the perfect gift is just too expensive. Maybe a gift card is the best choice.

Out of love, God sent Jesus, His one and only Son, to give us the gift of forgiveness. He is the perfect size. He easily fits into any heart and can be taken everywhere. He is the perfect gift for any age – from conception through the day we are called home. In fact, He is the only gift that comes with a heavenly guarantee. His lifetime guarantee promises a life with Him for all eternity, and it costs absolutely nothing. However there was a price, and it was high. It was paid by Christ Himself when He died to take away all of our sins. Lovingly, He sends to us His Holy Spirit to provide the faith to believe in Him. Jesus! Truly the Perfect Gift!

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank You for the gift of salvation given to us through Your Son Jesus. What comfort it is to know how much we are loved! In His perfect name. Amen.

The Perfect Gift
Mustard Seed: Everyday Celebrations, 2/28
Written by Elaine Bickel and Jan Struck
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2015
Adapted by CREC, 2017



It's a New Day

Closing Devotion

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Sometimes we're glad to see days come to a close. They've been hard, boring, or exhausting. We've heard bad news, or we've suffered a heartbreaking event. "Whew!" we sigh, and we look to a new day for better times.

Jesus' birth brought to the world a brand new day. It was the first day of His life on earth, a life that would bring Him the scorn and mockery of many who heard Him speak God's Word in truth. It would bring Him betrayal and beating and death on a cross in fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation. But His death was not His last day on earth! Three days later, Jesus rose, bringing to us victory over guilt and death, over hopelessness and despair.

No matter what the day brings, today is a day to rejoice. Jesus came to bring the gift of His grace and the assurance of a life in and with Him. He came so we can put the past behind us and delight in a brand new day.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, a new day dawned when You came down from heaven to earth, and now we can rejoice in You every day! Amen.

It's a New Day
Mustard Seed: The Joy of Christmas, 3/32
Written by Patricia Mitchell
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



God's Perfect Gift Devotion

[Please provide: musical accompaniment; hymnals for attendees.]

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

At this time of the year, our minds can focus on the brightly colored packages with shiny bows tucked neatly underneath the Christmas tree. We wonder, "What is in those packages that we see?" Regardless of our age, we all enjoy receiving Christmas gifts. What is the best Christmas gift you have ever received? [Allow time to share some of the answers.]

The best gift I was thinking of was not wrapped and waiting for me under the Christmas tree, but it was a Christmas gift, of sorts. My gift came a little before Christmas when my first child, a daughter, was born on December 2.

Even though my daughter was a wonderful gift, she was not the perfect gift. There is one gift that fits all sizes, all ages, all nationalities, all races. It is a gift we can all share. Once you have discovered this gift, you will not want to return it. That is why it is the perfect gift for everyone. My baby was not this perfect gift, but another baby was. That baby, that perfect gift, is Jesus.

Many do not think they need the gift of Jesus. Many ask, "At Christmas, why do we need to talk about a baby who was born over 2,000 years ago?" Romans 3:23-24 answers that question. That passage states, ... *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ...* Our sins separate us from God. To save us from the eternal death our sins cause, God sent Jesus, the perfect gift, to redeem us through His death and resurrection. Jesus has bought us back and made us righteous (perfect and sinless) before God, so that God now views us as justified. That means God declares us innocent and sees us just as if we have never sinned. How does Jesus do this? It is only through grace, which is undeserved love. This is the essence of this perfect gift. It is something we do not deserve, but is freely given to us by our loving heavenly Father!

I had thought waiting almost nine years for my daughter was a long time, but people waited, and waited, and waited for many centuries for Jesus, the perfect gift, to arrive. Today some are still waiting to hear of Jesus. The work of the LWML is so important to all those people still waiting in darkness. The LWML produces Christ-centered materials we can use to share the Good News of Jesus. The LWML raises funds to support missionaries throughout the world. The Holy Spirit works through the Word we and those missionaries share so that those sitting in darkness will be able to join Jesus, the perfect gift, for eternity in heaven. At Christmastime, we celebrate when this perfect gift came to earth. Jesus **is** our gift. He is the perfect gift for everyone!

Let us join together in singing verses 1, 3, and 4 of "The People That in Darkness Sat" LSB 412, TLH 106, LW 77.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, at Christmastime and always, help us to proclaim to all the world that You are the perfect gift. May the Holy Spirit work through Your Word of truth that we and missionaries proclaim so that those in darkness may come to know You as their Lord and Savior. In Your name we pray. Amen.

God's Perfect Gift
Written by Celeste Cummins, Storm Lake, Iowa
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Working for His Glory

Opening Devotion

... *whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31b).

Do you remember receiving your first paycheck? Maybe it was received for lawn mowing, snow shoveling, or babysitting. That money was so special some have framed the first dollar ever made!

It is exciting to be chosen for a new job. From flipping burgers to fixing computers, from grocery bagger to store owner, from mail clerk to director of marketing, each job is special. For some, a first job continues until retirement. Others change jobs and careers in their search for fulfilling work. Some use their skills in a high-rise office and some in the family home.

God has given us the talents that we use in our work. Each person's skill set may be different, but the Creator of our gifts wants us to *do all to the glory of God*. When we give our best at our job, we are honoring the Lord of our salvation and life, and can give witness to our Savior Jesus Christ who gave His all for us on the cross of Calvary. No matter the nature of our job, we can perform it for His glory and with the strength He provides.

Prayer: Giver of all things, we thank and praise you for current employment. May what we do give glory to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Working for His Glory
Mustard Seed: Everyday Celebrations, 21/28
Written by Elaine Bickel and Jan Struck
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2015
Adapted by CREC, 2017



How, Lord ... Can I Work with Joy?

Closing Devotion

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men ... (Colossians 3:23).

The sign was posted on the inside of the church door: "The Mission Field Starts Here."
Where else could that sign be placed?

A teacher could paste it into her daily plan book. A farmer could put it on the steering wheel of his pickup. Parents could stick it on the bathroom mirror. Why? Because each one of us has a mission field right in front of us.

How do God's people approach their respective mission fields? Do their attitudes reflect the love of God? Do their faces show the joy of serving Him? Is the work done half-heartedly or *heartily*, a heart responding to the love of the Lord?

Think of your personal mission field. Thank God for it. Then evaluate how you worked in it during the past 24 hours, the past week, the past month. Did the people you served see the Lord in you and in your work?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us remember that our work is our mission field. Forgive us when we have a poor attitude. Help us serve You with a joyful heart. In Jesus' name. Amen.

How, Lord ... Can I Work with Joy?

Mustard Seed: How, Lord? 27/32

Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2011

Adapted by CREC, 2017



Working with Joy Devotion

[Please provide: if singing the hymn, musical accompaniment; hymnals for attendees.]

... *whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31b).

One of Aesop's fables "The Gnat and the Bull" reads: "A gnat flew over the meadow with much buzzing for so small a creature and settled on the tip of one of the horns of a bull. After he had rested a short time, he made ready to fly away. But before he left he begged the bull's pardon for having used his horn for a resting place. 'You must be very glad to have me go now,' he said. 'It's all the same to me,' replied the bull. 'I did not even know you were there.'" The point of the fable is that we are often of greater importance in our own eyes than in the eyes of our neighbor. The smaller the mind the greater the conceit. (*The Aesop for Children*, Milo Winter. New York: Checkerboard Press, 1947, page 21.)

Too often we mute the Gospel's power because of our lack of concern for others. When our focus is on ourselves, we often see others as the bull saw the gnat. What motivates us to bring glory to God in all that we do? The answer is when, by faith, the Holy Spirit helps us to see our neighbor as Christ sees her. Particular neighbors may not be very lovable, but Christ loves them and died for them. Holy Scripture reminds us, *We love because he first loved us* (1 John 4:19). Jesus Himself commands us "... *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Mark 12:31a).

Webster's Dictionary presents a synonym for work: **calling**. Paul reminded the Corinthians that their lives were a living testimony to others of God's glory. The same is true for you and me. Through our words and actions, we reflect our core beliefs, desires, faith, and fears. When the Holy Spirit empowers us to care for another person freely rather than out of obligation, we express God's love to that individual. When we tell someone about the reason for the hope that is in us, we honor God. He calls us through His Word to build up one another and to witness to His love in all aspects of our lives.

We do not earn our salvation by works. It comes through the work that Christ did on the cross. The ultimate goal of our existence is to bring glory to God in "whatever we do." Our power comes from the Holy Spirit. Paul learned how to serve his neighbor with joy in everything he did. He tells us: ... *I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:12b-13).

God gives us joy and works in us to give Him glory by **Making Our Mission Meaningful**. Part of a recent LWML Primary Focus states: "We challenge and equip women of all ages, stages, ethnicities, and experiences to make a meaningful difference in the lives of hurting, helpless, and unbelieving people at home and throughout the world." This mission is accomplished as God works in us and through us. *For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building* (1 Corinthians 3:9).

As Paul prays for the Ephesians, he closes his prayer with the criterion for working with joy: *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all*

generations, forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21). Joy in work comes when we continually look ... *to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith ...* (Hebrews 12:2a).

The psalmist warns us to not think we are of greater importance in our own eyes than in the eyes of our neighbor. *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!* (Psalm 115:1) Are you doing what you are doing for your own glory, or are you bringing glory to God in “whatever you do”? By the power of the Holy Spirit, may all that we do be done in joyful recognition and gratitude for all that our great God has done and continues to do for us. To Him be the glory!

Sing or say the words to "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying" LSB 826, TLH 496, LW 318.

We Pray: Dear Savior, You have called us through the gospel to be part of Your church, the fellowship of all believers. Through this unique and special calling, enable us to experience the joy and blessing of working together with fellow believers, doing things together for Your kingdom that we cannot do alone. Sharing a common faith and purpose, may we cherish the unity You give with all believers. May all that we do be done in joy to glorify and proclaim You. Amen.



Joy in God's Love

Opening Devotion

We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote the famous words, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways ..." Yet when God looked at us, how many ways could He have counted? He saw our sins *red as crimson* (Isaiah 1:18b). And He loved us anyway!

"For God so loved the world, that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). When He looks at us now – through the cross of Jesus – God sees us as the people He designed us to be: forgiven, loving, serving people. Though we sin daily, God's love and forgiveness are always available to us. His love never fails, and He never withholds forgiveness from the repentant sinner. In Him we have comfort and joy.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Your unconditional love. We could not have loved You first, and we could not have brought ourselves to You. Help us to respond to the love You have given us by sharing it with those whose lives touch ours. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Joy in God's Love

Mustard Seed: Living in Joy, 6/30

Written by Dcs. Betty Knapp, Irene Mensing, Myrna Lou Meyer, Margaret White

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2005

Adapted by CREC, 2017



Begin with God ... So We Can Love Others

Closing Devotion

Unconditional love describes God's love for all sinners. This love began with Adam and Eve, whose sin spoiled the perfect world God had made for them, and continues through the present day.

In love, God promised us a Savior. He renewed that promise over centuries and fulfilled it by sending His Son. Jesus demonstrated love in word and action, culminating with His death on Calvary and His resurrection three days later.

How can we as mere mortals respond to such love? Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can demonstrate His love to others.

... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love ... (Ephesians 4:1b-2).

... may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ... (1 Thessalonians 3:12a).

And when we fail to love, as human beings always will, God accepts our repentance, forgives us, and enables us to begin again.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You are the perfect example of love. You have spoken of love and You have demonstrated it through Your Son Jesus. Lord, we do not love You or others as we should, and we beg Your forgiveness. Give us, we pray, a greater measure of Your unconditional love so that we are able to share it with Your people. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Begin with God ... So We Can Love Others
Mustard Seed: Begin with God, 28/28
Written by 2005-2007 Mustard Seeds Task Force
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Abounding in Love

Devotion

*May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all
(1 Thessalonians 3:12a).*

It is not always easy to abound in love. There are days when it is not easy to abound in like. Abounding in love seems impossible when a spouse has forgotten to take out the trash or the children bicker over a toy or gadget. Yet, Christ says in John 15:12: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* We don't have a choice to love or not.

We are the redeemed children of God. We are loved by God who has given His Son for us. He is there to help us love others. He made love an action verb. He leads us to actively love others. In our families a hug and a kind word actively shows love for one another. In times of stress and frustration, however, this is not easy to do. At these times, a special Bible verse can be brought to mind: *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Romans 5:5b). This verse is a comfort when it seems impossible to love someone else. God pours His love into us. By His help it will overflow.

When a co-worker seems to be deliberately hurtful and obstinate instead of helpful; when a neighbor allows her dog to run loose in your garden; when a teacher at school is less than understanding to a child you love; these are times God gives us the opportunity to practice love. At times like these we can love a person as God has commanded or take vengeance as God has commanded us not to do in Leviticus 19:18: *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.*

The Holy Spirit works in us to give us the strength to show love to those who at times are unlovable. We can show God's love to the co-worker by taking her a cup of coffee and by giving her your willing ear to listen. We can show God's love to the neighbor by taking her a plant or a bouquet of flowers from your garden. We can show God's love to the teacher by volunteering to help with a classroom project. These are ways to share the overflowing love God has poured into our hearts.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, this love can overflow into our communities through random acts of kindness. Take cookies to a business that you patronize. Volunteer at a non-profit in your area. Keep smiling at the grocery store and invite the person with a fussy child to go in front of you in line. Christ looked at individuals and saw their need and helped them. God works in us and helps us to look at people to see what their need might be so that we can help them and show them His love.

Praying for family, friends, and strangers is also a great way to spread God's love. To pray for the drunk driver, the terrorist, the unfriendly nemesis, as well as the victim, is not easy but they too are part of the "all" our Lord commands us to love. Even when what to pray seems impossible, God takes over. God's Word promises us, *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words* (Romans 8:26).

Prayer: Lord, help us walk Your servant way
Wherever love may lead
And, bending low, forgetting self,
Each serve the other's need.

You bid us bend our human pride
Nor count ourselves above
The lowest place, the meanest task
That waits the gift of love.
Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way
LSB 857, verses 1 and 4

Abounding in Love
Written by Alice Troyke, Kimberly City, Missouri
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Overflowing Love

Sketch

[Please provide: five actresses and five copies of the sketch for the actresses.]

Cast: Helen, a widow
Reader
April, a wife
Marsha, wife of a serviceman and mother of four
Cindy, a nurse

Setting: Church meeting room with a table and chairs; coffee cups and coffeecake; serving tray; bags with craft material to make centerpieces. Each actress could carry a tote and/or purse with the various craft objects.

Helen: [Enters, takes off jacket and looks around.] Well, I certainly didn't expect to be the first one here. You would think women who volunteer for a committee would think enough of the project to get here on time. Sometimes I wonder why I said I would chair this group.

Reader: [Stands off to the side.] ... *may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ...* (1 Thessalonians 3:12a).

Helen: Why am I acting this way? They have families and responsibilities while I only have myself and the cat to be concerned with.

April: [Rushes in with a bag or two of craft items.] Oh, Helen, I am so glad you are here. I just had the strangest experience and I need to share it.

Helen: I certainly hope it was a good strange. Here, let me help you with your things. [Starts to help unload items.]

April: Well, I'll let you be the judge of the strangeness. I just stopped at Wally World to pick up some ribbon and glue sticks for the centerpieces we are making. Of course, I found a few sale items that I could use so it took longer than I had planned. Wouldn't you know that there was only one gal at the check-out but the couple in front of me only had three items in their cart so I thought I would be out in short order. Was I wrong!

Helen: What do you mean?

April: The woman was cashing an out-of-town payroll check for \$55. She didn't have any ID and her husband had a different last name so the clerk was trying to get the supervisor to come and approve the check. No supervisor was available – something about a meeting, I guess. Then the man took out a credit card and said they could use it. Surprise! It didn't work either. By then I was getting really impatient so I reached into my billfold for my credit card. Behind my card was one of those business cards we had made for the church to put with the Christmas cookies we took to the nursing home. Suddenly ...

Reader: ... *may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ...* (1 Thessalonians 3:12a).

April: It just came to me that I could pay for their bread, cheese, and lunch meat and it would still be faster than waiting for them to figure out their problems. I told the clerk to put their items on my bill and I gave them the card and invited them to church Sunday. The woman looked like she was in shock and the man just stared, while the clerk asked if I was sure that's what I wanted to do. While the clerk was ringing up my stuff, the woman told me that this was her last paycheck because she had been let go from her job. She and her husband, who was out of work also, were on their way to stay with family. They both thanked me and left while I loaded up and separated the church stuff from my home things. I have no idea why I helped them the way that I did.

Reader: ... *may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ...* (1 Thessalonians 3:12a).

Helen: Your situation sounds like it was a good strange. I am so pleased that you thought to help those folks. I don't know if I would have thought of doing that. I might have looked around for another checker or just thought nasty thoughts about it all.

Marsha: [Angrily enters. Tosses her jacket and purse aside and plops down on a chair.] It's a wonder I even made it to this meeting. Arghh!!!! What a morning!

April: Wow, what happened to you? Were you in an accident with your car?

Helen: Something terrible must have happened. Was it the kids? Is it something with Mike? You usually seem so cheerful and positive.

Marsha: Would you believe that I planned on being here early? The kids know this is my day for doing the things I like. Tom was as bad as he has been since Mike went to Kabal. For being my oldest, he certainly acted like a spoiled rotten kid. [Briefly pauses.] Is there coffee? I didn't even have time for that.

Helen: I think the coffee should be ready, and I have some coffee cake I brought that I was planning on serving. Let me get it. [Leaves.]

Marsha: I can't believe Helen is so cheerful.

April: And helpful.

Marsha: Being a single parent, even for a year, is getting to be too much and it's only been six months. Helen has been widowed for years and I don't understand how she happily does so much for everyone. I feel awful. [Takes out a tissue, wipes her eyes, and then blows her nose.]

Reader: ... *may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ...* (1 Thessalonians 3:12a).

[**Helen** enters carrying a tray of cups and goodies.]

April: [Reaches out to help **Helen**.] Let me help you. I think a cup of coffee would be good for all of us. I'm sure Cindy won't mind if we start snacking without her. Bless her heart, she hasn't been to a meeting on time since she started working nights at the VA hospital.

Marsha: She probably won't want to hear my tale of woe. She told me she didn't know if she would be staying here for much longer. Here I am complaining because I am unable to cope with a household without a husband to help.

Helen: Now, Marsha, drink your coffee and tell us why your morning was so terrible. [**All** drink and eat a bite]

Marsha: Well, it started last night. We didn't get to talk to Mike on the computer. He had said they might be deployed for a day or so and would not be able to get in touch, but when it happens, I just lose it. That always sets the kids off so it might have been my fault as well.

Tom was at the library for a study time with his math group. They are trying out for some special academic contest so he was late coming home and didn't put gas in his car. Since he was driving his carpool this morning, he wanted to use my car. So we switched cars and I had to put in gas at the first place I could find. Of course, Katie couldn't find her homework, and Emma thought she had an upset stomach and didn't want to go to school. That meant Tyler didn't want to go to preschool either. The only good thing that happened is that silly dog came in with Tyler's backpack just like a normal morning. I am so glad we have Tyler and Sarge.

Even though it was a mad house with us all yelling or crying and so rushed that juice and yogurt bars were all they had time to eat, there was time for all of us to laugh before we left the house.

I was so aggravated at them and, I suppose, Mike and myself. I know it was partially because I was worried about Mike but still ...

Reader: ... *may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ...* (1 Thessalonians 3:12a).

April: I am sorry your day started out so badly. Let's have a hug and know we love you and understand. [**All** stand and hug.]

[**Cindy** enters as she carries more craft items.]

Cindy: Hey, what's going on? Can I get in on the hugs? I could use a hug today.

[**All** laugh and individually hug **Cindy**, then settle around the table.]

Helen: [Turns to **Cindy**.] It seems we all have had unusual mornings. How has yours been?

April: Has it been normal or strange in a good or bad way?

Marsha: I certainly hope it has been good.

Cindy: Well, if you can believe it, it has been both bad and good strange. [**All** nod and quietly comment.] The VA is closing the hospital I work at and moving to "a major metropolitan area for easier access and better service." What they mean is that they are down-sizing and cost-cutting and I will be out of a job. The nurses can either apply at the

new hospital or look for another job. That's the bad news and the other is either good or bad.

Helen, April, Marsha: [Speak together.] What?

Cindy: You know I had been thinking about applying for a medical mission trip. Today Pastor called to tell me that Lutheran World Relief is looking for Administrative RNs to do work coordinating at a couple of facilities in Turkey. He thought if I had a heart for this it would be a good thing for me and for them.

Helen: That sounds like something you would be good at. Of course they will have applicants from all over but if you want we can certainly start praying about it.

[All agree and nod their heads affirmatively.]

Marsha: Cindy, what is bothering you? Mike has said that the refugees are really in need of assistance, both medically and in relocating to a new home.

April: You are a good nurse and have a heart for people. Of course, there is a danger in those countries. Is that what is bothering you?

Helen: You would get used to a new area in no time. Look how fast you adjusted to living and working at the VA. You like working with all sorts of people.

Cindy: That's just it. I don't know if I could serve the same people who have terrorists as part of their nationality. I know thinking that isn't being a good Christian. I don't know what to do.

Reader: ... *may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ...* (1 Thessalonians 3:12a).

Helen: This is something we can pray about with you, Cindy. We know that God works change in our hearts. Remember, God can do anything. Prayer is a powerful tool. It isn't easy to give a problem to God and then not take it back. Trusting in God for everyday help is something we all do.

April: Remember how Marsha reacted when Mike called to ask if she would be willing to accept a new child into their family? That child came with a dog. Neither understood English nor our lifestyle.

Marsha: Oh, I was just awful! I can still remember that phone call. At first I thought he was out of his mind. Then Mike asked me to just listen and pray. He told me that his team had rescued an infant from an abandoned village where his family had been killed. They were going in to verify that the enemy had gone when they found our Tyler. Of course, he wasn't our Tyler then. Then he told me about the dog that was protecting the baby and wouldn't leave. If it hadn't been because of the unusual circumstances and the need for immediate humanitarian action, Tyler would have perished right there. It was due to the work of military, government, and church folks that it all took place. It had to have been God's hand that moved everyone. Those groups had never cooperated like that before or since.

Cindy, you were the one person that I wanted with me when I flew to get Tyler and Sarge. You didn't hesitate at all. You came and I know you cared for Tyler as soon as we saw him.

Cindy: But that was different. Mike knew the history and checked out the situation.

Helen: Maybe it wasn't Mike that checked out the situation but God that did the choosing and checking.

April: Cindy, this is definitely a God moment. Once He has a plan in place, it works. There is a Bible verse from 1 Thessalonians that has been going through my mind all morning.

Marsha: Mine too.

Helen: Is it ... *may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ...?*

Cindy: Oh my! I do know that verse. That will be my prayer while I consider this tremendous decision.

All: It will be our prayer even after you reach your decision.

Helen: Friends, let's get our crafting out of the way so we can get to the serious work of talking and listening to God.

[**All** nod affirmatively as they take their craft supplies out of their bags.]



God Loves Me Dearly

Opening Devotion

[**Please provide:** musical accompaniment; LSB hymnals or copies of this devotion for attendees.]

Begin by singing together verse 1 of “God Loves Me Dearly”:

God loves me dearly, Grants me salvation,
God loves me dearly, Loves even me.
Therefore I’ll say again: God loves me dearly,
God loves me dearly, Loves even me.
LSB 392, verse 1

This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:9-10 NIV).

In simple words, the ageless hymn “God Loves Me Dearly” tells the story of salvation granted to us in our Lord and Savior Jesus because we were “in slav’ry, sin, death, and darkness” (verse 2).

We were in bondage to sin and blinded by it and we could not save ourselves of its consequences. However, God “sent forth ... Jesus, my Savior,” who “... paid all I owed” (verses 3, 4).

We have been redeemed and set free from the slavery of sin. Our chains have been loosed and we are no longer blind! We look forward to praising our Savior and spending eternity in heaven with Him.

How amazing it is that “God loves me dearly, Loves even me!”

Prayer: We praise You, O God, for Your unconditional, impartial, incomprehensible love that has set us free. By Your powerful Spirit move us to dwell in that love and then to spread the Good News about You and Your love to others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

God Loves Me Dearly
Mustard Seed: Joyful, Joyful, 6/31
Hymn Text: LSB 392
Written by Rev. Larry and Shari Miller
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Forgiven and Free

Closing Devotion

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered (Psalm 32:1).

The prison chaplain visited the death row inmate whose life would soon end because of his crimes. As they talked, the inmate confessed to beatings, bombings, and murders. The chaplain quietly but firmly assured him that God was willing to forgive every crime. Incredulously the inmate cried, “**All** of them? How? Why?”

The chaplain told the story of God’s love for all men, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, His death and resurrection. “God assures you through His Word that His grace is for you, so you can believe in Jesus and confess your crimes to Him, knowing you are forgiven. In Jesus Christ, you are a free man.”

No matter what the sin, God is big enough to forgive it. Something perceived as a “small” sin (telling a white lie, wasting company time with long lunch hours) or something thought to be a “big” sin (embezzlement, abortion, addiction) all disappear in God’s sight through His grace and mercy. *The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned (Psalm 34:22).*

Prayer: Lord, we have sinned against You and against others. Forgive us and help us to live according to Your holy will. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Forgiven and Free
Mustard Seed: Comfort from the Psalms, 4/30
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Love's Atoning Sacrifice

Devotion

This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10 NIV).

Last month, the stores were filled with red and pink. Lace and hearts draped across aisles that boasted enough candy to satisfy a small army of children. Stuffed animals and roses invaded drugstores. Every other commercial convinced men that their sweetheart really wanted a diamond necklace this year for Valentine's Day or she might not be so willing to believe his next "I love you."

But now it's March, and where have all the valentines gone? The sugar rush has long since faded, and even some relationships of February may not have lasted longer than the beautiful bouquets.

For a holiday that boasts so much about love, it often falls short. Perhaps that is because the type of love we too often focus on is actually not love at all.

What, then, is love? In 1 John, *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (John 21:7 NIV) describes love to those he called his beloved. Read the opening verse of this devotion to see his definition. It has nothing to do with us, does it? It has everything to do with God.

He loved us. He sent His Son. This Son became an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

What does that mean? Well, some well-meaning greeting cards may proclaim, "I would die for you!" That may or may not be true, but the best any human could do for another would be to die earlier than planned for the sake of someone else's safety until the day they, too, will pass away. They may lose years on earth so that another may have more – and that is a wonderful love.

But God's love is even better. Jesus did not have to die. Ever. While even the greatest human hero will die someday, Jesus could have escaped death completely. But He chose to lay His life down so that we could be saved – not for a few days. Not for a few decades. The life Jesus won for us in His atoning sacrifice lasts forever and ever.

What a love! What a selfless, unconditional, everlasting love.

Now, dearly beloved, what do we do with such a love? Just a little earlier in 1 John 4, John tells us: ... *let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God* (verse 7).

We experience daily the most wonderful love this world has ever seen. Filled with such love, we can't help but want to share it! May God equip us with the strength and joy to share His love with others, that they may know the love of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You give us a love that the world does not understand. Your unconditional, sacrificial love is made clear in the atoning work Jesus completed for us on the cross. Through Your Spirit, enable us to proclaim Your love to others and to share this love in our words and actions. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Love's Atoning Sacrifice

Written by Lisa Clark, St. Louis, Missouri

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Faith is ... Relying on Our Heavenly Father's Grace and Mercy

Opening Devotion

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ... (1 Peter 1:3).

A German submarine sank a British freighter off Africa in 1941. The sub surfaced amid wreckage, lifeboats, and wounded men. When the British were ordered to board the sub, they thought they would be killed or captured. Instead the German captain had his doctor treat their wounds. His crewmen repaired their lifeboats. He gave them food, water, wine, and tobacco, then set them on a course for the nearest land. They were not treated as enemies, but they were shown mercy.

We have not been treated as enemies of God. Because of our sin we deserve hell which is eternal separation from Him. The grave should swallow us, and we should sink into a sea of torment forever.

No, God has not dealt with us as we deserve. He put our sins on Christ and dealt with Christ. Our Father gave us what we have not deserved. God, who is full of grace and mercy, has given us a living hope.

Our wounds have been treated and we have been clothed with Christ's own holiness. He has set us on a course for heaven. That is the sweetest truth we will ever hear!

Prayer: We thank You, O God, for Your mercy toward us sinners. In Jesus' most precious name we pray. Amen.

Faith is ... Relying on
Our Heavenly Father's Grace and Mercy
Mustard Seed: Living in Faith, 25/30
Written by Rev. Darold Reiner
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Simple Trust (No Need to Cheat)

Closing Devotion

What is said to be true of a large percentage of students going into medicine, law, and business? (They cheated to get ahead in school.)

It is frightening to think that the doctor performing our next surgery may have cheated to get into medical school. Can we truly trust our tax preparer or the person making our will? If we cannot trust people in those positions, who can we trust? Ever wonder that?

There is One who has no need to cheat. He knows everything. He even knows how many times we have lied or done any other sin, but He still loves us. He hates our sin because He knows how much sin hurts so He died on the cross to save us. But He is no longer dead. He is alive and no cheating was done to accomplish that! No one came to sneak Him out of the tomb. *God raised him up ... (Acts 2:24a).*

God promises that we, too, shall live if we trust in Him. Just as He raised His Son from the dead, we can trust Him to do the same for us. *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).*

Prayer: Our Lord and our God, when we are tempted to lie or cheat, remind us that we are Your children. Help us to be honest and fair in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Simple Trust (No Need to Cheat)

Mustard Seed: Simple Trust, 3/29

Written by Elaine Bickel

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2011

Adapted by CREC, 2017



The Joy of Being Loved by God

Opening Devotion

For your steadfast love is great above the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds (Psalm 108:4).

The mother's eyes never strayed from her child. A soft smile played across her lips as she watched him play. She was attentive to every move he made. Although the child was unaware of the attention she focused on him, yet her tender love was obvious to any observer.

As wonderful as the love of a parent can be, it cannot compare with God's loving care for His children. His love is boundless, timeless, unending. What earthly father or mother could presume to claim even one of our awesome God's attributes?

As God's people, we can pray, *Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love!* (Psalm 31:16). Knowing that God's answer to us is a resounding, "Yes!" we can say with utmost confidence, *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever* (Psalm 23:6).

Prayer: Dear loving Father, thank You for all of the people You have provided to give us love and care. Thank You most of all for the love You have given to us in Jesus Christ our Savior. In His name we pray. Amen.

The Joy of Being Loved by God
Mustard Seed: Living in Joy, 1/30

Written by Dcs. Betty Knapp, Irene Mensing, Myrna Lou Meyer, Margaret White

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2005

Adapted by CREC, 2017



Kindness

Closing Devotion

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

The loving mother held her daughter as she tearfully wailed, “Mom, I just can’t stop crying!” As she hugged her daughter tightly, the mother softly reassured her, “I love you, and I want to help.”

Some mothers might have kept their distance or ignored the issue. She could have said, “Get a grip, girl,” or “Pull yourself together.” But this mother offered kindness, love, and understanding.

Jesus did not ignore us, but saw our sinful condition. In love He went to the cross and gave His life for our sins. As parents motivated by Christ’s love, we want to model that same kindness in our relationships with our children. Kindness is love and forgiveness in action.

Stretch your faith-filled parenting: Join your child in performing a random act of kindness for another family member, friend, or neighbor.

Prayer: Kind and loving Savior, Your kindness is shown to us by Your love and forgiveness. Help us to demonstrate Your kindness by the love and forgiveness that we share with our loved ones. In Your compassionate name we pray. Amen.

Kindness
Mustard Seed: Faith-Filled Parenting, 13/32
Written by Rev. Larry and Shari Miller
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



The Greatest Love

Devotion

For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies
(Psalm 108:4 NIV).

Considering God

God is eternal and never changes. Neither does His love. Before the beginning of time, the holy God of all Creation conceived, undertook, and executed a radical plan to demonstrate the unimaginable scope of His love for us and for His entire creation.

Consider the veracity, changelessness, and faithfulness of the one, eternal, and true God, Who, with full deliberation upon any price, declared to all sinners: *Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him* (Psalm 2:11-12 NIV).

And Considering Love

Love is because God is; it is correctly a bona fide God-originated concept that describes His character. Our Creator loved us first. Love permeates and penetrates, pursues and woos, reaches and draws, covers and binds, protects and exposes, constrains and empowers, frees and loosens. God's love is unlimited and full of influence in all areas of life.

Consider the power in both loving and in being guided in love by God Himself, of being **in** love with the One Who has made believers this promise: *"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation"* (Psalm 91:14-16 NIV).

Considering Humanity

After creation and before the rebellion, humans were able to know God and experience the supremacy of pure love. But the self-centered human condition rendered us senseless to the things of God. We began the downward spiral that represents the wages of our personal and collective, active and passive sin. There is nothing within either the lifeless spirit of humanity or within a fallen world that might conceive – or **desire** to conceive – such an overarching attribute as lavish, saving love. We do not independently recognize our personal and collective impotence nor are we of a mind to do so. Consequently, in our blindness we are eternally liable.

Consider this hopelessness, and with this, consider that humanity was on God's mind and in His heart when He inspired this Scripture: *Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity* (Psalm 51:7-9 NIV).

Considering Jesus, The Greatest Love

Jesus Christ is His Father's beloved and ours. With full deliberation of the cost, Christ willingly reduced Himself to unite with our sinful selves, and He came into identity with His created to hinge us to God once again. Jesus became for all people the only sacrifice ever acceptable to the true God. His life has become our life. Once and for all time, our sinless Savior took upon Himself the totality of human guilt and shame. He has healed and forgiven us, instructed and led us to Himself. Jesus Christ is the most vital part of this uniquely abundant and mysterious love of God. The cross of Jesus Christ is both the fulfillment of God's far-reaching plan and the hope and cause of any relationship we might ever have with God. His death, then, is our death.

Consider the life and death of the Lord Jesus, about Whom it is prophesied: *Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the LORD. They will proclaim his righteousness, to a people yet unborn – for he has done it!* (Psalm 22:30-31 NIV)

And Considering The Love That Matters More Than Any Other

God never changes. So this being our anchor, we are assured that God loves us and that we are handpicked for His great and selfless love. We understand and embrace this, though we may not now fully fathom the scope of it. We are captured by it and come into it by the Spirit's leading. The cross of Christ marks this place in history; it is the location of the only means by which we know God and become acceptable to the Father – **this** divine washing, cleansing, eternally-forgiving work of Jesus Christ, **this** very specific testimony marks forever our own place at Calvary. We may safely judge our lives with a blameless judgement that will be forever based upon **this** righteous work. We can here and now experience God in a kindly relationship. We can more and more genuinely experience joys and pains – both ours and others – when we live in the knowledge that we are loved by **this** God. We may confidently expect to grow and to progress in our usefulness to God by **this** means. We may grasp our inheritance and be kissed by it. Without question, **this** is the greatest love of all.

Consider the joy set before you as you take up your cross and, by the Spirit, follow Jesus toward eternal peace, because He gives us this assurance: *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous* (Psalm 19:7-9 NIV).

Our Prayer

Lord God, today we think more about You – Your good deeds and gracious acts toward us – and we are personally encouraged in our lives and acts. We give thanks to You. We boldly declare that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. He is The Lord's Christ and ours. We acknowledge Him as the true lover of our souls. We are bold to ask that You joyfully engage our hearts in loving, caring service toward others and in personal gratitude for the greatest love of all. Amen.

The Greatest Love
Written by Elaine Perry, California City, California
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



What Day is This?

Opening Devotion

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24).

Every day is a gift from God. We have heard it. We have said it. We believe it! We can confidently face each day as a gift because God has made it.

While every day is a gift from God, there are certain days that make us more aware of this – birthdays, anniversaries, baptisms, and weddings. These tend to be the days we look forward to and look back on with joy. These are the days when others are likely to celebrate with us and become more aware of the One who has blessed us.

When we pause and reflect on today, we become more aware of who God is and who we are through faith in Jesus Christ. We do not cause the sun to rise, but we are able to enjoy the sunshine. We do not make the rains fall, but we can praise the God who reigns! We do not have to take on the weight of the world, we can trustingly wait to see how God will take care of us in the future as He has in the past. Celebrate today! Celebrate every day knowing, *This is the day that the LORD has made.*

Prayer: Lord, help us to celebrate each day as a gift from You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

What Day is This?
Mustard Seed: Everyday Celebrations, 5/28
Written by Elaine Bickel and Jan Struck
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2015
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Noisy Love

Closing Devotion

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! (Psalm 100:1)

They all showed up for the holiday celebration – more than expected! Each family member was full of excitement, hugs, and laughter. When she had offered her home, she had not anticipated this level of noise and chaos. She was questioning her decision and searching for aspirin when her five-year-old tackled her knees, lifted his grinning face, and blurted, “I like noisy love!”

The Lord welcomes “noisy love” from His children. The Bible records numerous celebrations of thanksgiving and praise that involved stringed instruments, trumpets, and cymbals – even dancing. Our God takes pleasure in the honest response of joy from the ones He has redeemed. It is a sweet sound in His ear when His grateful children overflow with praise. So the next time a song of praise sets our toes tapping, or the chatter of Fellowship Hour bubbles over into the church hallway, or even when the cries of a baby are heard during the sermon, we can thank the Holy Spirit for *joyful noise*.

Prayer: Lord, fill our hearts with Your grace and mercy. Let us enjoy moments of noisy, loving praise. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Noisy Love
Mustard Seed: From Quiet Times to Noisy Love, 19/30
Written by Jan Struck
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2013
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Joyful Celebration

Devotion

[Please provide: musical accompaniment and LSB hymnals for attendees.]

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24).

The first Bible to be translated into an indigenous language in Australia was the Kriol Bible. Their dedication ceremony was in May 2007. Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, first thought of going to Australia to translate the Bible into indigenous languages back in the 1940s. What better cause for celebration than to read the printed Bible in one's heart language for the first time – to think, "God speaks my language."

The Bible is the supreme missionary. It never takes a furlough and does not need a visa or passport. The Bible, once translated, is always available to that people group. The work of missionaries is facilitated by the use of the Bible in the local language. Public teaching in the Church requires a man "rightfully called" whether it is by the locals who hear the Word of God in their own language, or those sent from the Church at large to translate and evangelize. *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:14-17).*

Just think – God allows us to be a part of this joyous, life-long work of translating. *"For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor"* (John 4:37-38). We often cannot personally go and translate but yet we, too, can celebrate with the people of Australia. We can celebrate with our brothers and sisters in Christ because we are all one body. *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ (I Corinthians 12:12).*

The Bible has been available for most of us in our own language since before we were born, and we have grown up knowing the Bible, including hearing the Bible read when in our mother's womb. We are without excuse. A person living in a remote tribe whose language has never been written and who has never had access to the Word of God may never know of the sacrificial love of our heavenly Father, who, through His death and resurrection, guarantees eternal life with Him in heaven to all who believe. Having the Word in their own language can change this. This is something we can truly celebrate with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

There is a saying - JOY is putting Jesus first, others second, and yourself last. Being able to read and hear the Word of the Lord in our heart language supports our desire to put Jesus first in our life because He put us first in His life. As we meditate on the Word, we are filled with joy. As the Bible is translated into new languages, we joyfully celebrate the gift given to others that they might know Christ. May God grant it!

Close by joyfully singing "Listen, God Is Calling" LSB 833.

Joyful Celebration

Written by Jill Kohlert, Dixon, Illinois

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



The Restless Soul

Opening Devotion

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him (Psalm 62:5).

Researchers tell us that adults today don't get enough sleep. The advent of electricity means we stay up later than our ancestors. Well into the night we are watching television, reading, or using our computers. "Early to bed and early to rise" doesn't seem to fit in with today's lifestyle. Consequently, sleep deprivation and fatigue are common among us. As a society, we just aren't getting enough physical rest.

Just as common are the people who can find no rest for their souls. Many carry burdens of guilt, hatred, anger, or prejudice. Some are grieving. Others are unable to forgive, whether it is themselves or someone else. Day after day they search for inner peace and it just isn't there. They look for hope and can't find it.

Do you have a restless soul? Take to heart the words of Jesus, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ... I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matthew 11:28, 29b). Jesus invites us all to come and rest in Him.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, that we can say, "I came to Jesus as I was, So weary, worn, and sad; I found in Him a resting place, And He has made me glad" (LSB 699, verse 1). In Your name we pray. Amen.

The Restless Soul
Mustard Seed: Comfort from the Psalms, 19/30
Hymn Text: LSB 699
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Peaceful Rest

Closing Devotion

In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety (Psalm 4:8).

As we close our eyes to rest our minds continue to race with thoughts of the day's worries: "If only I would hear the key in the door, I'd know my teenager is safely home. Until then, I can't sleep."

"If only I could take back those angry words! How will I face her tomorrow? Will she accept my apology? I can't sleep."

"If only I was certain I will be hired. The interview went well, but ... I just can't sleep."

Troubles of the day often lead to sleepless nights. Could those long hours be used to pray, to reflect on God's past mercies and future care? A beginning might be to pray with the psalmist, *Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long (Psalm 25:4-5).*

Peaceful sleep can come, knowing that our Father in heaven is lovingly watching over His children ... *May the LORD bless his people with peace! (Psalm 29:11b)*

Prayer: Dear Lord, when we are overcome by trouble and worry, help us to turn to You. Forgive our weakness. Calm our hearts, ease our minds, and give us peaceful rest. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Peaceful Rest
Mustard Seed: Comfort from the Psalms, 9/30
Written by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2009
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Faith is ... Setting Our Minds on Things Eternal

Opening Devotion

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (Colossians 3:2).

Eternity has little reality for many people of our day. They have forgotten about it and live as if it does not exist. Yet nothing is more certain. One day we shall meet eternity face to face.

Set your minds on things that are above, says the Lord in His Word. Yes, there is something above us. Heaven is above us, and Jesus is the Way. No one is more impoverished than that person who does not believe in things above.

When the prodigal son in the far country came to himself, his mind was occupied with one thought: "How can I get home to my father?" He arose, went to his father, and said, "Father, I have sinned." He trusted in his father's love and mercy. (Luke 15:11-32)

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can set our minds on our Heavenly Father and the things that are above. Without His guidance, we focus on earthly and temporal things. With it, we can set our minds on things above, which are eternal.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us daily to set our minds on things eternal so that we may be of service to You in Your Kingdom. In Christ's name. Amen.

Faith is ... Setting Our Minds on Things Eternal
Mustard Seed: Living in Faith, 23/30
Written by Rev. Darold Reiner
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, ©2007
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Simple Trust
(The End is Just the Beginning)
Closing Devotion

Whose voice became famous for saying, “That’s all folks!”? (Mel Blanc)

Mel Blanc became so famous for saying those words at the end of Porky Pig cartoons that he even had them inscribed on his tombstone. How sad it would be if “That’s all, folks!” were true at life’s end. How wonderful it is to know that life’s end is just the beginning of our eternal life!

Cartoons are fun fiction. They can be trusted to entertain us, but nothing more. The Bible is God’s certain Word. It can be trusted to be totally true. By faith we can join Job in saying, *“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25-27a).*

That is not a cute phrase written on a tombstone somewhere. It is the promise of the living Rock Himself. *The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer ... (Psalm 18:2a).*

Prayer: Thank You, God, that You have assured us that life on earth isn’t all there is. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we look forward to eternity with You. In His name. Amen.

Simple Trust (The End is Just the Beginning)
Mustard Seed: Simple Trust, 5/29
Written by Elaine Bickel
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, ©2011
Adapted by CREC, 2017



Journey Devotion

When you are preparing to take a journey, what plans do you make? Do you carefully map out the route, the mode of transportation, and the stops along the way? Do you joyfully study all you can about the journey and look forward to the experiences you will encounter at the destination?

We are all on a journey to heaven. This journey began at baptism. Through water and the Word applied in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, our journey of faith began. Every day the Holy Spirit grows that faith in Jesus in our hearts. Every day the Holy Spirit leads us to recognize and confess the times that, because of our sins, we have strayed from the route God desires for us. Every day God graciously forgives our sins for Jesus' sake. He washes our hearts and renews us so that we can once again follow Him and serve Him on our way to our heavenly home.

In His Word, God promises that He already has plans for us. *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope* (Jeremiah 29:11). Have you spent time studying the travel plans and the ultimate destination God has in mind for you? Will Christ be your guide or will you try to go it alone? Do you have a joyful anticipation of living in heaven?

The Bible gives all the information you need. Jesus came to earth to live the life without sin that you could not, and died on the cross as your substitute to atone for your sins. Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). Jesus promises to be with you every step of the way. *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20b).

Your map to a joyful eternity goes through Jesus. There will be stops along the way. Some will be happy surprises while others will be difficult encounters. You can trust that Jesus will indeed be with you always. He has gone ahead of you and made all the arrangements for you to live with Him in His heavenly mansion.

Prayer: Lord, so much of the time we want to have things our own way. We busily try to plan our lives so we have it easy and fun. Help us to keep You in first place in our hearts. Help us to spend time in Your Word learning all we can about our journey in faith in You and our heavenly destination. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Journey
Written by Aletha Voges, Kent, Washington
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017

LWML Mission Statement

The mission of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League is to assist each woman of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in affirming her relationship with the Triune God so that she is enabled to use her gifts in ministry to the people of the world.

The League Pledge

In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption, we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have, and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His kingdom, our will to do His will and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen.

Authored by Rev. Harry Fricke © 1955 LWML

Lutheran Women, One and All

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Lutheran Women, one and all
We have heard the Gospel call
We by faith have seen the Lord
Crucified and then restored.
We have seen Him pay the price
For our sins a sacrifice
Him we Lord and Christ acclaim
And unite to praise His name. | 2. Lutheran Women young and old
Well we know His challenge bold
Help to take the Gospel Light
To a world in darkest night
By example in the home
By inviting those who roam
By our prayers for sinners lost
By our gifts for missions' cost. |
| 3. Lutheran Women coast to coast
In the Lord a mighty host
Let us all united be
In the Holy Trinity
One in faith in hope and love
Working for the Lord above
Till our earthly labor's done
We in heaven shall all be one. | |

Tune: LSB 892, LW 495
Elmer A. Kettner



Serve the Lord with Gladness!

1. "Serve the Lord with gladness!"
It is He alone
Who redeemed us sinners,
Guides us as His own
To enjoy the blessings
Of His love and grace,
Will at last in glory
Meet us face to face.
Onward, then, for Jesus!
Let this be our aim:
"Serve the Lord with gladness!"
Glorify His name.

3. "Serve the Lord with gladness!"
There's no greater joy
Than to serve the Master,
Work in His employ.
As we build His kingdom
Angels, too, rejoice

2. "Serve the Lord with gladness!"
He gave us command
To proclaim His Gospel
Now in every land
So that fellow sinners
May, like us, be blest.
Leading them to Jesus,
We can serve Him best.
Onward, then, for Jesus!
Let this be our aim:
"Serve the Lord with gladness!"
Glorify His name!

Over every sinner
Brought to hear His voice.
Onward, then, for Jesus!
Let this be our aim:
"Serve the Lord with gladness!"
Glorify His name!

Tune: LSB 662, TLH 658, LW 518
Prof. Ernest Lewerenz

Praise, Love, Serve

(Based on "The League Pledge")

Our God and Father, made the earth, And when we went astray,
Our God, the Son, descended here To take our sins away.
With His own blood He bought us. He broke the bonds of sin.
Then God the Spirit came into Our hearts to dwell within.

In gratitude we pledge ourselves, To Him with all we have.
Our hands will work; our voices sing; Our lips proclaim His love.
His errands we'll do gladly; His Gospel we'll defend;
Our silver and our gold we'll use -- His Kingdom to extend.

Wherever He has need of us, We will His call obey.
Whenever He calls out to us, We'll answer right away.
His will is ours that lost souls Will turn away from sin
And come to have eternal life Through fellowship with Him.

Author: Jean Hansen Kammerer
Tune: O Little Town of Bethlehem LSB 361, TLH 647, LW 60
The League Pledge: Rev. Harry Fricke, 1955



Loaves, Fishes, and Mites

Mite Devotion/Reading

[Please provide: a copy for each of the two readers, a Bible for Reader 1.]

Reader 1: [Read Matthew 14:13-21.]

Reader 2: Evening was approaching and the vast crowd who had come to listen to Jesus showed no sign of leaving. The disciples, who were probably tired and hungry, encouraged Jesus to send them away so they could buy their own food. "You feed them," Jesus told the Twelve. Imagine the looks on their faces when they saw the food that had been collected. Five loaves + two fish = enough food for more than 5,000 people?? "Impossible," we say. "It just doesn't add up."

Reader 1: Jesus tells us, "... *What is impossible with men is possible with God*" (Luke 18:27).

Reader 2: A few loaves of bread and two small fish fed a large crowd of people. By the blessing and power of God, the impossible became possible. We, too, have been witness to how God, again and again, has made possible what on our own would be impossible concerning our mite offerings. While God directly multiplied the loaves and fish, God has moved the hearts of millions and millions of people to give your Mites + my Mites + Mites from all over the world to equal millions and millions of dollars. "Yes!" we proclaim in praise. "With God's blessing it does add up!"

Reader 1: Men, women, and children all around the world, and others closer to home have been blessed by mites. Mites have been used to educate, to provide help for the disabled, and to help victims of natural disasters. Mites have built churches, refurbished homes, and trained pastors and deaconesses.

Reader 2: Mites have provided transportation, books in print, audio, and braille, as well as scholarships and teacher training. Mites have helped heal, they have given hope, and they have provided comfort from nurses, doctors, relief workers, and even dogs. Mites have bought food to fill empty bellies and Bibles to feed undernourished souls. Of utmost importance, these mite projects and the people who carried them out shared with the project recipients the life-saving truth that Jesus died and rose for all.

Reader 1: Did our LWML sisters who, many years ago, came to a meeting with the idea of helping others by saving pennies, nickels, and dimes in a little box have any idea what their new project would turn into? Perhaps not. But it was with gladness that they wanted to serve others, knowing that with God's power, great things were, and continue to be, possible with mites.

Reader 2: Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we bring these mites as our offerings of love and ask that they be used to Your glory. We pray for Your blessings on each and every project and on each and every person who will see Your love in action. Thank You, Lord, for abundantly answering our prayers. In the name of Your Son Jesus we pray. Amen.

Loaves, Fishes, and Mites

Written by Marcia Gomulka, Miramar, Florida

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2017



Proclaiming the Gospel with Mites

Mite Devotion/Litany

[Please provide: copies for attendees.]

The parting words of our Savior Jesus to His disciples were “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). How daunting these words must have been to the men who had faithfully followed Jesus in His ministry but were probably more comfortable on a fishing boat than going out to proclaim the Gospel to the **whole** creation.

As present-day disciples and followers of Christ, we, too, are given the same command to go and proclaim the Gospel. We can share our love of Jesus in our homes and with friends, at our places of work, or in our neighborhoods. But to bring the Gospel to the **whole** creation is daunting for us also.

How blessed we are as Lutheran Women in Mission to have among our witnessing tools our wonderful Mite Boxes! How amazing it is to think of the many places in God’s creation our offerings go. How amazing it is to think of the many people whose lives are touched physically and spiritually by mites. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, mites are helping to proclaim the Gospel all over God’s creation.

Leader: We pray: Father, with thanksgiving we come before You.

Group: Thank You for graciously supplying our needs. May we daily remember all that we have is a gift from You.

Leader: Lord, in gratitude we come before You.

Group: We are grateful, Lord, for the spirit of generosity You have given to us. May the mites we give be used to Your glory as they provide hope for others.

Leader: God, we ask with confidence knowing You hear our prayers.

Group: Father, bless all who have given these mites and all who receive them. May each of us be blessed as we witness Your mighty works.

All: Lord, in Your Holy Word You tell us to love one another. Help us always to be mindful of others’ needs. Thank You for the opportunity to serve You and others through mite offerings. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Proclaiming the Gospel with Mites
Witten by Marcia Gomulka, Miramar, Florida
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2017

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reSOURCEs for Planning Programs