

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, February 27, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Daniel 9:18 O my God, ...we do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Isaiah 9:6 He is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*Mark 8:29 (Jesus) asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

He was given the name Abram but later was given a new name - Abraham - to reflect his role as the Father of God's chosen people. She was given the name Sarai, but later was given a new name - Sarah - to reflect her joy as the mother of a child. He was given the name Jacob (thief), but after wrestling with an angel, was given a new name - Israel - to reflect his new mission in life as the head of God's chosen family. The prophets Isaiah and Hosea both gave their sons strange and unusual names that were prophetic in nature. Names were not given lightly in the Bible. They were given after very careful consideration. The only people today I know of who take names that seriously are our American Indian friends. It is an Indian custom in most tribes to give a child a name at birth as a legal name, but the *real* name is given by some honored grandfather or grandmother, an older friend or relative of the family. And it might not be given for a year or more after the child is born, when they have had time to pray and meditate about it, because it is believed that a person will live up to their *real* name. God took more than 600 years to finish naming His Son, and when He did, the whole world rejoiced: *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!* The critical point in the disciples' spiritual journey occurred at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked them who they thought he was. May Peter's declaration be ours, and may we live up to the name He gave us at baptism - *Child of God*. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Dear Father, I was given my name at my birth by my parents but I was given the name "Christian" by you on the day I was baptized. As your child, I hope that what I do will always be pleasing to you. Thank you for always loving me and for your great forgiveness when I fall short. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*"Thoughts to Ponder" by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman.*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, February 28, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Hebrews 3:15 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*

**HYMN**

O Jesus, king most wonderful! O Conqueror renowned!  
O Source of peace ineffable, in whom all joys are found:  
When once you visit darkened hearts, the truth begins to shine,  
Then earthly vanity departs, the kindles love divine.  
ô Attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 119:165 Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.*

*1 Peter 5:14 Peace to all of you who are in Christ.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

We should not have been surprised that he slept like a baby. He worked harder than all of us. No leaf went unturned, no outlaw went un-shot, no wild animals went untamed! Mike, my four-year old brother, came in with the rest of us after a hard day at the O.K. Corral. Like the rest of us he was covered from head to toe with dust and grime that required a mighty scrubbing in the old bunk house washtub. A bite of grub, a sip of ömoonshineö milk, and his eyes slammed shut! He had done his duty. He had no regrets, and he slept at peace with the prairie, the posse, and the rest of the world. The Psalmist sang of that kind of peace, achieved by ödoing our best to do our dutyö to the Lord. Nothing would interfere with their sleep, nor would it cause them to stumble. Would that all of us could walk in the way of the Lord so well that at the end of a day or on The Day, we would discover the peace of God which passes all understanding. The writer of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter declared that the more we find ourselves in Christ, the more that peace flows over us. This peace - this shalom - is Godø gift to those who seek His blessing. It is the first step in the long walk toward world peace. May we all sleep soundly, assured that God is continuing to take care of our world, and we are at peace with Him. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Thank you for giving us this day of rest, O Creator. May it be one in which your peace comes to me and all your world. May I spend this day in your presence so that I might rest in your peace. When this day ends, may I go to sleep knowing that you are with me. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

*“Thoughts to Ponder” by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman.*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, March 1, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Hebrews 3:15 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Jeremiah 9:7 Thus says the Lord of hosts: I will now refine and test them, for what else can I do with my sinful people?*

*Mark 13:13 The one who endures to the end will be saved.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

More than once I have been tempted to give up before finishing a job. Once cultivating a field of corn in a low area with no breeze when the temperature was close to 100 degrees, I wanted to quit, but about then Mom drove out to the field and stopped to see how it was going. When I told her I wanted to quit, she reminded me that there was rain in the forecast, and that if I didn't finish the field, Dad would have to leave his field and do it for me. At other times in my life I've been discouraged or just not feeling up to the task, but somehow managed to force myself to finish. I can always look back and am happy that I completed the work or project, no matter how much blood, sweat or tears it took. I realize now that in the kingdom of God such efforts are part of the refining and testing of our sinful natures. Perhaps it is laziness or the Devil himself, tempting us to fall short of God's plan. Hang in there, because those who endure will be saved! May we discover the blessings of perseverance and the joy of *enduring to the end!* (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Forgive my lack of wanting to endure, dear God. The couch looks so good; the book is so interesting; and there are a dozen reasons why I want to quit. Give me the focus and energy that is needed to see the task of working in your kingdom until the end. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen*

Note: March 1 is observed as the founding of the Unitas Fratrum (Unity of Brethren) in Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic) in 1457 by followers of John Hus, martyred for his faith in 1415.

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, March 2, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Hebrews 3:15 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 36:7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*

*Ephesians 5:20 (Give) thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I received a D in English on my report card when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. It was my own fault for being so block-headed and stubborn. We were learning to outline sentences. (I'm not sure that is done in English any more, but it helped to keep the nouns, pronouns, prepositions, etc. all in their proper place in a sentence.) At the time I was angry with Mrs. Wilson, our teacher. I have to admit I didn't have very kind thoughts about her, but she was as committed to teaching me that sentence structure as I was to avoiding it. In the end, she won out. Two years later, in high school, I ranked among the top ten when it came to outlining sentences and was rewarded with a week of special study during that class time while the others caught up! Thanks, Mrs. Wilson! St. Paul wasn't talking just about learning to outline sentences, he was talking about everything in life - the good and the not so good - when he urged his readers to give God thanks. The older I get the more I realize that God was at work blessing me even when I thought I was under a curse. It just took time to put it all together. So now, like the Psalmist I can see *how precious is (His) steadfast love*, and like Paul, I can say thanks in all circumstances. May we all take a second look at our situations and circumstances to see if we can discern the hand of God blessing us when we least expect it. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Help me to see, dear God, that when things are not going my way, there might be a reason behind it all. When I feel as if I am under a curse, let me realize that you just might be blessing me. Thank you for your steadfast love which never ends and never diminishes. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, March 3, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Hebrews 3:15 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Nehemiah 1:5-6 O Lord, ...let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants.*

*James 5:16 The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

One of the benefits of keeping a prayer journal has been to look back and have a record of prayers prayed, and to make note of how many of them have been answered. I know I shouldn't be, but I am always amazed! If I want a "pick-me-up", I get out my prayer journal and am reminded again and again that God has been busy on my behalf, especially at times when I didn't notice. *God has been attentive to my prayers.* In hindsight I can even give thanks for the times when God said "No" or "Wait" to my urgent pleas. At those times I can see why His unanswered prayer was a blessing I could not appreciate "in the heat of battle". God knew better than I what I needed and when. Our prayers do rise before God as incense, and He does answer. How wonderful and generous He is, even when we least deserve it. May we be as attentive to God as God is to us, and may we give thanks daily for the answers to our prayers God is already providing. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*How good to know that you always listen to my prayers, my dear Father. Thank you for these conversations that we can have all through the day and night. I know that even though I do not always get the answer I want, you will provide for me as you see it is needed. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, March 4, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Hebrews 3:15 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 69:33 You who seek God, let your hearts revive.*

*Matthew 6:33 (Jesus said,) "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Sue and I were in Berlin on our way to catch a train. Because of the arrangements we had made for someone to meet us at the other end, it was critical that we get the right train at the right time. Our difficulty came as we tried to find out where to go to catch the train. We got on the wrong connecting train which would have taken us in the opposite direction. Fortunately we met a missionary who spoke English and got directions from him. Then another English speaker led us to the correct gate. When we arrived we breathed a sigh of relief. It was like receiving a boost of energy. As we travel this journey of life we are reminded to keep our sights on God's kingdom. The Psalmist declares that those who seek God will be revived. All other kingdoms lead us in the wrong direction and cause us to make the wrong choices - get on the wrong trains going the wrong way. When we go God's direction He revives and energizes us for the journey - more than batteries in a bunny! Thus, Jesus encourages His followers to make striving for God's kingdom their priority in life. Doing so, He says, will make everything else work out for us. May we prioritize our lives in such a way that God and His Kingdom are truly number one. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Thank you, dear God, for placing the right people at the right time to help guide me on this journey that is life. It is good to know that many speak your language and are willing to help me when I feel lost. May I go in the right direction this day and may I feel your loving presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, March 5, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Hebrews 3:15 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 90:14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

*Mark 10:16 (Jesus) took (the children) up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

4:00 AM! The alarm went off. It was dark and COLD (below 0). I was tired. I heard my parents stirring and my twin brothers moving, but I just wanted to bury myself in the warm quilts. As a teenager I was *not* a morning person. Unfortunately, the cows had to be milked, and the other animals fed before we could eat breakfast and go to school. My brothers were far better at getting the chores started than I was. It took a while for my engine to start running. As I get older I am becoming more of a morning person, but there are still mornings when I would like to cuddle up in the nice warm arms of the Lord and let Him bless me with another hour of sleep. Just knowing that He does bless me with His steadfast love - asleep or awake - gives me reason to rejoice. Perhaps that is why the Psalmist could sound so cheerful about mornings. He knew the blessings God would shower upon him as the new day dawned. Jesus was a morning person too. He often rose very early to spend time alone with His Father. It was good quiet time. How about you? May we rise even five minutes earlier than normal for the remainder of Lent to spend time with the Lord, allowing Him to take us *up in His arms, lay his hands on us, and bless us.* (lls)

**PRAYER**

*As faithful as the sun comes up in the East each morning, O Lord, let me be faithful in my meditations with you. Each day is much brighter and seems to go better, when I spend a little quiet time alone with you before the busyness of the day gets me distracted. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, March 6, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Hebrews 3:15 Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 118:15-16 There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; the right hand of the Lord is exalted."*

*1 Corinthians 15:54-55 Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I wept when I heard about Grandma's death. But when I tried to tell someone about it I began to giggle. I was embarrassed. I couldn't help myself. I felt guilty. Why was I giggling about something so painful and so sad. Psychologists tell us that it is not unusual for grief to express itself in that way in children and even in adults. Perhaps some part of my seven year old self that I could not identify was bubbling over with joy because Grandma was celebrating the victory of Jesus over death. The Psalmist must have caught a glimpse of that spirit too when he encouraged the singing of *glad songs of victory*. He knew the power of God far out-shined anything on earth. Somehow, in some way, something in me knew what St. Paul declared to the Corinthians, that death was swallowed up in victory. Was it possible that it was the "Christ in me" who giggled that day? May we take comfort and find joy, even in our sorrow and mourning, with the assurance of that *death is swallowed up in victory* - the victory of Christ. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*O God, you have given us the ability to love so deeply, but it hurts so much when those we do love go home to you and leave us behind. Help me not to dwell upon my loss, but to rejoice with them that death has been swallowed up and they are living in your promises. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, March 7, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 18:31 (Jesus said,) "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."*

**HYMN**

The only Son from heaven, foretold by ancient seers,  
By God the Father given, in human form appears.  
No sphere his light confining, no star so brightly shining,  
As he, our Morning Star.  
ô Elizabeth Cruiciger

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalms 91:14 I will protect those who know my name.*

*Matthew 1:21 (An angel said to Joseph, "Mary) will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Name calling becomes quite an õart formö for some people. Once I learned the finer points of it as a kid, I have to admit, I was as bad as all the other kids in our one-room school house. I must admit the first time someone called me a nasty name in a game of cops & robbers, I was crushed. Iöve seen other õuninitiatedö younger kids reduced to tears by what name-calling did to them. So, why does God make such a big deal about keeping His name holy in the second commandment? Why does Luther make such a big deal of it in his explanations of the commandments? Because the name of God - the name of Jesus - carries with it the power of God Himself. To abuse His name is like using a nuclear generator intended to send energy to help people live, as a bomb to blow them to smithereens. To know and keep the name of Jesus holy is to live under the power and protection of the One who bears that name. Since we are all children of God, it is equally important that we respect the names of other people in the same way. If it's necessary to call someone another name, why not call them brother, sister, or õfriend of Jesusö? (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Forgive me when I don't use your name as it is intended to be used, dear God. It is a wonderful name and is all powerful; powerful enough to give me life itself. May I always respect and love your name as you love me and mine. Help me to remember to treat other people's name with the same respect. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, March 8, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 18:31 (Jesus said,) "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Deuteronomy 30:2-3 Return to the Lord your God, and ... the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you.*

*Mark 1:14-15 Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

When my sister was about five, we were staying at our grandmother's house when a number of guests came to visit. Grandma served coffee and gave my sister a plate of cookies to pass out. When Jackie finished, the plate was empty and a big tear rolled down her cheek as she returned the plate. Grandma saw the problem, opened a cupboard door and pulled out another cookie jar, handing the largest cookie to Jackie. Even though my sister had given away all she had to the guests, Grandma still had a special one for her. Grandmas are like that. So is God. Moses declared to the Israelites in the wilderness that they need not fear being generous with one another. God would restore their *fortunes* and more because He is a God of compassion. When we do God's will without selfishly keeping things back for ourselves, He restores to us more than abundantly. The only thing He asks is that we repent (return) and believe. Jesus came to give all of Himself to us without reservation. His life, death, and resurrection were the ultimate gift of good news He has given us. A gift that keeps on giving - forever. This is most certainly true! (lls)

**PRAYER**

*I am sorry for my stinginess and lack of trust in you, dear Father. You have given to me generously but I have kept back for myself when I should have been sharing with your children who have little. Open my heart and mind so that I might open my hands to give to others. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, March 9, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 18:31 (Jesus said,) "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 36:9 (O God,) with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*

*John 12:46 (Jesus said,) "I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

It was so dark that we couldn't see our hands in front of us. The darkness of the tall pine trees on either side of the road was only slightly darker than the cloudy sky above, giving us a small amount of guidance as we walked and talked. We could have used our flashlights, but we chose to stumble in the dark to talk without interruption from other retreaters. He was 15 with a mountain of pain and trouble filling his heart and soul with darkness. My mind felt as empty as the dark night as I listened and tried to think of something wise to tell him. All I could do was listen and pray. Somehow in that black night, God's Spirit flipped a light switch in a young heart without my knowledge. Weeks later his parents called to ask what I had said to cause him to change so much for the good. I was dumbfounded! I couldn't remember saying anything of any importance. I could only thank God for His fountain of light flaring to life a torch in a soul now living in the light. I wonder if that was the experience of the Psalmist as he gazed at the evening sky. In a moment of meditation, he saw God's light, even in the darkness. I was certainly the promise of Jesus, who declared that He came *as light into the world ...* for those who believe. When I feel least able to speak, He speaks. When I feel most in the dark, His Light gives Life. All I can do is say, "Thank You, God. Thank You!" And I stand in awe! May His light fill any darkness in your life with peace, hope, and love. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*So many times I have wandered in the dark, O God. I don't know where I am going; I can't seem to find a way out. You have blessed me by showing me the light of your goodness during those times and I thank you. Use me to help shine your light on others who are wading in darkness. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, March 10, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 18:31 (Jesus said,) "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Deuteronomy 4:29 You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul.*

*Matthew 7:7 (Jesus said,) "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

For the past year and a half, I've been learning the gospel each Sunday and presenting it from the heart rather than reading it. It involves more than just memorizing the words. It makes me internalize the words. Some incredible things happen to me almost every week. It is amazing how I can read something a hundred times and miss a simple little word that just pops out at me! That happened to me this morning, again, as I typed the two scriptures. "...the door will be opened **FOR** you." I first typed "to you," and the significance of the "for" slapped me in the face. When I was about eight or nine, I came to the house after gathering eggs, with both hands filled with eggs. The house was "opened to" me. All I had to do was turn the knob. Instead, I hollered for help, and the door was opened **FOR** me. The promise of Jesus is that God Himself will open the door **FOR** us. No amount of goodness or effort on our part will open that door. God will create/provide/give what we ask for. God will reveal what we search for. God will open the door **FOR** us. What do your heart and soul seek this day? May we all approach the gates of heaven and the door to God's kingdom with joyful anticipation, thankful for what Christ has done and is doing to open them **FOR** us. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*How wonderful it is to know, dear Jesus, that when my hands are filled and it seems like I can carry no more, you open the door for me and invite me in to set my load down. You are such a loving and caring Lord and sometimes I forget that I just need to ask for your help. In your holy name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, March 11, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 18:31 (Jesus said,) "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*1 Samuel 14:6 Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.*

*Mark 4:38-39 (The disciples) woke (Jesus) up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Some days I catch myself coming and going. I want to throw up my hands and scream, "I just can't do any more!" About that time my whole system wants to shut down and take a nap. If I give myself the chance to "shut up and listen" I can hear God reminding me that He created the universe without my help. (A self-important part of me wants to declare, "No way!", while the rest of me knows how very true it is.) God saved His chosen people from slavery, from starvation, from dying of thirst, from extinction in exile without my help. God even sent a Messiah to save the world from sin — and the Messiah wasn't me! "God can still the storms..." on the Sea of Galilee, in my family, in my work, in my life! In fact, the Psalmist makes it clear that nothing can keep God from accomplishing whatever He wants to be done, with or without me. My job is trust that God will! I can do as much as I can do, allowing God to use me, but I must leave the rest to the One who can truly do all things. Thanks be to God! May we keep our importance (or lack thereof) in perspective and give glory to the One who can cause the storms of life to be calm. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*"You will have no other gods." It is so easy to forget that command, my dear God and think that I am my own god. Forgive my ego when I assume that I must do everything by myself (and even that the whole world revolves around me). May I use this time to listen to your voice and to calm me. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, March 12, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 18:31 (Jesus said,) "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Isaiah 26:13 O Lord our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone.*

*Mark 12:17 Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

The father of a 15 year old from Columbia, South America told me he never had to argue with his son about going to church. At age 14 his son informed him one Sunday morning that he was old enough to decide about going to church himself and had decided he wasn't going. And he didn't. At the next meal, this father instructed the boy's mother not to set a plate for him. When the son came to the table his father informed him that God had provided everything on the table - even the roof over his head, and if he wasn't going to worship God to show his appreciation, he was no longer welcome at the table. He would always have a bed, but there would no longer be an allowance, because even his father's income as a doctor came by the grace of God. If he wanted clothes or tickets to concerts or anything else, he would have to do without. The good doctor said that after that night, his son was always ready for church when the rest of the family was. Isaiah gave thanks to God for *being* the God who truly creates, provides, protects, and rules over all humankind. Jesus gave his disciples an object lesson which began with a question about paying taxes. His command is good for us to remember in every age: "*Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.*" May we always remember to give to God what belongs to God. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*How easy it is to forget that you provide everything for me, dear God. How easy it is to think that it is all mine. With that in mind, it should be easy to remember that you are worthy of my praise; both in my words and in my actions. Thank you for everything that you have given me; even life itself. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, March 13, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 18:31 (Jesus said,) "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Ezekiel 34:16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, says the Lord God.*

*Titus 3:3-5 We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray.... But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Mom sent my sister and me to bring the cows in from the field on the other side of the hill. From the top of the hill we could see their path through a tall sweet clover field. When we got there we had a problem. The sweet clover was over our heads. The only thing we could do was follow the paths the cows made. We found the cows, but it didn't take too long before we were lost too. We didn't know which direction to chase the cows. Then we looked up and got our directions from the hill, and chased the cows in that general direction. Ezekiel realized the importance of keeping our eyes on the Lord, for without the Lord's guidance we are lost. Sometimes we can get lost searching for the lost when we don't keep our eyes on the One who is our Savior. He is the One who is high and lifted up over the struggles and troubles of our lives. Paul wrote to Titus to remind him and his congregation that the way of wisdom is to follow the Lord, not those who will lead them astray. May we look up to Christ our Leader and our Lord, and live, and may the Lord find us and save us. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*When I get lost and lose my way, may I look up at the cross to show me the way to go, my dear Jesus. You sacrificed everything for me and for the rest of your children. May I see that in the cross and that it is pleasing to you when I give to others as you have given to me. In your holy name I pray. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, March 14, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*1 John 3:8 The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

**HYMN for the Week:**

Jesus, refuge of the weary, blest redeemer, whom we love,  
Fountain in life's desert dreary, Savior from the world above;  
Often have your eyes offended, gazed upon the sinner's fall;  
Yet upon the cross extended, You have borne the pain of all

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 22:27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.*

*1 Timothy 3:16 The mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

One fact was perfectly clear concerning farm animals - probably all animals. The young know their mothers in a crowd. There were times of the year when we would separate the young from their mothers for vaccinations, earmarks or surgery. All of the young would be in a pen together and when they were released, they would make a bee-line for their own mother. I never saw a lost baby pig, calf or chicken. The Psalmist must have noticed that same phenomena in people as well as animals. Those who know the Lord are the same way. We were baptized in Christ Jesus and adopted as God's own children. Like magnets to metal, we are attracted to our Father and return to Him on the Day of the Lord. Unless we deliberately turn the other way we know Him as a young animal knows its mother, and we will follow Him into glory. There is no better news! May we remain close to our Lord and Savior so that we may be joined with Him in glory. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Stay with me, O my Father so that I might know you even better each day that I live.  
Thank you for seeking me out and calling my name when I stray and get lost in this busy world. Thank you for knowing me so well that you can even count the hairs on my head.  
In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, March 15, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*1 John 3:8 The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Isaiah 9:6 A child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders.*

*Luke 2:10-11 The angel said to (the shepherds), "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

My mom wants to know when your mom is going to have her baby? That was the first clue I had that my mother was pregnant with my little sister. It came from Wayne Osborne, my classmate. I told him he was crazy. Perhaps I hadn't been very observant, but the thought never crossed my mind. But when Mom picked us up after school I was shocked to notice that she was wearing a baggy dress and, yes indeed! She was pregnant! Now, just imagine the shock of the shepherds. Babies are born every day. Big deal! Right? But this birth announcement came to them in the middle of the field and from - ANGELS!!! Wayne Osborne was one thing, but angels are another matter. This baby was REALLY going to be special. They may not have been theologians, but even unclean shepherds knew the prophecy of Isaiah and knew from early on about the Messiah. What an awe-inspiring joy and what an outrageous privilege it was for them to be among the first to hear it - not from Wayne Osborne - but from messengers straight from God's presence! Next time you hear about a baby being born, remember the One who was born specifically to save you and me. May every birth announcement send chills down your spine and help you remember the birth of your Savior. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Thank you for each child that is born. May they be as special to their parents as your son, Jesus, is to you, my Father. When I have the privilege of seeing a new baby, let it be a reminder of my Savior who came, not only to save me, but also that child and every child brought into the world. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, March 16, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*1 John 3:8 The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Isaiah 42:16 (Thus says God the Lord,) I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.*

*2 Timothy 1:10 Christ Jesus ... abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

We were playing a game of tag with our cousins around their farm house at night. The yard light wasn't much help. It was almost a comedy of falls and spills because the ground was unfamiliar. I say almost. It stopped being funny when a low hanging clothes line leaped out of nowhere and tried to strangle me. As I ran to keep from being tagged by my cousin Kennard, the line hit me across the throat and acted like a spring which slammed me on my back on the ground, almost knocking me out. For several days the red mark and bruise on my throat looked as if I had survived a hanging! Many things in life can act like that clothes line in the dark. They catch us off guard, they trip us up, and they slam us to the ground, leaving our hearts, our minds and even our physical bodies aching. The promise of God which Isaiah delivers is for light that will reveal the pitfalls and strangleholds for what they are. This light will turn the rough places smooth. Paul tells Timothy that Christ Jesus is the One who will lift us up from the dust of death to the immortality of God's Light. Next time you stumble, physically or spiritually, lift up your head to the Light that gives new life. May His light help us run the race without falling, and may it help us follow His smooth path. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*You are the light of the world, dear Lord. Light my path with your word so that I will not stumble and fall. Help me to see those "clotheslines" of sin that might be in my way, and keep me from doing wrong. I pray that I might be a light so that others might see your presence in their lives. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, March 17, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*1 John 3:8 The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Deuteronomy 15:10 Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so.*

*1 John 3:18 Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I vaguely remember one of our teachers in country school. But I remember the lesson she taught us even better than I remember her. We were all supposed to decorate a cookie for someone else. We could use anything we wanted to. We could add lots of colored frosting, nuts and even little pieces of fruit, or we could put yucky things on it, like pepper or small rocks, etc. A few of us opted to go the nasty route. When the time came the teacher asked us if we'd like to give our cookies to the most deserving person. We all said, "Yes!" I knew exactly who I wanted to give my disgusting cookie to. Then she said, "You are the most deserving person I can think of. You may eat your own cookie!" Needless to say, those of us who opted for nasty, were truly unhappy - with ourselves for being mean. God calls us to love others "as we love ourselves," to "give liberally and be ungrudging". God calls us to forgive "as we have been forgiven," and encourages us to give "as we have already received." The writer of 1<sup>st</sup> John reminds us to make our words and our actions match. May our words and our deeds be loving, generous, and "sweet" this day. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Forgive me, gracious God, for those times that I make "yucky cookies" for others; when I think to do them harm instead of wishing them well. It is true that what I give to others will be returned to me. Thank you for your forgiveness and wanting me to be the best child of God that I can be. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, March 18, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*1 John 3:8 The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*2 Samuel 2:26 Then Abner called to Joab, "Is the sword to keep devouring forever? Do you not know that the end will be bitter?"*

*Matthew 26:52 Jesus said to (Peter), "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Our swords were only well-sanded sticks. We had no face masks or padding. OSHA would not have approved. (For that matter, Mom was not happy about it either!) Fortunately our swords weren't sharp and, beyond a few bruises, it was more a matter of whose sword broke first. Our imaginations saw only the glamor and the glory of victorious battles. Movies and TV weren't as graphic back then, so the true horror of battle was not in our picture. Although I was killed several times, about the worst damage I ever received was a smashed finger or a goose egg from failing to duck fast enough. The sad thing is that guns, and sword, and words have become the weapons of choice, aimed at seriously maiming body, mind and spirit. Every study I've ever seen on the subject confirms the fact that those who are battered become batterers. Those who are victims often become victimizers. Somehow we have to stop the vicious cycle and put away our swords, lest we and all who follow us, die also by the swords of anger, hatred, and revenge. After the death of King Saul and his sons, Abner, the commander of Saul's army, asked Joab, a nephew of King David and captain of David's army, if there hadn't already been enough bloodshed. Jesus ordered Peter to put away his sword, rather than perishing in an attempt to stop Jesus' arrest. He also taught us the word on the cross: "Father, FORGIVE...." May we follow His example. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Nothing will be different unless I come to you, my dear God. Change my heart to one that holds peace instead of ill-will. May the sword of my tongue be used to sow love instead of division. May I learn to forgive as you have forgiven me. All of this I pray in the name of Jesus, my Savior. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, March 19, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*1 John 3:8 The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 136:3-4 O give thanks to the Lord of lords, ...who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever.*

*Hebrews 12:28 Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

When I was a kid, Sunday mornings at our house were often rushed and chaotic. We usually got up between 4:00 and 4:30 so that we could milk the cows and finish all of the other farm chores, eat breakfast, and stagger bathroom clean-up (quite a feat for 8 people all sharing one bathroom!), get dressed and in the car for the drive to church in town. I have no doubt that Mom and Dad felt exceeding joy and thanksgiving and breathed a sigh of relief as they sat in the quiet of worship - thankful that we all made it without someone killing someone else! Here, though they may not have identified it at the time, was one of God's great wonders and a perfect example of God's steadfast love about which the Psalmist wrote. The writer of Hebrews declared that we had reason to give thanks, "*since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.*" What are the miracles in your life? Perhaps you've overlooked some pretty basic times when God was busily blessing you with his steadfast love and His unshakable mercy. In the busy-ness of rushing about to get ahead in life we may miss some of the most important blessings. May we take time to give God thanks for each and every one. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Calm my thoughts and mind, dear Lord, so that I might feel your presence within me with each breath I take. Let the tensions and anxieties melt away as I sense your blessings upon me. Thank you for this time in which I can number my blessings and give you thanks and praise for them. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, March 20, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*1 John 3:8 The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Ezekiel 34:16 I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, (says the Lord God.)*

*1 Corinthians 1:27 God chose what was foolish in the world.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I saved my allowance for many weeks to buy a toy "Doctor's Kit". It had a play stethoscope, thermometer, tongue depressors, band-aids and pills (candy). It was fun to play doctor. Headache?...Pink pills. Scratch?...A band-aid and a yellow pill. I think I had pills for every ailment. Did I mention that I was a very popular doctor too? All of my patients got better and not one of them died, although I suspected that several of them were hypochondriacs. (I didn't know what the word meant when I was nine.) I really enjoyed making people feel better - even from their imaginary ailments and emergencies. However, when it came to the real thing, my "Doctor's Kit" was pretty foolish, and I wasn't much help. Still, even today, as a pastor, I play the part of a spiritual doctor. I don't have pills for wounded hearts, unless you consider the promises of scripture to have the effect of a pill. I don't have band-aids for broken promises, unless you consider the comfort of a gentle touch to cover the wound. I don't even have answers for the gaping lacerations of grief, unless you consider prayer a healing balm. Even now, I often feel pretty foolish. When I am honest with myself I acknowledge the Lord God as the one who binds up the injured and strengthens the weak, sometimes using foolish me. Not only is God there *for* us, God is there *through* foolish us. May the Lord help us all keep ourselves in perspective and use us to bring healing to others. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*O Healing One, thank you for the opportunities that you have given me to minister to those who are ill or dying. It is awesome that you use even foolish me to give words of comfort, hope and healing to those who need healing in body and soul. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, March 21, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Romans 5:8 God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

**HYMN FOR THE WEEK:**

Jesus, thy boundless love to me no thought can reach, no tongue declare;  
Unite my thankful heart to thee, and reign without a rival there!  
Thine wholly, thine alone, I am; be thou alone my constant flame.

**SCRIPTURE**

*1 Samuel 2:10 The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king.*

*Titus 2:13-14 We wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

My first traffic ticket brought about my first experience before a judge. I was in junior college at the time. My parents had bought me a used car to replace one that died. They took the papers with them to get license plates. However, on my way home, a patrolman, doing a routine traffic check, pulled me over. Without the papers, the "In Transit" tag in my window was useless. When I went before the judge he only gave me two options - guilty or not guilty of operating a vehicle without proper registration. I really didn't think it was that black and white an issue. He did. I paid the price. When Hannah delivered her son Samuel to the temple, her prayer included an acknowledgment that the Lord would be the *judge of the ends of the earth* who would *give strength to his king*. I am certainly happy that Jesus gave Himself to be *The Judge* for me. If I had to face the "black and white" of Judgment for every sin of thought, word and deed, I would have no hope. I would be, of all people, most to be pitied! As it is, I stand before the throne of God and in Jesus name, throw myself on the mercy of the *Court*. "And God who is gracious and merciful, full of compassion will forgive (my) sin" - for Jesus sake. Those who believe in the Lord have lots for which to be thankful! May we, by the grace of God, live our lives as faithful servants of the Lord our God. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*I tremble at the thought of being before you to receive the judgement that I deserve, O most Holy One. I am so thankful that I do not have to defend myself and my actions for I would surely lose. However, with Jesus as my Advocate I know that you will forgive my sins and make me whole. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, March 22, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Romans 5:8 God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 40:17 You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.*

*Mark 1:40-41 A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!"*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I loved "The Little Engine That Could". It was a real inspiration to me as a kid. With that philosophy I could do anything, if I just believed in myself. The problem came when I found out that no matter how much I believed, no matter how much I tried, there were still some things I could not do by myself. I can save myself from some pain and suffering by avoiding certain situations. I can save myself from danger by staying out of harm's way. But I cannot save my soul for the life of me. Yet, it is at the very moment that I acknowledge my powerlessness, that God reaches out His hand to forgive, to heal, to comfort, and to save me. The Psalmist proclaims his acknowledgment that when he himself must admit failure, he can rely on God, his *help and deliverer*. His only prayer is that God act quickly. Mark's story about Jesus and the leper makes it clear that God enters our lives and acts, not because we are so good, but because God is so good. And because God chooses to do so. We are all spiritual lepers, infected with a contagious and fatal "sin disease", for which there is no human cure. Like the leper, we must come daily to the Lord, begging Him to make us clean. Jesus is the willing and compassionate. We pray, "Jesus, if you choose, you can make me clean." Jesus declares to us, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Jesus is the "engine" who not only could, but **does** love us, forgives us, and makes us clean! May we humble ourselves, confess our sins, beg for His mercy, and give thanks for the grace we *know* he bestows on us. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*You have given me many gifts, dear Lord, and cleansing me of my sins is one of the most precious ones. I can only cry out to you, "Have mercy on me, a poor sinful being." Thank you for listening to my pleas, choosing to make me whole, and clean once more. In your Holy Name I pray. Amen*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, March 23, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Romans 5:8 God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Zephaniah 3:12 I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord.*

*Revelation 2:8-9 This is what you must write to the angel of the church in Smyrna: I am the first and the last, I died, but now I am alive! ...I know how much you suffer and how poor you are, but you are rich.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

They were among the poorest families of the church. They lived way back off the beaten path and their clothes always smelled of burnt wood. The house itself gave off a strong aroma of burnt wood and was tiny, poorly insulated, sweltering hot in the summer, and freezing cold in the winter. There was almost no room to sit because of piles of everything for which there was no storage room. The youngest ran around on bare feet with a runny nose that had been smeared around like make-up, with evidence of ash dust and peanut butter for added color. By the standards of most of the members of the church they had nothing of value that wasn't 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> hand-me downs. But that was only the cover of the book, so to speak. On the inside this was the richest family I had visited in weeks. They had no earthly wealth, but they knew the Lord. They were not ashamed of prayer and even surprised me by adding their own heartfelt prayers to mine. My worldly mind entered their humble home feeling arrogant and rich. As we talked, I discovered how spiritually poor I really was. They were the truly wealthy of this world, and their generosity with what little they had made me feel miserly and impoverished, yet outrageously blessed for knowing them. The Lord, speaking through the prophet Zephaniah and the apostle John in Revelation, proclaims His entering into our human lives in surprising way. The Lord knows the truth of our faithfulness (or lack of it), and our true spiritual wealth. How wealthy are you? It doesn't take money or possessions to be wealthy in the eyes of God, who measure wealth by the content of our heart and soul. May we count our blessings and live as grace-filled servants of our gracious Lord. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Before I so quickly come to judge someone by how much money they have, what kind of fine home they live in, or the fancy car they drive, give me the eyes to see what is truly important to you, dear Father. Let me see their spiritual blessings, and help me to increase in mine. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, March 24, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Romans 5:8 God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Isaiah 26:3 Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace - in peace because they trust in you.*

*Romans 5:1 Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

We sat in a hallway in the administration building at Midland Lutheran College, waiting our turn at the comprehensive oral exams which determined if we would graduate. Nerves were like over-stretched fiddle strings. The stress level was at the top of the chart in the faces of every student. Every student that is, except Robert. At first I attributed his calmness to the fact that he was a Navajo Indian who seemed to be proficient at meditation. In my own nervousness I asked him if he wasn't just a little bit worried about the exams. "No," he said. "I've studied. I'm ready." I had prepared too, but I wasn't ready for answering unknown questions in my major and minor fields. Robert was. And Robert was totally at peace with the whole process. That kind of peace comes to us as we get to know the Lord as the prophet Isaiah did. He knew the Lord well enough that the turmoil and tragedy about to strike Judah, did not ruffle his feathers. He was at peace with himself and with his Lord because he had learned to trust the Lord. Paul discovered that same peace as he realized that his justification came, not from his own goodness, but from God's goodness and mercy. Through Jesus Christ, the Lord of his life, Paul, and Martin Luther after him, discovered the true peace for which they sought. They recognized God's saving power over sin, death and the devil. Once we fully comprehend and trust in Christ's sacrifice for our justification, we join those who are totally at peace with themselves, with others, and with God. May we stop trying to save ourselves, trust God, and be at peace. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*May I be like Robert, O dear Lord, and face what lies ahead with calmness and peace, knowing that you have prepared me for this world by what you have done for me. You have showered me with love and grace, and with those two things, I can face anything. My I always trust in you. Amen.*

*(Wish Pastor Freeman "Happy Birthday" at [pastoroslc@zianet.com](mailto:pastoroslc@zianet.com) .)*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, March 25, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Romans 5:8 God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Job 5:11 (God) sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.*

*1 Corinthians 1:28-29 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Some of the most wonderful people I have met have been people I misjudged. Art was one of them. When I met him he was already suffering from Alzheimer's disease. The house he and his wife shared was small and not much to look at. Their clothing sported multiple patches with plenty of frayed edges. At first sight Art seemed like an aging, senile old man with very little to show for his life. I was always amazed that, though he couldn't remember me and eventually even his own family, he could still remember the Lord's Prayer. It was not until after he died that I learned truth - that this humble man had touched the lives of many people. I learned of his generosity, his kindness, his love, his sharing of joy with a multitude of friends, family, and even complete strangers. He seemed to have so little, yet what he had, he shared without regard for his own needs. I met this lowly and despised man as an arrogant and ignorant, young pastor. I said farewell to him - a giant of a man in my eyes stinging with tears - as a humbled servant of the One who lifts up the lowly. St. Paul wrote of people like Art, lowly and despised people chosen by God, people who live their lives and resemble the Son of God in their way of life. Take a second look at those who, on the outside, give the appearance of being small and of no importance. You may be looking at greatness in the eyes of God. May we strive to imitate such humble servanthood in our own lives. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*It seems that in some cases, the more I have been given, the less I want to share with others, O giver of Life! May I imitate people like Art who give love and joy to many different people. May I willingly give away so that others might live abundantly. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, March 26, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Romans 5:8 God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Proverbs 17:3 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.*

*1 Peter 1:6-7 You have to go through many hard trials for a while. Your faith will be like gold that has been tested in a fire. And these trials will prove that your faith is worth much more than gold that can be destroyed.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

At first, practicing the piano was fun. But as the months and years went on, and the longer I played, the more I had to practice, and the harder practice became. öCount!!!ö öKeep your posture straight!ö öIs the top of you hand flat enough to hold a glass of water while to play?!ö Practicing became a chore. Then came the day when the pain and struggle of practicing paid off. I began to play *for* someone - I was even give the opportunity to play at church. All of the trials and tribulations of life might be compared to those practice sessions. Like the silver and gold spoken of by the writer of Proverbs, we may undergo difficult testing and *refining*. As the practice built up my confidence and skill, our trials, says the writer of Proverbs, build up our faith and prepare us for the *real* test before the *Judge* who gives more than awards which will fade in this world. The writer of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter makes a similar analogy to people facing painful and deadly religious and cultural persecution. His encouragement is not escapism. It is reality. Everyone who is serious about their faith and living a Christ-centered life will face difficult times because of friends, neighbors, and community pressures aimed, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not, at driving a wedge between us and our God. The good news of scripture is that there is a light at the end of the difficult and dark tunnel through which we pass ó the “*crucible ... for silver, and the furnace ... for gold*”. God gives the eternal prize to those who hang in there to the end. It is well worth every the effort and is far more precious than gold. May we faithfully persevere and be found worthy by the Lord. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*After the great sacrifice you have made for me, by forgiving me all of my sins, I do not want to be a lazy Christian, dear God. Instead, may I practice being your follower each and every day so that I might get better at the task. May I grow stronger in my faith and endurance. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, March 27, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Romans 5:8 God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Isaiah 53:5 He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.*

*2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

The upper part of Grandpa Sydow's index finger was missing. All he had was a stub. I asked him how he lost his finger and he told me that it was blown off by a cherry bomb. When he was my age (about 12 at the time) he saw a kid throw a cherry bomb into a crowd of people near him. He reached down to throw it away so that no one would get hurt, and just as he was about to let go it exploded. He lost his finger, but nobody else was hurt. While some family members doubted his version of the story, I was very much impressed and looked up to Grandpa as a hero. Isaiah wrote to the Jewish people in exile in Babylon of One who would come and be *wounded* for the transgressions, the sins and iniquities of others. This Suffering Servant would give His life for all humankind. St. Paul declared to the Corinthian Christians: "That's what Jesus did with our sin." Taking the pain and suffering of our sin upon Himself, Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and died so that we might live. He sacrificed more than a little inconvenience. More than a little pain. More even than an index finger. He became sin so that our sin would die with Him, and so that we might be righteous with Him also. Such amazing grace is truly good news! God loves us so much that He would give His own Son to pay for our sin! May we live our lives in gratitude for that great sacrificial gift. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Some doubt that you are real, my loving God. Others are skeptical that you would go to the lengths you went so that I might be forgiven. But to me, you are my hero, and I owe my whole existence to you. May this day, and all my days, be for your glory. Amen. (Just to see if Pr. Sydow really proves my work, wish him a happy birthday today.) [He did, but his secretary slipped it back in!]*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, March 28, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 9:62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

**HYMN FOR THE WEEK**

In heaven above, in heaven above, where God our Father dwells;  
How boundless there the blessedness! No tongue its greatness tells.  
There face to face, and full and free, the ever-living God we see,  
Our God, the Lord of hosts!  
ô Laurentius Laurinus

**SCRIPTURE**

*Daniel 6:23 Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.*

*1 Corinthians 16:13 Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

When I was about six or seven, Dad was in the field so Mom went out to get the cows from the pasture. At the time we had a big Holstein bull. This bull did not bother Dad, but he did not like Mom. He took off after her and chased her into a creek. Fortunately he was a sissy when it came to getting his feet wet and stopped or he could have killed my mother! Just imagine what Daniel must have felt like when he was thrown into a den of starving lions because he refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar and continued to worship the Lord God! Perhaps God stopped the lions from killing Daniel the way He stopped the bull from killing Mom!? I have often thought that we would be amazed, and maybe even a little terrified, if we knew just how often God has intervened to save our physical lives - even as God has intervened to save our spiritual lives in Christ! St. Paul's warning to the Christians in Corinth is one we should all heed: "*Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.*" It is so easy to cave in to peer pressure and let our spiritual and moral standards fall because everyone else is doing it. It takes confidence to the faithfulness of God to see us through whatever test we face. May the Holy Spirit inspire us to face the lions of this world with confidence that God will be with us, strengthen us, and keep us for Himself in His loving grace. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*For most of my days, I think I go through life being totally unaware how watchful you are over me, dear God! I have no idea the many times you have sent someone to my aid. I don't have a clue as to how much love you have given me through others. Help me to be aware the next time I face the "lions". Amen*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, March 29, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 9:62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*1 Kings 19:11-12 Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.*

*1 John 4:8 God is love.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

We were playing in the hay mow. We had created a "mountain" in the straw bales, and had a huge rope to swing from. The neighbor kids were over, and we were having a great time when Dad came down to the barn to get us. "Why didn't you answer?" he asked angrily. "We didn't hear you," we replied. It was time to start chores and we hadn't heard the word. We played happily and boisterously through every attempt to get our attention. Dad had to climb up into the hay mow to get us to listen. How easy it is, even today, to be so caught up in playing the world's games missing the still small voice of God. Elijah had defeated the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and was on the run from Queen Jezebel, with a price on his head. He was so intent on escaping and feeling sorry for himself that he couldn't hear God speaking to him. We are a lot like that, aren't we? We try to focus our attention on so many things - TV, computers, traffic, busy-ness, problems, weather, etc. They are like earthquakes, stormy winds and violent fires. They are noisy enough to keep us from hearing the Voice that really counts. Perhaps it's time to be quiet - be still - and hear the voice of God. How do you know if it is really God's voice? Ask yourself if it expresses love? The writer of 1<sup>st</sup> John makes it clear: "God is love." That's our clue. Whatever God speaks to us will be love-directed, not bent on evil or sin, but filled with God's gracious love, one which was willing to live, heal, bless, and forgive us. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*There are so many distractions in this busy world, dear God, that many times it is difficult to hear your small, still voice in the midst of it all. Speak to me now in the stillness of this day. Open my ears so that I might hear your voice in the quiet of another person. May I know it is you when I hear love, not sin. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, March 30, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 9:62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Job 16:19 Even now, in fact my witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high.*

*2 Timothy 2:19 God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his."*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

In 1993 I went to Paraguay to speak at an international conference. I speak no Spanish. I knew none of the other participants, except by reputation. Fortunately, I recognized the emblem one of the people on the plane was wearing, and introduced myself. Even more fortunate for me, he spoke Spanish *and* was one of the officers of the organization. When we got through customs, he gathered me and some of the other participants, like a hen gathering her chicks. Several times he pointed to us and (I think) said in Spanish, "They are with me." Job was confronted by three "friends" who were trying to convince him that the reason he lost everything and was in such bad straits was that God was angry with him. Job refuses to accept their analysis of his situation and declares that God vouches for him. God says "*Job is with me!*" Isn't it good to know that Jesus does that for us? Those who believe in Him have the assurance that when it comes to entering the heavenly kingdom, Jesus Himself will be there to say, "They are with me. Let them in." That is the foundation upon which Paul encouraged Timothy to build the church. It is the conviction that God truly does claim us as His own. We are God's dear children and God will go to any lengths to insure that *those who are His* will be welcomed into His eternal Kingdom. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*In spite of the troubles that I might encounter, I know, like Job knew, that you are with me, O God. You lead me through dangers and say, "You are with me". At times you lead me by the hand. In others, you send other people to lead and guide me. Thank you for never leaving me. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, March 31, 2010**

**WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:**

*Luke 9:62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

*1 Corinthians 15:57-58 Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Until my parents bought the farm, we were share-croppers. A share of every crop went to the owner of the land, who happened to be Grandpa. Several times, when we were working in the field, Dad or Mom reminded us that the load of grain was being harvested or the hay was being hauled in for Grandpa. It was important that we be especially careful with it. That experience reminds me to ask myself questions about every aspect of my life. Questions like: For whom do you work? For whom do you clean the house? For whom do you mow the lawn? For whom do you teach Sunday School? For whom do you sing? For whom do you play games? For whom do you give? For that matter, for whom do you do anything? If the answer to any one of those questions is not God, it's time to re-check our priorities in life. And if the answer is God, the result should be pleasing to God, without worrying about what others think. Our work and our play becomes a labor of love for the One who formed us from the dust of the earth in the beginning, and who will be with us until eternity. We do not just work to accumulate more "stuff" for ourselves, or play to give ourselves awards. We do so to give thanks to God for the victory God has already given us through Jesus Christ. We can, as Paul writes: *be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.* May we take that as our model for all activities of our lives. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Dear God, you are the giver of life and everything in the universe. You have not only given life, you are the owner of life. Just as an employer gives wages to those who work for them, you give me everything that I have. May I always remember for whom I work and play. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman*