

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Thursday, July 1, 2010

WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:

Luke 10:16 - (Jesus said,) "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me."

Read the scripture and meditate on the verse using these questions:

T - (Thanks) Thank you, my God for...

R - (Regret) Why, oh Lord....

I - (Intercession) My loving Father, please....

P - (Purpose/Plan) Lord, I need you to help me....

P - (Praise) I praise you, O Creator of the Universe for...

SCRIPTURE

2 Chronicles 20:6 - In your hand are power and might, so that no one is able to withstand you.

Luke 1:52 - (The Lord) has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

We had a sand table in our one-room school. It was the perfect height for a 6 or 7 year-old. The clean sand was kept on the table by 1x4 sides all around. When we had our assignments done we could ask for permission to *quietly* play in the sand. At that age, I was the only one in my grade and was often the only one at the table. With a small amount of water, I built quite a mountain, and I was the king! Then Zeke, a 7th grader - one of the "big kids", joined me and a war changed *quiet* play into *noisy* play. My mountain creation crumbled and the teacher ordered us to take our seats. Like children at play we all have a tendency to think we are king/queen of our mountain, forgetting who the Creator really is. According the Chronicles, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, called the people to prayer, recognizing God's power in the face of the Ammonites and Moabites about to attack; and God answered their prayers. Mary acknowledged the power of God to make the "impossible" possible in her, *bringing down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly*. With all God's power and might, He blesses us and encourages us to participate in His creation, asking only that we remember Who sits on the Throne. For mighty kings, lowly virgins, and ordinary people like you and me, it is time to eat a little humble pie and give thanks. May we discover and acknowledge the God of our salvation, especially when we face "impossible" situations in life. (lls)

PRAYER

It is so easy to forget who you are, gracious and loving God! I begin to think that I am the king of the mountain and even the universe in which I live. Forgive me for my arrogance as I bow before you and acknowledge that you are creator and ruler of all things. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Friday, July 2, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 2:28 - There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.

John 1:14 - The word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

I worked for Tom Hughes at Tom's Music House in Norfolk, Nebraska while going to Norfolk Jr. College. I did just about anything and everything, from demonstrating organs to cleaning out the deepest dirtiest basement anyone ever imagined. I liked the work and the people. Christmas Eve my father came to pick me up because my car needed repairs. While he was waiting for me to finish my work, he started talking to Tom. I glanced over at him a couple of times, a little worried about what he would say. I hoped he wasn't revealing all of my faults. However, each time I took a quick look, I saw his face glow with pride. On the way home he told me why. Tom had complimented him on having a son like me. When Daniel was challenged with interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, Daniel informed him that *there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries*. John describes the greatest mystery of all: *the Word becoming flesh and living among us* - God's own Son, Jesus Christ. I can well imagine the glory reflected on God's face as He declares to His own Son, "You are my Son. I am well pleased!" This One came to live among us, making His Father proud, causing His Father's face to glow, and reflecting His grace. Have you caused your father's face to glow? Just imagine how much it makes your Father's face to glow also. May our lives reflect God's love and mercy, and may they make God's face to glow with pride as He declares of us: *This is my child! I'm proud of him/her!* (lls)

PRAYER

Do I make you proud that I am your child, dear Father? Are you happy with how I act toward you and toward others? Thank you for adopting me through my baptism and making me your own. May my actions this day make you proud. In this I pray in your son, Jesus' name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Saturday, July 3, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 54:6 - With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.

1 Corinthians 6:20 - You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

It was not until I had children of my own that I fully understood the sacrifices made by my parents when I was growing up. Thinking back, I vaguely remember a Christmas when each of the five of us (then) received one gift, but there was nothing for Mom or Dad. They never told us that it was a bad year on the farm. I remember complaining that I was hungry late one night when my Dad, who had worked late in the field, was eating the last of the pork and beans (before the weekly trip to town to shop); when he shared what little he had with me. I remember piano lessons when Mom scraped together the remains of her "egg money" so that we could have music. The list continues through high school and college years. How can I ever adequately say "Thanks!" to two people who gave so much to me? The Psalmist understood how much God had done for him, and, of his free will, he gave thanks. Paul reminds the Corinthians of what it cost God to save them from sin, death, and the devil. For this and so much more, they were urged to freely give thanks with their lives. So, it is good for us to consider the great sacrifice which God made for us in His own Son. God bought us with His own life, death and resurrection. How do we ever adequately say "Thanks!"? The only way I know is by glorifying God in our bodies, in our voices, in our lives. May we freely give thanks as we have freely received. (lls)

PRAYER

I give you thanks, dear Father, for my parents and others who have sacrificed for me through the years. Thank you for the privilege of knowing them. Forgive me when I haven't given my appreciation to what they have done or for the gift of salvation and life you have given. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Sunday, July 4, 2010
Independence Day in America

WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:

Matthew 11:28 (Jesus said,) "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

HYMN

Fear not, I am with you, oh, be not dismayed.
For I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.
— J. Rippon

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 60:12 - With God we shall do valiantly.

2 Corinthians 3:5 - Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

I stepped into the chancel to preach. I had studied the lessons and prepared a sermon, but I was drained. It started with a very difficult counseling session on the previous Sunday afternoon. Every time I sat down to rest that week, the phone rang - three nights in a row it rang after midnight. Two funerals, and one wedding added to the normal load of teaching, Bible study, and administration. I had preached so many sermons already that week that I wasn't sure I could do anything Sunday morning. I sat in the front pew at 5:30 that morning, half sleeping and half weeping when a peace came over me, and I knew it would be OK. For at least an hour I rested in that peace, gaining in the confidence that in God all things are possible, and the certainty that what I had to say was God's word, not mine. In my utter emptiness, I was filled. In my incompetence, God came forth with power to do in me what I could not do myself. So I stepped into the chancel to preach - and God spoke. God promises to do the same for all who rest their confidence in Him. No matter what challenges face us, may we do our best, but let our confidence be in Christ who is with us always. (lls)

PRAYER

You are such a surprising God, O Lord. When I am at my weakest, you give me strength. When I do not have the words to say, you give them to me. You use me when I think I have nothing more to give. May I rest in your love and power this day as you renew me in body and spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Monday, July 5, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 9:4-5 - Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong.

Romans 5:20 - Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Mom bought a new bottle of brown liquid shoe polish, the kind with the dauber attached to the lid by a small wire. While she was outside helping Dad finish some chores, I decided to help by polishing our shoes for Sunday morning. I was five, and I had three younger brothers and a younger sister at the time, all wanting to help. I'm not sure exactly how it happened or who bumped it, but the bottle tipped over and spilled in the middle of the kitchen floor. I knew Mom would be mad, and Dad would be even angrier. So, we wiped it up as best we could, and covered the stain on the linoleum with newspaper. But that didn't hide anything. Next we tried a piece of cardboard, but that was even worse. Finally, there was nothing to do but come right out and admit what happened. True to expectations, Mom and Dad were angry, but by supper time they had helped me clean it up, given the lecture entitled "When we aren't in the house, behave yourself!" and all was forgiven. In the same way, "God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" sheds His grace upon all who return to Him. God loves to love us, especially when we feel the most unlovable. Covering up or trying to hide our sin from God only separates us from His mercy and grace. May we, like Daniel and Paul, discover the relief and the joy we can experience when we "come clean" with God. (lls)

PRAYER

Sometimes I sin knowingly, dear Father, by disregarding your commandments and instructions and other times I don't even realize the harm that I am doing. Forgive me for the stain of sin after you have made me clean through my baptism. Thank you for your grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Tuesday, July 6, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 31:28 - Just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, ...so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.

John 15:1-2 - (Jesus said,) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit."

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

On our farm there was an unwritten law which stated, "If it doesn't produce, it's gone." When Dad stopped using work horses, the two old plugs went to the sale. When cows stopped giving milk because of age, they became hamburger. When chickens stopped laying eggs they were sold or butchered for chicken soup. I fully understand the vinegrower's rule. A plant that doesn't produce just takes up space and causes added work. I've also seen the results of a good pruning job. Mom still reminds me of the year when I was in high school, and I asked if I could prune all of our apple trees (about a dozen of them). We had a lesson on it in one of my classes, and I thought it would be good practice. I removed all of the suckers and any crossing branches. When I finished the trees looked naked, and everyone, especially Dad, thought for sure I'd killed them. But that year we had the biggest and best crop of apples we ever had. Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, and John, the apostle, both observed the results of good pruning of fruit trees. They compared it with God's concern for us, His vineyard. Jesus points out that God wants us to do more than just take up space. We need to put our faith into practice. God's plan is that we will all become the very best that we can be - the way God made us in the first place. May we live well, grow strong in faith, and produce the fruits of God's love for all to share. (lls)

PRAYER

Pruning is hard work, dear Lord! Not only does it require a lot of energy and hard work, it is painful to cut things off from a living plant. However, I know that I will not grow and will not produce the kind of fruit that you want if it is not done. Prune me and help me get rid of that which does not produce. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Wednesday, July 7, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 11:7 – The Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds.

Matthew 5:6 – (Jesus said,) “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

I’ve observed over the years that I have a pretty pronounced “sweet tooth.” In fact, just about anything that I shouldn’t eat, I crave. I often wish I had the same craving for the healthy foods - the veggies and fruits that would be better for me. I have also observed that the more of the good stuff I eat, the more I enjoy it, and sometimes even crave it. It is the same thing with righteousness - “*rightness with God*”. What our worldly nature craves is not always what is good for us. Hungering and thirsting for more Bible study, more hymn singing, more worship, more prayer, more acts of kindness, are not usually part of our human appetite. However, I have also observed that the more I “eat” of those things which lead to rightness with God, the more I enjoy them and even crave them; and the more they lead me to act accordingly. The Psalmist observed that *the Lord is righteous* and loves *righteous deeds*. Good deeds must make God smile with joy, like a parent watching their child doing something helpful without being told. God fills up our senses and appeases our hungering and thirsting heart as nothing else can do. Hungry? Thirsty? Try righteousness. It’s a taste that takes some getting used to, but once we do, we’ll be glad we did. May we be blessed as learn to hunger and thirst for that which truly satisfies. (lls)

PRAYER

How much I crave that which is not good for me, dear Father! However, I know it is not healthy for me and can make me fat and lazy. Feed me with righteousness and those good things which bring it about. May I always hunger and thirst for studying of your word, praising you, and helping others. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Thursday, July 8, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 51:11 - The ransomed of the Lord shall return; ...they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

1 Peter 4:13 - Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

A trip to the dentist was a terrifying experience for me when I was 7 or 8. Our old dentist didn't fill anything that wasn't "absolutely needing it." In addition, he only used novocaine when *he* thought it was necessary, and his ancient drills appeared to be remnants of some torture chamber from a long-ago haunted castle. Fear of the suffering was the only emotion I remember. So, when a tooth ached, I waited until I couldn't take it any more before admitting to the need. Like a martyr I trudged up the long flight of stairs to the second-floor dentist's office to wait my turn in the chair of horrors. Somehow I survived (purely by the grace of God) and my sorrow and fear and pain were relieved, and I could rejoice at those most glorious and musical words, "rinse and spit, we're all done!" There are challenges in life which may have similar effects on us to my trips to the dentist, and we may face them with the same fear and dread. The good news is found in the fact that Christ has faced far worse suffering for us and promises us the most wonderful and glorious and musical words, "Shout for joy, my friend, and enter into the joy of my kingdom! Your suffering is no more!" May we be empowered with hope-filled, excited, anticipation of the Day when God will put an end to all tears, all suffering, and all sorrow, inviting us to celebrate the glory that is revealed. (lls)

PRAYER

You prayed to your Father that the pain and suffering that lay ahead of you might be taken away, dear Jesus. However, it was necessary for my salvation. May I also be willing to live with some of the pains in life until I hear those glorious words when you welcome me into your joy. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Friday, July 9, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 94:15 – Justice and fairness will go hand in hand, and all who do right will follow along.

Luke 18:7 – (Jesus said,) “Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?”

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

A lot can happen in a daily one-mile walk from school to home. Races, fights, skinned knees, and bruised egos, along with the normal “big kid” bullying. They were not unusual for the 10 of us students at Canfield, District #35, as we made our way past the cemetery, over the dusty hills. One day I noticed my sister (with whom I often fought like cats and dogs) crying. When I asked her why, she told me that two of the other girls wouldn’t talk to her. (You must understand that I considered it perfectly OK to fight with my sister, but I would challenge anyone else who made her cry.) My challenge became a shouting match which fizzled out before we got home. The end result was that I had my sister and the two other girls all mad at *me*. With a common enemy they were friends again. I wonder if I got a taste of how God must feel when He tries to bring peace and justice to those who cry to Him day and night? The Psalmist understood that tension and recognized that *justice and fairness go hand in hand*. God’s justice and God’s fairness don’t always fit into our agenda. We don’t always appreciate God’s efforts to bring them about. Jesus declared that in the end, God would grant justice to those who turn to Him. May our decisions and our lives be framed by justice and fairness so that we might be part of God’s solution rather than part of the problem. (lls)

PRAYER

I don’t always like what you have to say, dear God. I rejoice (and even am a little smug) when you speak of fairness and justice when it applies to me, however, you make me uneasy when they apply to others. Help me to understand that your fairness and justice apply to all people. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Saturday, July 10, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Job 10:12 – You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit.

Mark 5:19 – Jesus ...said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.”

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Remember those days when you (or your kids, if it's too far back to remember) came home from school or from playing, and began to chatter away about everything that happened? I hear stories of my doing that to my parents, and remember, even more clearly, how our children could give no end to the details of every part of their day. Once we wondered if they would ever talk. Then we wondered if they'd ever stop talking! Jesus gives us permission - in fact, He encourages us - to chatter away about God's steadfast love and mercy, in the way that Job does in his prayers after he has lost everything. Once we recognize it in our lives we are invited to tell everyone and not spare the details! After the legion of demons was cast out of a man and into a herd of swine, he wanted to become a disciple of Jesus. However, Jesus tells him to become an evangelist, sharing the good news of what God had done for him with his old friends and neighbors. What "good news" can you describe in loving detail this day to each and every person you meet? May we learn to pay attention to what God is doing for us in our lives so that we can share that good news with anyone who will listen. (lls)

PRAYER

How I can talk and prattle about the most unimportant things in life, dear God! I can speak endlessly about the weather, what I saw on the way to the grocery store, or about what so-and-so is doing. Help me to be as verbal about the important things; like about how much you love us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Sunday, July 11, 2010

WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:

Luke 19:10 – (Jesus said,) “The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

HYMN

Savior, like a shepherd lead us; much we need your tender care,
In your pleasant pastures feed us, for our use your fold prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have bought us; we are yours.
— Dorothy Thrupp

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 53:3 - As one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Matthew 5:4 - (Jesus said,) “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.”

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

It wasn't much to look at. In fact, it was the ugliest, dirtiest rag you could lay eyes on. But our son loved that (once) yellow blanket, and kept it within reach at bed-time for many years. Then one day, when we were packing to move to a new house, his mother discovered the tattered remnant between the mattress and the box spring. Believing he would want to keep it safe, she asked if he wanted it in his suitcase or another box. When he responded that he didn't want it anymore, we (not he) experienced the grief of passage. Our baby was growing up and didn't need his “blanky” any more! It wasn't much, but it had comforted him through sickness, through nightmares, through “time-outs”, and so many growing-up events. Isaiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon of One who was to come, One despised and rejected by others, who would change the course of history. He would be the “blanky”, the security, rejected by others. This One came in the person of Jesus to bring comfort and hope to a world in mourning for the loss of loved ones and the loss of relationships. In all of our lives there are people (or “blankies”) which pass away or beyond our reach, and we mourn their passing, blest by what they meant to us and comforted by the knowledge that our ultimate security blanket is the Lord, Himself. May we experience that comfort in our relationship with Jesus Christ, our ultimate “security blanket.” (lls)

PRAYER

It is with deep gratitude that I thank you for all of those “blankies” that you have sent to me along the way, O Father! So many people have loved and cared for me and I have missed them terribly when they have gone home to you. Thank you that Jesus will never leave me. In his name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Monday, July 12, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 15:2 - The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation.

Romans 5:2 - Through (Jesus Christ) we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

A friend gave us tickets to a stage show in Osage Beach, Missouri. She, her husband, and their six-year old son all worked with the show, he playing drums, she running the very complex sound system, and their son playing a super-hero in a couple of skits. When we went to the show, we were given some of the best seats in the theater. During the intermission, we were escorted behind stage to meet the extremely talented stars of the show and to see the inner workings of the production. The owner, his wife, and their teenage son were all in the show, and they all made us feel at home, as if we were part of their family. That's the kind of relationship Moses wanted the Israelites to have with God. It was that relationship which convinced Moses that the Lord was his strength, his might, and his salvation. That also describes the kind of friend we have in Jesus. He paid the price of admission to the heavenly courts with His own life, death and resurrection. He Himself invites us to the very throne of God. He Himself has prepared a place for members of His family. We can boast in His name, for He is our Salvation! May we live lives worthy of the privilege to which we have been called, as children of God and heirs of salvation. (IIs)

PRAYER

Come, Lord Jesus. Come into my heart and make your home within it. Thank you for making me a part of your family and inviting me to join you each and every day. Teach me to make others feel welcome in your name so that they might also open their hearts to you. In your name I pray. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Tuesday, July 13, 2010

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 17:16 – The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord.

Mark 6:42-43 – All ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

There is nothing like a pot luck dinner in a church in rural Nebraska! By the time Sue and I got in line, about 3/4 of the people had already gone through, filling their plates. When we reached the food, I wondered where those people had filled their plates, because they had hardly made a dent in the delicious dishes on the tables. It was as if the cooks had taken lessons from Elijah whose jar of meal and jug of oil kept on giving. Or was it from Jesus Himself who was able to feed thousands of people with a few fish and loaves of bread, and still take up twelve baskets of left-overs. The One who invites us to the Victory Feast in heaven, promises just such a feast, and these pot luck dinners are only a “foretaste of the feast to come!” If we would begin each day by writing down all of the blessings God has given us (instead of making a list of the things we didn’t get), the list would begin to look like one of those pot luck dinners. (Believe me, I’ve done it many times!) Then, we can remember that we should be like the woman who gave Elijah the last flour and oil, or the boy who gave Jesus his fish and bread, so that those who have none can be fed. May we trust the Lord with the resources we have, as they did. May we cheerfully share God’s blessings with a food kitchen for the poor or by donating to a pantry for those with special needs. (lls)

PRAYER

Help me to remember that you are a God of abundance, O Holy One. Forgive me for trying to make you into a God of scarcity. Remind me of that every time that I think I will not have enough or that I can give enough that you always have given to me freely. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Wednesday, July 14, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 139:23-24 – Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Philippians 1:6 – I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

We went to Expo 86 in Vancouver, B.C. It was at a time when border guards and customs agents were keeping a very close watch on children, because there had been a rash of kidnaping during the previous years. The customs agent looked directly at our ten and twelve year olds and ask them pointed questions about who they were and where they were going. It was obvious, they didn't want us to interfere in their questioning. The kids answered as innocently as I've ever known them to be, saying, in effect, "Ask me anything you want and I'll tell you what you need to know!" It is the same thought expressed of the Psalmist who invites God to search him and lead him to heaven. His heart and soul are wide open to God's probe. It is the same confidence Paul has in the One who began a good work among us - Jesus Christ. Would that every hour of every day we all would be able to invite God to search our hearts, our minds, and our souls. God does, you know! Ready or not! Our God knows us inside and out; every thought, word, or deed. Therefore, we can have confidence in Him, or we can try to be confident in our own abilities and goodness. The scriptures assure us that true confidence comes in imitating Jesus, so that no wicked way can ever be found in us. May we place our full confidence in Him. (lls)

PRAYER

The only time I do not want you to know what is in my heart, dear Father, is when I am ashamed of what lies in it. I am not fooling you when I think that I can keep any secrets from you because you know all that is within me. May my life be an open book to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Thursday, July 15, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 26:9 – (O Lord,) when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

1 Peter 1:17 – If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

I went off to play by myself, leaving my three-year old brother to play by himself. He wandered over to the rabbit hutch and somehow figured out how to open it. In his attempt to play with the rabbits, he let most of them out. Since I was supposed to be watching him, it was clearly my fault. I wasn't spanked often, but I did feel the righteous anger of my parents on the seat of my pants occasionally. I was never abused or given cruel or unusual punishment. I was taught that there were consequences for breaking the rules. I remember thinking at the time that I was being treated unfairly; until I saw the baby rabbit killed by the dog, and recognized that I was responsible. I experienced a consistent love which dished out discipline and justice for all - a love which is modeled after God's love and justice. Isaiah tried to help a stiff-necked, rebellious Judah understand that God's judgments and God's discipline are always aimed at helping them learn to be right with God (righteous). The writer of 1st Peter echoed that words to the early Christians. God's justice and judgments may make us feel uncomfortable and even cause us to think God is being unfair. However, God's judgments are not as unfair as the consequences of our sin, for which Jesus suffered and died on our behalf. May we thank God for His grace and mercy when we are the ones who need to return to the Lord. (lls)

PRAYER

You will always be my loving parent and I will always be your child, dear Father. Forgive me for acting as a child and not recognizing that you sometimes need to punish me for my wrong doings, and that you are disciplining me out of love so that I do not continue doing the same things. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Friday, July 16, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 7:4 – Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint.

Matthew 28:20 – (Jesus said,) “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

In a rare moment of panic, I was ready to throw in the towel and admit that I couldn't possibly complete all of the sermons (including Sunday, Wednesday, a funeral and a wedding), all the Bible studies, all the calls, and all of the counseling sessions already scheduled. It had been one of those weeks during Lent when everything seemed to come to a head at once. In a quiet moment, Sue, my helpmate, soothed the frightened child in me, reminding me that I wasn't alone. I was not the Messiah! He who is with me would see that what needed to be done would get done. In that quiet time we prayed for wisdom to take one step at a time and to let God lead the way to the “next indicated steps.” Amazingly (although I must admit it wasn't really that amazing), everything that needed to get done that week was finished. Isaiah encouraged the people of Judah to take time to be quiet, listen to the calming voice of the Lord, and allow the Lord to strengthen their hearts. Jesus reminded “all who have ears to hear” that He will be with us always. Jesus *is* with us *always*, even when we don't hear Him or feel His presence. We can thank God that His agenda for us will be accomplished and those things which can wait (though important to us) will get done when He determines the time is right. May we *take time to be quiet*, and *remember* that Jesus *is with us always*. (lls)

PRAYER

Calm my fearful heart, dear Lord, and open my ears so that I might hear your voice reassuring me that you indeed are here with me now and will always be with me. Help me to see how important it is for me to take time during the day to call upon you and then listen to your voice. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Saturday, July 17, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 38:14 – O Lord, I am oppressed; be my security!

Mark 2:10-12 – (Jesus) said to the paralytic, “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

We sat there for the longest time - waiting. We were waiting for someone to say something. The leaders just sat there saying and doing nothing. Finally I (big mouth) opened that mouth and asked if we were going to sit there all day or actually do something. I had spent good money to fly to Cleveland, Ohio for a youth ministry training event, and I didn't want to just sit around doing nothing. Like opening a flood-gate, others chimed in, and finally the leaders began the session. They had been waiting to see if anyone was interested in doing anything or not. I was reminded of this one day when visiting a family new to the community. At the end of my visit I invited them to join the church. They told me they would. They had visited several other churches, but no one else had invited them to join. When was the last time you invited someone to worship with you or to join your church? Or, have you ever complained about problems in life only to realize that you hadn't invited God to help you solve them? Isaiah knew better than to “go it alone”. He knew he needed the Lord on his side to deal with a rebellious people. In much the same way, the friends of a paralytic recognized the importance of getting him to Jesus for healing. Have you ever forgotten to listen to Jesus so that He can declare to you, “*Take up your bed/illness/sorrow/need and live!*”? May taking our pains and troubles to the Lord in prayer, be our first thought rather than our last. (lls)

PRAYER

I assume that because the church door is always open, everyone feels welcome to join, dear Lord. May I always remember to invite others to join us so that they know, that you and the community also want them. Be with me and let me not be afraid to finally open my mouth and invite. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Sunday, July 18, 2010

WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:

Galatians 6:2 – Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

HYMN

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
The unity of heart and mind is like to that above.

We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.

— John Fawcett

Read the scripture and meditate on the verse using these questions:

T - (Thanks) What in these verses makes me thankful?

R - (Regret) What do these verses reveal that show my need to confess my sin?

I - (Intercession) What do I need to ask God for in prayer for others and myself?

P - (Purpose/Plan) What action or purpose do these verses encourage me to take?

P - (Praise) I praise you, O Creator of the Universe for...

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 54:4 – Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed.

Mark 4:40 – (Jesus) said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Poised at the edge of the high diving board, the scrawny little nine-year old stood shivering - partly from the cool breeze blowing against his wet skin, and partly from fear. He had jumped from that board before, but now, with an audience, he was afraid. He had yelled at the top of his voice for his father to watch, and then froze. Numerous voices chimed in to encourage him to jump, but he just stood there. The lifeguard treaded water near where he would jump, but still he hesitated to take the plunge. Then, with a scream of determination, he launched himself from his “50,000 foot tower” into the bottomless pit of the pool! Pretty good picture of the way many of us are when it comes to sharing our faith or taking “baby steps” of faith. That’s how it was for the exiles in Babylon who wanted to return to their homeland, but were afraid to make the move. After Jesus calmed the storm at sea, the disciples too were terrified. They wanted to believe Jesus was the power of God in flesh, but they were afraid of what that would mean. Jesus gave them, and us, words of encouragement. What will it take to get us to pray for others, lay healing hands on others, share God’s word with others? What are we afraid of? Someone wrote, “The only thing to fear is fear itself.” In matters of faith, that is the essence of God’s word to us. “Believe in God, believe also in me....” Jesus said. Believe! Then, take the plunge - act on what you believe. Christ won’t let you down. May we have the faith to believe and act on that faith. (lls)

PRAYER

As I stand here at the edge; wanting to invite someone to worship with me; but afraid to take the plunge; I ask for your help and encouragement, dear God. Help me to see that there truly is nothing to be afraid of, and that you will give me the words to say. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Monday, July 19, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 63:8 - My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

John 16:27 - (Jesus said,) "The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I come from God."

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

He was fourteen. He had been in numerous fights with parents, teachers and classmates when his parents brought him to me as a last resort. He wouldn't talk to a counselor and I didn't hold out much hope that he would talk to me either. But something must have clicked. I discovered that he was going through an identity crisis because he was adopted. We talked a lot about his feelings and I went to bat for him with the adoption agency to find out what could be found about his biological parents. Afterward I saw him at church and occasionally at youth group meetings, but had little contact. The day of my farewell I saw him in the crowd with other teens, not giving it too much thought until he came to me during a lull. I reached out a hand to shake his, but he drew me in and gave me the biggest bear hug of the evening, placing his lips near my ear so that no one else could hear him whisper, "Thank you! You'll never know how much you mean to me!" And he clung to me as tears stung my eyes. Then he was gone. This was the kind of clinging the Psalmist believed his soul was doing with God. It is the same kind of relationship Jesus had with His Father and He wants to have with us. Would that all of us would cling to the Lord with such intensity and gratitude. May we all share that same love with others. (lls)

PRAYER

Thank you, dear Lord! I don't tell you enough of how much you mean to me. You are my constant companion and friend and when I receive the bread and the wine; your body and blood; I know that you are giving me the biggest hug that I could every get. May I cling tight to that love! Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Tuesday, July 20, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 104:27-28 - (O Lord,) these all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

Mark 6:37 - (Jesus) answered them, "You give them something to eat."

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

We waited with baited breath for our elegant hostess, dressed in the very fashionable and neatly stitched and patched hand-me-down overalls, to serve us on her finest hand painted plastic "china". It was a rare coffee and mud pie event, to which she had invited her brothers and a neighbor. My six-year old sister did her best to imitate our mother's social graces as she passed out the cups and saucers, carefully wiping the spider web out of my cup and the remnants of the last extravaganza out of the neighbor's. She carefully poured the muddy mixture (our coffee) into the cups and went to the oven (a cardboard box) to retrieve the freshly-baked "pie". We expected the standard "mud pie delight", but were surprised to see her draw a finely decorated brown bag from her oven. We were even more surprised to each receive one large **real** cookie from the bag. Mom had prepared our snack and given it to my sister to serve. God has given us cupboards and refrigerators full of goodies to serve to others. We can serve them or keep them to ourselves. We can share with elegant flair or treat them as "mud pies." May we serve the good news of God's love to those who show up at our "coffee party", at home, at work, at school, or at play! lls

PRAYER

You have given me so many good things, gracious and loving God! You bless me with an overabundance, yet when asked to give to others, I turn away or I dig through what I have to find those things that I would not want or what is the cheapest. Forgive me and open my heart. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Wednesday, July 21, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Hosea 10:12 – Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord.

Ephesians 5:15-16 – Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

The field was left uncultivated (fallow) one year. My job was to mow it. As I did, I discovered a world of wild things that were living among the weeds. Some good and some - like the skunk - I was very happy to see waddle away from where my tractor was mowing. There was also a world of wild weeds that seemed to thrive in that fallow ground. Some I would have to return to dig up later, because without killing the roots, they would just return. A lot like our lives when we are idle for too long, isn't it? Once the weeds of bad habits and sin get started, they are much more difficult to get rid of. Hosea declared the fallow ground to be the hearts and souls of people who did not have a relationship with the Lord. It was time, he preached, to prepare the soil of their souls to receive the Lord. Paul urged the people of Ephesus to keep that soil weeded and the people to live in a way that helped them make the most of the time and talents God had given them. How well are you using the time and the talents God has given you? May we use our time to plow up the fallow ground and put our lives to the best use possible. (lls)

PRAYER

It is good for my soul to remain “fallow” and rest in you for a little while, dear God, but it is not so good for it to remain that way. Cultivate in me a renewed heart and mind and plant the seeds of ministry within me. Use me in turn to plant your seeds of hope and love in others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Thursday, July 22, 2010

SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 12:15 – If you will not heed the voice of the Lord, ...then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.

1 Corinthians 7:19 – Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

When I was playing with one of my cousins, something I did caused one of the younger kids to cry. Dad was nearby and came over, took me by the arm to a place behind the building and applied his hand to the seat of my pants. I remember saying, "But Dad!" (What I meant was, "But Dad, I'm *your* son!") What he did and the look he gave me said, "All the more reason to behave yourself!" I learned early that there were no membership privileges when it came to obedience in our family. God treats us in the same way. Samuel, the prophet and priest, gave a solemn warning as part of his final sermon to the people. Even God's most beloved people would feel the hand of the Lord on the seat of their pants if they disobeyed His voice. In the wilderness, in the promised land, and even in the early church, we need to heed Samuel's warning. Paul told the Corinthian Christians that membership in the family of faith did not come with the privilege of disobeying God's commands. God loves us enough to expect us to live as His children should live - not as lawless hooligans. Does your life reflect God's love and justice? Perhaps it's time to take stock. Just saying you're a Christian isn't good enough. God expects us to live it! May we do so with joy and thanksgiving for our gracious and merciful Lord. (lls)

PRAYER

Thank you for not being the type of parent that lets their children get away with anything that they want to do just because they are their child, dear Father! I see how that kind of inaction breeds a person who is uncaring about others. I pray that I will always obey you and your word. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Friday, July 23, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 33:18 – Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.”

John 17:22 – (Jesus prayed,) “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

We read about it. Our guide told us what to expect. But when we walked through the huge doors of the city hall in Stockholm, Sweden, we all stood in absolute awe, as though in shock. The splendor of millions of tiny golden mosaic tiles from floor to two-story ceiling was unbelievable. We were like children awakened from sleep, who might see the subject of the most incredibly beautiful dream come true. Now imagine a glory many times greater in the Person of God as He “leaked” a little of that glory out on Moses just from His shadow as He hid Moses in the cleft of a rock! It was so brilliant it caused Moses’ face to glow, frightening those who saw it, causing them to beg Moses to wear a veil. God’s purity was so great they couldn’t even stand to look at a mere reflection of the Lord. Imagine also the spiritual glory Jesus shared with His disciples! And, then imagine that glory as He shares it with those who call on His name! Wouldn’t it be great if enough of that glory leaked out of *us* so that those around us would stand in awe of and seek the One we reflect?! May the glory of the Lord fill us and shine through us to enlighten a world darkened by sin. (lls)

PRAYER

I know that I could not handle seeing your glory in all its fullness, dear Jesus. But I pray that I might be aware of that glory and come to you in humbleness and awe. Shine some of your richness upon me that others might see you in my words and actions and also come to see your glory. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Saturday, July 24, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 26:12 – In the great congregation I will bless the Lord.

Hebrews 10:24-25 – Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

I have often looked back at my early education in that one-room country school with great appreciation of the experience. The only draw-back was that for a number of those years I was the only student in my grade. There were other kids close to my age, but it wasn't the same. I really enjoyed Sunday School because there, I had other kids who were my age to talk to, to sing with, to pray with, and play with. No doubt from the creation of Adam, God already knew the loneliness of one. It seems obvious to me that the Psalmist also understood the importance of a "great congregation" even for praising God. I have noticed how much easier and more enjoyable it is to sing with a large group of people. Blending voices and blending the Spirit who lives in each of us, makes God's joy complete and increases our own joy. The writer of Hebrews encourages his readers to *provoke one another to love and good deeds*. That is another advantage of a community of faith, encouraging one another and worshiping together. I hope you do not "neglect to meet together" for worship tomorrow. You may not think it makes much difference, but, ask any pastor, it truly does - to God and to others seeking to feel the presence of God's Spirit. May you be blessed in the congregation as you worship the Lord. (lls)

PRAYER

Solitude is not always good, dear Lord, especially when it comes to raising our voices in song and praise to you. I am inspired by a full congregation joining our voices as one. May I never neglect seeking a place to worship and inviting others to join us so that we might be one. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Sunday, July 25, 2010

WATCHWORD FOR THE WEEK:

Ephesians 2:8 – By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

HYMN

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;

'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

— John Newton

Read the scripture and meditate on the verse using these questions:

T - (Thanks) What in these verses makes me thankful?

R - (Regret) What do these verses reveal that show my need to confess my sin?

I - (Intercession) What do I need to ask God for in prayer for others and myself?

P - (Purpose/Plan) What action or purpose do these verses encourage me to take?

P - (Praise) I praise you, O Creator of the Universe for...

SCRIPTURE

Numbers 14:19 – (O Lord,) forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love.

1 John 2:2 – (Jesus Christ) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

At one time I enjoyed war movies. I liked the action and the fact that the “good guys” always won. Over the years, the luster of those movies has worn thin as I read more of the historical record which describes the terrible carnage of war. In addition, the facts indicate that most wars are fought at the command of grown adults talking and acting like children who want their way. When they can't have their own way, they send their warriors, who are little more than children themselves. These young warriors are like toy soldiers, out to fight battles and die for the wealthy or politically connected, in hopes of getting what they want, while they sit safe and secure in the lap of luxury. I know that is an oversimplification. War is not that simple. But I find myself feeling guilty for my part - however distant it may be - in the suffering and pain caused by war - any war. Only by the grace of God can I find forgiveness for what I have directly or indirectly done, and for what those I elected to office perpetrate. Those physical battles are a reflection of the real spiritual battle going on daily with us and within us. Thank you Jesus for battling the war with sin, death and the devil for us! May we come to fully appreciate Christ's atoning sacrifice for our sins. (lls)

PRAYER

Take away my warring heart, dear God and replace it with one that loves my neighbor, no matter how distant and different that neighbor might be. Use me as your instrument of peace by opening my ears to listen; working out our differences instead of acting like children. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Monday, July 26, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Zephaniah 3:7 – “Surely the city will fear me, it will accept correction,” (says the Lord.)

2 Corinthians 6:18-7:1 – “You shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

I endured the giggles and occasional screams for what felt like hours. At 3 AM, in utter exhaustion, I finally called the slumber party to a halt and threatened “dire consequences” if it didn’t quiet down. “Surely they will listen to me and quiet down,” I thought. Think again! After a brief lull of blissful quiet, when I almost fell asleep, it started all over again. I believe I have an idea of the thinking of God when He corrects His children. Will we ever learn to accept God’s correction any better than children, or will we continue to return to our old sinful selves? It was God’s hope as expressed by the prophet Zephaniah. It was a hope that faded all too soon, and the “dire consequences” of destruction and defeat struck the people mightily. As God’s sons and daughters we live under the “grace-full” umbrella of an infinitely patient Father. But even so, some Day that patience will wear thin and the “dire consequences” will be delivered big time! While we live with God’s promises, may we be cleansed in His healing waters so that we will be ready for that Day. (lls)

PRAYER

I am thankful that I am your child, dear Father, but I think it might be time that I begin to act as if I was an adult child; taking responsibility for my actions, behaving as you would want and studying, listening and acting on your word. I pray these things in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Tuesday, July 27, 2010

SCRIPTURE

2 Samuel 24:10 – David said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant.”

Mark 2:17 – When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “...I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

“Pastor, when you hear my story, you will probably want to just kick me out the door. Everybody else has.” What followed was a litany of pain, sin, stupidity, and grief that covered everything in the 10 Commandments, and then some. He was miserable and confused. “I’m sorry for most of it,” he continued, “and I know God will never forgive me, but I had to get it off my chest and tell someone.” I told him that in confessing his sin he had taken the first step back to God who was standing at the door of His Kingdom with His arms outstretched and waiting for him to take the next step. Surprise and disbelief showed on his scarred and weathered face. “It’s not possible!” he declared. “Not with people, but with God all things are possible.” I declared. It opened the door to the stories of David and Bathsheba and the parable of the prodigal son. As I unfolded those stories I saw giant tears well up in his already-bloodshot eyes. “But I’m so bad!” he cried. “How could God ever love me?” “I don’t know,” I replied. “You’ll have to ask Him when you see Him! All I know is that God loves us enough to die for every one of your sins and mine. After all, he came to save the sinners, not the goody-two shoes! Would you like to return to Him and receive Him and hear His words of forgiveness?” He laughed as the weight began to lift. Steady doses of healing balm later, his life was noticeably changed. Not because of me, but because of what God does for each of us in Jesus our Lord. Got a heavy load? God has the solution! May we return to Him and allow Him to carry it for us, through the cross to the resurrection. (lls)

PRAYER

The heavier the burden, the more wonderful it feels when that burden is taken off my back, O loving Lord! When I hear those words of forgiveness, it is like I become a new person; because I have. Thank you for loving me so much that even with my sins you would die for me. Amen, Lord Jesus.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Wednesday, July 28, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 94:14 – The Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage.

Romans 11:2 – God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

We lived a mile from any paved or graveled roads. In addition we had a very long lane which made it impossible to travel, except by tractor, during the winter or rainy seasons. One winter when I was about five, Dad took me and my sister on the tractor to where the car was parked. We waited there while he went back to get my twin brothers. When they arrived, he left them with us to go get Mom and my youngest brother. With two squirming three-year olds to entertain, it seemed like hours went by as we waited. They began to cry because they were sure we were all being abandoned. Finally, I heard the tractor coming. Relief was in sight. Dad had not forsaken us. I already knew that he wouldn't, but my younger brothers were still learning that lesson. The Psalmist had learned to rely entirely on the Lord and trust that God would not forsake or abandon His special people. Paul had to remind persecuted Christians in Rome, and other cities to whom his letter was sent, that God never abandons or rejects those who place their trust in Him. Many people are in a learning pattern. They panic at the thought that God has forgotten them and their needs. So it is that those older in faith need to encourage those infants in faith with the good news of God's unshakeable love and care for every one of His children. May we sing the Psalmist's song, trusting and believing that the Lord will never forsake or abandon His people. (lls)

PRAYER

I am sorry for those times of doubt, dear Lord; those times when I have thought you have deserted me and left me all alone. Help me to believe in your promises that you will never leave or forsake me and you will be with me until the end of the age. May I encourage others going through doubt. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Thursday, July 29, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 15:17 – Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it.

1 Corinthians 16:14 – Let all that you do be done in love.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

While on internship, I was invited to dinner with one of the members of the church. The table was truly a delight to the eyes and the nose. As the appetizer was passed, the host made a rather snide comment about the senior pastor. I let it pass, since I was the new kid on the block. Unfortunately, I quickly discovered I was not there to feast on delicious food, but rather on the anger and hatred of a man who made it quite clear that he was a “dissident” who didn’t like the senior pastor because he was “changing everything”. I can’t tell you what the meal was, any more. It was buried under the mud being slung by the host. On the other hand, I can remember the most delicious cookie shared by a lovely little lady suffering from painful arthritis. I can remember her generosity and her joy at being able to serve me what little she had. Which would you rather feast on? Love? Or hatred? As for me and my house, I’ll take the love any day! The writer of Proverbs was of that opinion also, preferring to be a loving vegetarian to feasting on bull stuffed with hatred. Paul encouraged his readers to center everything on love, following the example of our Lord. May we join the saints in feasting on the love of the Lord, allowing hatred to fall into the garbage pail where it belongs. (lls)

PRAYER

How wonderful it is to sit down for a meal with those who are filled with joy for you and one another, dear Lord! It doesn’t matter what is set in front of me because I know that you are also sitting at the table. May my words be pleasant to others as we gather in your holy name. Amen.

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

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Friday, July 30, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 142:3 – When my spirit is faint, you know my way, (O Lord.)

2 Timothy 1:7 – God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

The first month or two in a new parish, (or now as we settle into retirement), is very challenging. We must learn new names, new customs and traditions, new locations, new everything - while sorting through all the “stuff” we moved, and searching for the lost “coins” we were sure we put in the box marked “XX”. At the end of a long day, it is easy to close our eyes and feel our spirits faint, wondering if we are over our heads and beyond our level of ability. Then, of course, we are driven in prayer to acknowledge that, yes indeed we are not in control, but there is One whose Spirit *is* in control and who is willing to work through our inadequacies. A good night of resting in His strength and His Spirit revives us to try again. Sometimes I discover that it is only when my own spirit faints that I can allow His Spirit to take control of my life, fill me with His love and His power. No doubt the Psalmist learned that centuries before and shared it in the songs of the Psalms. As Paul wrote to a discouraged young pastor by the name of Timothy, *God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.* May we tap into the power God wants to share with us, rest in His love, and live in confidence that He will lead the way. (lls)

PRAYER

“Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.” Give me your power and your strength so that I might make this day on in which I share you with others. Amen. *(Text by Thomas A. Dorsey)*
Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Larry Sydow; Prayers by Pastor Bruce Freeman

DAILY DEVOTIONS
Saturday, July 31, 2010

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 40:5 – You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you.

Romans 11:36 – From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Just when I didn't think things could get any better, they did! I'm not sure how many times I've heard the opposite, but at the risk of making you feel uncomfortable, whenever I've turned things over to God, I have discovered His wondrous deeds amazing me. I have never been able to out-give God, no matter how hard I try! I find myself on the receiving end of more blessings than I could believe possible, much like the Psalmist. He sang praises to God for the wondrous deeds of the Lord that multiplied his many blessings. Even Paul, who suffered many hardships and trials, gave glory and praise to God for all the blessings bestowed on him. Like the Psalmist and Paul, I am not a person with his head in the clouds. Yes, bad things do happen to all of us, just as they do to many other people. But even in the bad things, we can discover God's hand at work, as it was in the life of Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery: *"What you (my brothers) intended for evil, God intended for good!"* May we take a new look at our lives, our blessings, and, yes, even our problems. May we see many reasons to give God glory also! IIs

PRAYER

You are an amazing God, O my God! When I am down and forgetting to count the many blessings that you have given me, give me a new perspective in life! Even as Joseph was sitting in jail, he was never alone; many were even sent by you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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