

2010 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET



"Smiling Faces That Love Jesus"
By Stephanie Toukmaji, age 5

Back Creek Presbyterian Church

Lenten Devotional

Lenten Devotional

Welcome To The 2010 Lenten Devotional for Back Creek Presbyterian Church!

We have compiled daily devotionals for you to read during the Lenten season. Devotionals were written by students, adults and young teens. Hymns and two of the songs written by Aaron Gies are included. Please read the scripture readings which are provided.

You may notice that Lent actually has 46 days. We wondered why we talk about the 40 days of Lent when there are 46. Here is the explanation we found online:

The answer takes us back to the earliest days of the Church. Christ's original disciples, who were Jewish, grew up with the idea that the Sabbath—the day of worship and of rest—was Saturday, the seventh day of the week, since the account of creation in Genesis says that God rested on the seventh day.

Christ rose from the dead, however, on Sunday, the first day of the week, and the early Christians, starting with the apostles (those original disciples), saw Christ's Resurrection as a new creation, and so they transferred the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

Since all Sundays—and not simply Easter Sunday—were days to celebrate Christ's Resurrection, Christians were forbidden to fast and do other forms of penance on those days. Therefore, when the Church expanded the period of fasting and prayer in preparation for Easter from a few days to 40 days (to mirror Christ's fasting in the desert, before He began His public ministry), Sundays could not be included in the count.

Thus, in order for Lent to include 40 days on which fasting could occur, it had to be expanded to six full weeks (with six days of fasting in each week) plus four extra days—Ash Wednesday and the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday that follow it. Six times six is thirty-six, plus four equals forty. And that's how we arrive at the 40 days.

We enjoyed working together on this project. We hope it will help you to grow in your walk with Jesus Christ at this Lenten season.

Jane Frazier and Carrie Threatt

Lenten Devotional

February 17, 2010

Verses to think about: Psalm 51:10-12

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

We too easily forget our Maker and Redeemer, replacing God with things and ambition. Lent is the season that does something about this situation. It calls us back to God, back to basics, back to the spiritual realities of life. It calls us to put to death the sin and the indifference we have in our hearts toward God and our fellow persons. It beckons us to enter in once again to the joy of the Lord—the joy of a new life born out of a death to the old life.

Robert Weber, renowned worship theologian, states this in his chapter on Lent in the book *Ancient Future Time*. Weber’s explanation of the season of Lent reminds me of a couple of things: 1) the song *Wayfaring Stranger* and 2) the times that I’ve followed Christ into the mission field.

When we sing the song “*Wayfaring Stranger*”, we see ourselves as wanderers in this world, longing to go “there” and see our deceased loved ones and to see our Savior. We know that “beauteous fields lie just before us” and that “we’ll shout salvation’s story in concert with the blood washed band.” But we still have yet to cross over the Jordan.

When I’ve been on the mission field to remote villages in Honduras and Belize, poor old mining towns in Appalachia and Wales, and to a destitute and crime ridden border town in Mexico, I could tell that these folks were singing the same song. We are all fallen and longing to see that day when our Savior comes. We know that in order for us to be with Him we have to die to our selfish desires. We know that the path he will lead us down is “rough and steep.”

See next page

Lenten Devotional

Christ was with the poor and the outcast throughout his ministry; and when I am with the poor and the outcast I know that I am one of them. My poverty is in my lack of faith. When I am with those that rely on God to bring the next meal, I see myself as poor in faith. When I am with those who long for the restoration that Christ will bring because their current existence is unbearable, I see myself as blind to what the Spirit is doing day in and day out to restore God's people to Himself. We are all "wayfaring strangers traveling through this wearisome land."

Prayer: Lord, turn my heart from my selfish ambition. Open my eyes to see your restoration playing out through creation. Lead down the path you have made for me and let me long to follow you home. Amen.

Dylan McKeeman

Lenten Devotional

February 18, 2010

Verse to think about: "So we must go to him outside the camp and endure the insults he endured." Hebrews 13:13

From his school playground in Matamoros, Eleazar watched as a car pulled up to his family's home and gunmen brutally murdered his father. He told me how his mother had scrambled to get all of the children safely across the border into Texas and how his anger would eventually lead him to prison - and about the chaplain who shared the gospel with him there.

He'd probably never seen a book on evangelism - but he shared his faith in an effortless way. Many of the people he spoke with were older and knew something about his former life. They could still see the gang symbols on his arms but what they heard told a completely different story - one of a life dramatically changed by an encounter with Jesus Christ. Eleazar knew the depth of God's love for him and he had come back to his old neighborhood - to redeem it with the gospel!

The camp in today's scripture was a dignified place - where the religious people of the day were well thought of and could expect to be treated nicely. For us, "camp" might be a sympathetic friend who always agrees with our grumbling, or the comfort of a church where our needs are being met. But the admonition of this scripture is for us to break away from anything that hinders communion with Him!

Our flesh wants to escape opposition. When that happens what I really need is someone who will help me to remember what the Master endured for me. Eleazar helped me remember that!

Please pray for Eleazar and his family, especially for his mother who has experienced recent health problems.

Charlie Price

Lenten Devotional

February 19, 2010

*Verses to think about: "Be still and know that I am God".
Psalm 46*

Why is it that my first inclination, when asked to serve, is "do I have time for this"? The pace of life is ever increasing because of our "worldly" commitments. As a result, we have less and less time to take on opportunities to serve God. It seems that the world is upside down and God gets the last portions of our time and talent rather than the first.

God never fails to bless me when I am willing to serve. When teaching Sunday school to kids, the lesson often times feels like it applies more to me than the kids! Of course, bigger commitments are even more difficult to "say yes" to.

When Back Creek sponsored a mission trip to Mexico, it was a new level of commitment as it required giving up several days and heading to another country. Admittedly, my first thought was "how can I do this and still keep up with all of my worldly commitments". God was faithful in helping me to let go. As you would expect, I was blessed on a whole new level. I was able to see just how upside down the world really is.

One thing I learned is how the poorest people seem to be the closest to God. There is no money, there are no possessions or hectic schedules to distract them from Him. I was able to experience firsthand how people fully view their dependence upon God. Somehow I think that is the way God intended us to be. As we enter into the season of Lent, my devotion will be to rely less on self and focus more on God and ask him to reveal his plan for my life.

Michael Weller

Lenten Devotional

February 20 & 21, 2010

Verses to think about: Romans 2:4

“Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience not realizing that God’s kindness leads you to repentance?”

We wonder sometimes if the hard things in our lives, or the lives of others, are pay back for sin. Jesus made it clear in Luke 13:1-9 that there is no relationship between blessing and our goodness or hard times and our sin. Instead, Paul tells us that the kindness of God leads us to repentance.

In the time of Lent, we especially think about our need to repent. We may find we do not think of any sins that need to be confessed to God. Instead we focus on the wrongs of others. It is not that we have not sinned. Paul assures us in Chapter 3 of Romans that we have all sinned and cannot find our way to God on our own. Ask God to show you your need to repent. He will.

Then remember that his desire is not that your realization of your sin is to lead you to feel guilty or grovel in how you have let him down. Instead run to the Cross and remember that it is all washed away by the blood of Christ. Rejoice that you are his precious child. Climb in to your Father’s arms and let his kindness flow over you.

Lenten Devotional

February 22, 2010

Verses to think about: "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."

1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV

For the past three summers, I have volunteered at a week-long, residential summer camp for adults and adolescents with special needs called Camp Joy. Never in my life have I felt as joyful and treasured as I do when I am at Camp Joy. I am only now beginning to understand that LOVE, more specifically God's love, is the driving force behind all that Camp Joy means to me.

The campers at Camp Joy have a special kind of love in their hearts. Their love is genuine, pure, and almost overwhelming because it is the kind that washes over you like rain in a storm. They love each and every person willingly, openly, and unconditionally. As I try to wrap my mind around the sheer strength and magnitude of their love, I realize that it is impossible for God not to be the one behind it all. After all, God is love and all love comes from him.

So each week of Camp Joy is a reminder to me that I should be constantly radiating pure love towards everyone the way these very special people do. Because how can I claim to be a Christian, a child of God, if I am not a joyful stewardess of God's love?

Cassady Schulte

Lenten Devotional

February 23, 2010

Verses to think about: Isaiah 40; 28-31

During the youth mission trip this past summer, some of our kids were doing door-to-door visits when they met an elderly Mexican woman. They were shocked to learn that the woman's house had been destroyed by a gang. Now her only home was a hammock some neighbors were letting her use in their back yard. Despite her grim situation, she was brimming with joy.

The kids invited her to attend church on Sunday, an invitation she was quite excited about. As the conversation continued, she would occasionally, spontaneously sing out "Domingo!" ("Sunday"). That evening, the kids who met the woman told the rest of the group all about their encounter – we were all very blessed in hearing about this dear soul.

Ever since then, the "Domingo Lady" has come to my mind whenever we sing the song Everlasting God in church. Specifically, there is a line in the song which says of God, "You're the defender of the weak, you comfort those in need, you lift us up on wings like eagles." I cannot sing those words without thinking of our friend from Mexico. She was homeless, elderly, and literally did not have a possession to her name. She was weak and in need. Yet God was indeed her defender and comforter. The evidence of this was her joy.

Isn't our God incredible? That he could bring such joy, strength, and hope to a person who literally has nothing? Perhaps when God is all you have, you have more of God.

Jonathan Rockness

Lenten Devotional

February 24, 2010

Verse to think about: Philippians 1:21

God's love and mercy always present was especially felt on a recent mission trip to Dominican Republic. My senior class and I had the opportunity to spend 5 days serving in some of the poorest villages in the Santo Domingo area, working mainly with orphanages.

On the third day of our trip, neighboring Haiti experienced a massive, devastating earthquake. While we felt no more than a tremor, many of us were frightened about possible aftershocks and further disaster.

A resident missionary spoke to our group at that evening's worship service. He encouraged us to stay strong in Christ and to not give ourselves over to fear. He reminded us that as Christians we must be willing to give our life for Jesus at any moment. His message was, "We must have the bravery of a lion, not just its roar." He referred to Philippians 1:21 where Paul was ready to give all for Christ - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

God's message given through the missionary brought our group peace and exhorted us to fully trust our Savior.

Anne Newsom

Lenten Devotional

February 25, 2010

Verses to think about: Genesis 1: God said about creation that it was good. Psalm 8; Psalm 139:5-12

“Humans were created for this intimate communion with their head-over-heels-in-love Creator God. When God thinks of us, he feels a deep persistent longing—not simply for our wholeness but, more basically, for our friendship. This possibility lies at the core of our own deepest desires.”

David Benner, *Surrender to Love* (page 22)

David Benner quotes an ancient story about a fish anxiously swimming around in search of water, failing to realize he was in the midst of it. We are in God’s presence all the time. We cannot go away from his presence as Psalm 139 reminds us. Do I live with the consciousness that I am in God’s presence every day? Do I relax and enjoy him?

“What is man’s chief end? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” The Westminster Shorter Catechism



Lenten Devotional

February 26, 2010

You call us over the heads Of all the idols we make
You call us down from our tower
From your throne in the sky

You call us out of the storm
In the cool of the day
You ask us what it is that we have done

You make us wish we were not
What we know that we are
You promise you will take care
Of what's out of our hands

You put the Word in the world
When the time was just right
And He died for the things we have done

And He says:
Come to the Father
All sons and daughters
Life is the Promise, Mine is the Power
Hold up each other
You are sisters and brothers
Nothing can take You from Me

You called us out of the dark
That we thought was the light
You gave us Faith in the shape
That we know You can fill

We learned to hear who we were
In the sound of Your Name
We hear the whisper of what is to come

It is a new kind of love
That gives what it would receive
It is a new kind of worship
For a God with no needs

It is a new kind of hope
In a world that still bleeds
And now we wait for Your Kingdom to come

-Aaron Gies

Lenten Devotional

February 27 & 28, 2010

Verses to think about: Ecclesiastes 5: 4-5

"When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it."²

"I'll call you." "Let's get together sometime." "I'll pray for you." "Sure, I can help you with that."

Are you over-promising and under-delivering? That is my constant temptation. It feels good to offer to help. I am wanted and needed. I feel strong and powerful. There is a glow to helping others.

Until I promise what I cannot deliver. The request feels so simple and easy, I want to say, "Yes!" But those promises can add up until there is no time left to fulfill them. Then, I get to feel untrustworthy and undependable. I had the best intentions, but I let somebody down.

How does God feel about that? Solomon tells us, "It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it." Sometimes you have to say no to something or someone: how can I know what to do? How do I know when to say yes or no?

First, as always, stay in constant contact with God. The Holy Spirit is always with me to guide my actions. Stop and check in with God before accepting a responsibility. You can actually tell someone, "I need to pray about it first." Or, if you have already taken on all you can handle, "I can't help you with that."

See next page

Lenten Devotional

Sometimes you need to step out of the way so that someone else can have the blessing of helping. Maybe God has planned for someone else to learn and grow from that opportunity. Just because you have done it before doesn't mean you have to do it every time. Maybe it is time to step back and mentor someone else to take on that project or responsibility.

If you can help, if you have prayed and sought confirmation from scripture and other Christians, then get to work right away. Do not delay in doing the good you have promised. If someone asks for prayer, pray with them right then. If you agree to work on a project, start planning and schedule it on your calendar.

Stay in prayer as you make your promises and commitments. Let the Holy Spirit lead and guide you. Remember that, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) If God has led you into it, He will lead you through it. Glory to God!

Alexandra Keirstead

Lenten Devotional

March 1, 2010

Verse to think about: Job 36:11; Philippians 4:11

I have been so very blessed to have the opportunity to go to Matamoros, Mexico on missions trips with Adventures in Missions twice within the past several years. There has been an indescribable number of things God has shown me through these trips. One of the most important lessons I took home from my most recent trip was the idea of contentment.

One of the greatest parts of traveling to a foreign country for a missions trip is how much you have to adapt and step outside of your comfort zone. The most obvious is the heat, but also the less-than-ideal living conditions, the lack of well-operating plumbing, and the mosquitoes that look as though they've spent a little too much time hanging around the microwave. Through all of these uncomfortable conditions, it is very easy to just push through; to only think ahead, about what you're going to do next, about how you're going to get through this. This is the easiest way to lose sight of what God has put you there for. On one of the first nights in Matamoros, an AIM leader addressed this matter.

"It's called living in your destination." he explained. Living in your destination means you focus on the here. The now. On what you're doing and why you're there and how you can glorify God's kingdom today. Not on when you can change clothes. Not on when dinner is. This isn't just about a big trip. This is about everyday life. When you're at school, work, church, or wherever else you go during the day, most people live OF their destination: thinking about what's next, when this is over, when we can move on. I challenge all of you, myself included, to be content with the here. To love where God has put you at this exact moment. To think of why you're here and what God has planned for you.

See next page

Lenten Devotional

Elihu tells us about contentment in God's kingdom through Job 36:11 "If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment"

If we are staying true to God's word, we will be happy where we are, not where we could be.

Sydney Stikeleather

Lenten Devotional

March 2, 2010

Verses to think about: Romans 3:23, John 3:16

Text: "For all have sinned". Each of us has a debt to God. We have all broken his commandments. There are no innocent people in the world. Everyone who dies is a sinner. Someone has said, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." Every person is in need before God. The difference is those who see their sin and confess it.

Have you and I repented? Have we come to Jesus at the foot of the cross and agreed with Him about our sin? Have we faced the truth that each of us has ignored God in our own lives? That each of our hearts is bent on our own way?

We are each in need of a Savior. And God has made a way for us. He has provided one to pay the debt of our sin before a holy God. For God is the one who "so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jane Frazier



Lenten Devotional

March 3, 2010

Verses to think about: I Corinthians 13:4-8

Five years ago, while serving as President of Women's Ministries in our denomination, I was invited to speak at a Women's Conference sponsored by the women of the Pakistani ARP Church. The theme of the conference was God's love and my message was taken from I Corinthians 13:4-8. Yet, I was the one who learned much about love from these beautiful Christian women. I witnessed this love in action and would like to share some of the things I learned:

Pakistani Christians may be financially poor... they don't have "stuff"... but they are rich in HIS WORD. They don't let anything get between them and God. His Word is honored and not taken for granted...they practice hospitality and invite guests over to their homes for tea... meals... fellowship.

Worship services begin with the singing of the Psalms... many, many Psalms... many songs... upbeat... happy... words of scripture memorized and sung back to the Lord in praise - they sing Psalm 91 to the familiar New Year's Eve tune. Even those who cannot read have hidden HIS WORD in their hearts through song!

Length of the worship service is not an issue... quality of praise and worship is. On Sunday, during the worship service, praise, prayer, communion, and the message lasted for over five hours... with a half hour tea break, of course... awesome doesn't touch it! These Christians work very hard and suffer much; yet, they express joy and humility as they serve...a servant spirit that demonstrates Christ' love in action.

See next page.

Lenten Devotional

If we are going to respond to the call of the Great Commission, comply with the command to love, and participate in finishing the work of Jesus, we have to get out of our comfort zones. During this Lenten Season, may we respond by denying ourselves of so much “stuff”, and picking up the torch. We have been given everything we need and have been declared ambassadors for Christ...the world is waiting to hear.

Patsy Ratchford

Lenten Devotional

March 4, 2010

Verse to think about: 1 John 4:10

Camp Joy is probably one of the best things I have ever done with my life. At first, I was nervous and did not know what to anticipate. My camper, Zack Brandon, instantly eliminated any worries I had. He was joyful and full of energy, and got excited about simple things like nap time and Bible lessons.

Zack taught me about what love is really like, and that love does not even concern itself with appearances. Zack had Downs' Syndrome, and he would not be extremely desirable by the world's standards. God's standards, however, put him at the top of the list of God's children. Even when Zack was hard to control, I just kept showing him love and taking care of him.

This entire experience showed me, more than I had ever seen before, what my relationship with God is like. I can be difficult, even annoying, to God, yet he still loves me and provides for me.

1 John 4:10 sums up my lesson from Camp Joy: "This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

James Parkhill

Lenten Devotional

March 5, 2010

Verses to think about: Mark 3:31-34 "Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

He calls me his sister!

I don't have a son, but I do understand a little about brothers. Many of you have heard me quote my brother Phil with affect and respect. I like to show off the tricks my brother Danny taught me, like using the principle of adhesion to drain my coffee spoon or the laws of physics to smash an aluminum can.

Jesus is the perfect brother. Beyond that, He is the friend that sticks closer than a brother. No one compares to Him. Oh, the adventures we have had together! The things He teaches me! He calls me His sister! I have a sister's access. I can go to Him at any time for advice, companionship, comfort, new discoveries and insights Affection and respect? These words hardly begin to describe my regard for my Big Brother. (Hebrew 2:11-12)

Let me tell you about my brother, Jesus!

Ellen McLaughlin
(Reprinted from the 2003 Lenten Guide)

Lenten Devotional

March 6 & 7, 2010

Verse to think about: "It is not by force or strength, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty. Zechariah 4:6

I am utterly amazed at the idea of the Holy Spirit dwelling within me. Sometime I find it hard to fathom, but I vividly remember the first time I was sure of it. When the announcement was made, about three years ago, that there would be an adult Mission Trip to Wales, I felt an immediate desire to be a part of it. I had never considered going on a Mission Trip and I was certainly not comfortable sharing my faith with others.

I obtained an application and "somehow" I was able to explain "why?" (I wanted to go) and "what?" (I believe) to the satisfaction of the Mission Board. As we prepared for the trip, I struggled with the idea of approaching strangers and talking to them about Christ. I even considered dropping out until I was assured that I would not have to get on a bus and tell the person sitting next to me about my faith.

Once in Wales, we were asked to go out in teams of two and talk to strangers in the market place in Merthyr Tydfil. That night, the team was back together discussing the events of the day and I recounted my experience of speaking with an elderly gentleman. Knowing my trepidation, a member of our team asked me what I had said and how I had handled the experience. My response was, "I just opened my mouth and the words came out."

They were not my words, but the words the Holy Spirit wanted me to share. When we are willing, God has a way of putting us with the people he wants to speak to and the Holy Spirit will give us the words he wants us to speak.

Carol Dienhart

Lenten Devotional

March 8, 2010

Verses to think about: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

After spending six weeks at Camp Joy over the past three summers, I have learned that there is a distinct difference between joy and happiness. While I love every minute that I spend at Camp Joy, being completely responsible for a person who has special needs is rarely an easy task. Each day has its fill of blissful moments as well as frustrating ones but they are all saturated with joy. While I may not be happy that my camper awakened in the middle of the night with a bad dream, I am joyful that I get to comfort her from the bedside until she falls back asleep.

Thus, 1 Thessalonians does not say "be happy always" nor does it say "give thanks in favorable circumstances." As Christians, we are called to live each day with the God-given joy in our hearts that allows us to rejoice even in suffering. It is the times when you have reached the end of your rope and feel entirely inadequate that God blesses you with a true joy which outweighs the fleeting emotions caused by mere circumstances.

Embrace these moments and accept God's joy; doing so will make you a whole lot happier.

Cassady Schulte

Lenten Devotional

March 9, 2010

*Verses to think about: "Be kind to one another, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you."
Ephesians 4:32*

"Those who have been welcomed into the big kingdom (God's kingdom) have been welcomed into a lifestyle of forgiveness. It is a way of living where each day I admit that I instinctively get in the way of what God is doing on earth. I do it as an individual. I do it in my marriage and parenting. I do it in my neighborhood. When I live this lifestyle I find joy in telling Jesus, day after day, that I need what he did in his life, death, and resurrection. This lifestyle is about growing to acknowledge that in some way, every day, I give evidence to the fact that the cross was necessary. And this lifestyle of forgiveness makes my daily attitude one of heartfelt gratitude and joy."

"Every time you ask for forgiveness, you make the kingdom of God visible."

"Every time you ask for forgiveness, your sight is accurate, your head is clear, and your heart is in the right place."

Paul David Tripp
A Quest for More
(pages 159, 161)

Lenten Devotional

March 10, 2010

Verses to think about: from Ephesians 3:7-8

I think about my college roommate. Wendy knows God exists. She even respects him for his holiness and majesty. Yet she isn't a Christian because she believes she has to fix her life and behavior first before accepting God. I am saddened that she thinks she has to be good *before* she can be a Christian. Notice the order of events in Paul's life. He recognized that God gave him his grace first and then he was able to serve him. We can't redeem ourselves to perfection first and then offer ourselves to God. As humans, we must offer ourselves as sinners before the perfect God, accepting our weaknesses. God is the one that has already made it possible for us to come as sinners. (Rom 5:8) God gave His perfect Son as a sacrifice on the cross to die for our sins while we were sinners.

Even after we are accepted by God and become Christians, we cannot do anything by our power. As Paul says about his ministry, "I became a servant of this gospel...through the working of his power." Once we become Christians, the Holy Spirit gives us the desire to grow to be more like Jesus. Paul could not be a servant of the gospel without recognizing God's power and his weakness. After three missionary journeys, Paul saw himself as "less than the least of all God's people."

All of us are sinners, yet God has accepted us. And through us, he desires to bring many people to know him. We can bring that good news to them as sinners, recognizing all that is good in us is from the Lord. All of us are "the least" yet we have a Great Big God working in us.

Melanie Currie, Missionary to Thailand

Lenten Devotional

March 11, 2010

Verses to think about: Ephesians 5: 1-2

Camp Joy has blessed me in many ways; among the many blessings, it has served as a much-needed conviction. At the end of my first week, I reflected on the complete and total dependence my camper, Stephanie, had on me. I was exhausted after a week of caring for her--yet there are many, like the parents of these campers with special needs, who have given up their whole lives and devoted their time to caring for them every day. Though I am sure it's rewarding, I can't even imagine the difficulty of such a sacrifice. Giving up your own hopes, dreams, and plans in the service of others would be no easy task.

During my week at Camp Joy, I was often reluctant to give my time completely to Stephanie. On many occasions, I was frustrated with the inconveniences that came with serving her. I had moments where my love for her was overcome by love for myself. What I needed seemed more important than what she needed. I was convicted because I know that true service of others requires complete selflessness.

In my daily life, I am reluctant to make the sacrifices that are required to serve others. Yet I realize that this is exactly what we are called to do.

Elizabeth Ballard

Lenten Devotional

March 12, 2010

Verses to think about: Matthew 11:28-30

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

The Message



Lenten Devotional

March 13 & 14, 2010

Verses to think: I Corinthians 15:12-28

An early Protestant missionary to the Ryukyu Islands in the western Pacific discovered a strange mass grave. The grave revealed that more than 11,000 heads taken from bodies were buried there. On further investigation, the missionary learned that in 1637 the Japanese government had ordered all Christians in the empire put to death. Because they knew Christians believed in the resurrection, the Japanese buried the heads of the martyred believers a great distance from the bodies, in the belief that their resurrection would be prevented.

We know that such measly attempts by men cannot thwart the promises of God. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single greatest event in the history of the world. Because of the awesome power that God demonstrated in raising Jesus from the dead, we have faith, salvation, and hope. The Apostle Peter expressed it in this way: “By His great mercy He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for salvation.” (I Peter 1: 3-5)
Thanks be to God for His grace!

“Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou has made and does Forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: create and keep in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of the, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; thought Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen”

Martin Efirid

Lenten Devotional

March 15, 2010

Verses to think about: 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Psalm 37:7-9

This past summer I volunteered to be a counselor at Camp Joy. Camp Joy is a camp for the mentally handicapped. I was kind of nervous about it before I arrived there. But I knew God was with me and would help me.

The thing that I feel God taught me that week was to have patience. My camper was this man named Robert. He was such a sweet man and always so loving to everyone. But he was a very slow walker. He never liked to be at the front of any line; and he always told me I was walking too fast. When I tried to speed him up he always said, "I have one speed and its slow."

I had to learn patience, and learn it quickly, so I prayed about it and God really showed me how to be a more patient person.

And it has helped me, not just at Camp Joy. It has helped me to not get irritated when someone drives slowly or when I am waiting on someone. I take life slower now, I am not always in a hurry.

Brian Conrad



Lenten Devotional

March 16, 2010

Verses to think about: Matthew 25:31-46

During my time in Haiti (I've been there 4-5 times) I worked in Mother Theresa's home for sick children. These are children who have AIDS, TB, and other diseases and are very sick. The first couple of days there I witnessed a child who died just a few cribs down from another baby I was caring for. I later found out that this is common!

During the afternoons we toured the city. A country where there are built-in inequities and oppression that builds a system of poverty and illiteracy. I became discouraged, disenchanted. I wanted to cry out to God, "where are you! How do you let this happen?"

And then...I met St. Joseph's Home for homeless boys. And learned that not only is this a home for homeless boys but it is a bastion for Jesus and hope; a place where the Holy Spirit presents light in a dark world. I learned about a boy named Sony who at one time was stricken with Cerebral Palsy, and described as a piece of wood who could not walk. Sony now dances in the St. Joseph's dance theatre!

And God answered the question I asked when I arrived; "Where are you God?" with an affirmative, "I have been here always"; and "whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" Luke 25:40.

You see Jesus has always been there, continues to be there for us here but we miss him if we put him in a box, in a way that we want to see him. If we will make ourselves vulnerable, and look to act on our faith, he will continue to be revealed to us. Praise God! You see I went to change the world, make it better and lo and behold, I encountered Jesus and he changed me. Praise God!

Ross Fowler

Lenten Devotional

March 17, 2010

Verses to think about: Matthew 6:25-32; Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and do not lean on your own understand; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.” Proverbs 3:5,6

This past semester has brought a whole new light to these passages. I know our Lord has called me into the medical mission field and that He surely will lead the way no matter the grade of the trail, but there are many moments when this seems so far away. During these times, I am softly reminded of the encouragement in these verses.

How great it is to know that our future lies in Him, a place so much safer than our own hands. Even though we may not know for certain where this journey in Christ may lead, we can follow His lead praising and telling others of this love that gives us the strength to continue on and have confidence in the fact that for those who love him, it will work out for the good.

Kate Newsom



Lenten Devotional

March 18, 2010

Verse to think about: Psalm 16

One of my favorite days in Matamoros, Mexico consisted of my group's "Ask the Lord" (ATL). ATL is a listening prayer, in which you spend alone time with God asking him to lead you in the direction he wants for you to go. Your day's adventure is based on the visions and messages you receive during the prayer.

After a mere 10 minutes, my group was able to come up with a bike with a rainbow colored towel hanging over the handlebars. As we walked down the street, in the direction of the arrow one of my group members had seen in their prayer, we saw many bikes with multi-colored things around them but nobody felt led to stop. A man in a rainbow colored shirt walked swiftly past us catching our eyes for only a second. Although we had noticed the man, we didn't think he was the one we were looking for so we kept walking.

About two minutes later, the same man came out of nowhere and walked past us again. This time we knew he was our guy. Practically running to keep up with him, my group began to follow him. Losing sight of him as he turned down a side road, we hoped he had at least led us in the right direction of wherever we were supposed to be.

After a few more minutes of walking, the same guy passed us on a bike with his rainbow colored shirt hung over the handlebars as we had seen in the visions. Our translator, noticing the Grim Reaper tattoo on his back told us he was not safe and we shouldn't risk talking to him. After crossing paths with the man on the bike multiple times, our translator finally agreed to stop the man for God's Will. When we stopped the man to speak to him, he immediately reached in his pocket and scared us all to death. Our translator appeared very frightened and my whole group was slowly stepping away. The guy on the bike asked us to pray with him for his family, that he would be able to find a job to provide for his family.

Looking back, I feel confident we were exactly where God was calling us to be. There is no better feeling than feeling His presence within you. Are you where God wants you to be?

Carrie Threatt

Lenten Devotional

March 19, 2010

Verses to think about: Habakkuk 3:1-10

God came “His glory covered the heavens, and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.”
Habakkuk 3:3 and 4

Lord, I hope I never cease to be amazed by your power, mercy and grace. Just as you saved Israel from the Chaldeans despite their rebellion, you save me from my just punishment. The more I reflect on this, the more I see how unworthy I am of your love and mercy. I can never repay you for the cross; so please, help me live a life that reflects my debt to you.

I am in constant battle against you for control of my life. All I can do is personalize Habakkuk’s prayer, “In this time of deep need, begin again to help me, as you did in years gone by.”

Lord, I know you will encourage me as you lead me through another season of discipline. When I complain that your way is too hard, you will remind me of your suffering. When I want to give up and return to my own ways, you will “show me your power to save.”

“The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”
Habakkuk 3:19

Stacy Estavez
(Reprinted from the 2003 Lenten Devotional)

Lenten Devotional

March 20 & 21, 2010

Verses to think about: Psalm 73:25, 26

Over the past 14 years, I have had the amazing opportunity to work at Camp Joy, a camp for the mentally and physically handicapped. During this time my perspective has changed, from that of a counselor to a leader. As a counselor you come with the understanding that you are going to be serving God and your camper. You are there to help your camper learn the bible lessons and help them with their needs.

While that maybe true, the past several years that I have been on staff has given me a different outlook on the affects Camp Joy has on people. It is actually us, the "normal" that are being taught by our campers. They are the ones living life to the fullest, there are no worries, no shame in their appearance, and most of them understand that one day, in heaven, they will not be handicapped anymore. They are the "normal" ones, we have the different handicaps. Our lives are filled with worries, how we look and worldly possessions. Their yearning for heaven is far more than ours.

Neal Stroup

Lenten Devotional

March 22, 2010

A poem to help you think about God's great work in our lives:

Do not think me gentle
because I speak in praise of gentleness,
or elegant because I honor the grace
that keeps this world.
I am a man crude as any,
gross of speech, intolerant,
stubborn, angry,
full of fits and furies.
That I may have spoken well at times,
is not natural.
A wonder is what it is.

-Wendell Berry

Lenten Devotional

March 23, 2010

Verses to think about: Zephaniah 3:17, Exodus 34

“The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word “love”, and look on things as if man were the center of them. Man is not the center. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake. “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine love may rest “well pleased”. To ask that God’s love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because he is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled, by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us loveable.”

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (page 36)



Lenten Devotional

March 24, 2010

Verses to think about: Psalm 100:3

Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

When you see the word “Church”, what image comes to mind? It could be an old majestic building with a tall steeple. It could also be a warehouse with big screens and loud music. It might even be a small store front with chairs and a podium. One might also think of tradition, with hymns, choirs, altars, and robes; or perhaps contemporary, with a band, praise music, and no ties or dresses.

When God sees the Church, He sees His People: babies, toddlers, seniors, college students, middle age folks and every age in between. He sees people with many talents and gifts, all given to them by Him. He sees people from many places in the world and many shades of skin color; as the children’s song goes, “red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight”.

When man sees his church, he sees a building which he has built or a style he prefers. When God sees His church, He sees His People, who are precious in His sight.

Oh, to see the church through the eyes of our Heavenly Father who loved us so much that he sent his one and only Son from heaven to earth, who willingly opened his arms wide on a cross to die for our sins. Oh, to love the church as our Father loves the church!

Tracy Ratcliffe

Lenten Devotional

March 25, 2010

Verses to think about: "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from whence cometh my help. My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth..."Psalm 121:1-2

Hanging in the vestibule of our sanctuary is a lovely painting done by Mrs. Peggy McLaughlin of Monte Sinai Chapel in Ixtacamel, Mexico. This chapel is a testament to the faithfulness of members of Back Creek to give and of the desire and determination of a small group of Hausteca Indians to build a chapel on their mountain top.

During the 1970's Mr. Pat Covone, an ARP missionary began evangelistic work among the Indians who lived in the Hausteca region.. He trained lay workers to lead Bible studies and hold worship services in small huts where children and adults would gather for worship and teaching each week. Some groups were growing in size and needed larger buildings. In 1973, Mrs. Emma Echols spoke at Back Creek one Sunday evening and told of building a chapel in Mexico in memory of her husband. Hearing of the need for other buildings sparked a flame for missions in our congregation and money was given to construct a sister church.

Funds were sent to Mr. Covone, who arranged for the purchase and delivery of concrete blocks and other materials that would be needed for the building. The area selected for the new chapel was at the top of a mountain where there was no electricity, well, or even a road. The men of the village began the difficult task of carrying the concrete blocks two at a time from the highway to the top of the mountain. Each trip took nearly an hour. Several of the men had some construction skills, so they began on the foundation using water carried from a nearby stream to mix the cement. Slowly the walls began to rise as the men, women and children continued to carry the supplies up the mountain.

See next page

Lenten Devotional

In the summer of 1974, I was able to visit the site of the chapel and presented the group with a color photograph of Back Creek Church to help them visualize the church who was their partner in this building project. They examined the photo and immediately decided that their chapel should have a steeple similar to ours that could be seen from the highway far below.

After Christmas in 1974, Rev. and Mrs. A. C. Bridges, Fred Hunter, Mrs. Emma Echols and I flew to Mexico to attend the dedication. A wonderful sight met our eyes as we slowly hiked up the last rise to the chapel. A lovely steeple with a bell sat atop the building! The exterior was painted white while inside there was a beautiful hand carved pulpit. It was a glorious day with many Indians from the surrounding mountains present to help celebrate the completion of the chapel! In the following months money was sent to purchase and install a generator so that the chapel could have electric lights and a loud speaker to play music so that people on the mountains and the valley below would know that there on the top of the mountain, they could hear God's message of grace and love!

Barbara Glasscock

Lenten Devotional

March 26, 2010

Blessed are those who
Have come to trust you
They will never be ashamed
They worry for nothing
Even in suffering
They count all their losses gain
Hoping in sadness
Eyes on the Promise
They are laughing through their tears
Taking the long view
Pain is a prelude
To the hope of all these years

We will all go home
We'll all go home
If the Truth be known
We will all go home

Home where the heart is
Where your best is good enough
Where there is no death, no pain
Home where they say you can never go back to
'Cause it's never quite the same
Like we imagine, like we remember
Both identical and strange
Home where we make sense of our existence
When He gives us our new names.

Just like Kansas
Just like Odysseus
Like the Fire-glow
Waiting at the long road's end
Just Bag-end, just like Graceland
We'll all be going Home...

See next page.

Lenten Devotional

Thine is the Kingdom
And when you come
All your children will be there

Just like Valhalla, Just like Elysium
Like the last time that You came
And all of the ragged
That you have rescued
Will toast You on that day
All of the masses, raising their glasses
Singing "Hail! The victorious Raised!"

-Aaron Gies

Lenten Devotional

March 27 & 28, 2010

Verses to think about: Psalm 25:9. "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."

You want MY kids to go on a mission trip to Mexico? WITHOUT ME?? Uhhh, I don't think so." said the naive woman. I should have known then that God was going to teach me (AKA naive woman) a huge lesson on trust and humility and He did just that. I was given the privilege of chaperoning our youth group to Matamoris Mexico a few summers ago (I know, I know I signed up for that job to keep an eye on my children) but as it ended up I needed to see our youth in action a whole lot more than they needed me there.

While we were in Matamoris we visited an orphanage, a detention center, we helped at VBS in a small church but the most impactful part of the trip for me was our visit to the city dump. We were told before we left to "wear strong soled shoes, long pants and bring work gloves and oh by the way it smells really bad so just be forewarned". Well, I had no idea what we were in for until we pulled in and the smell hit us. All of us, youth and chaperones alike, were taken back by just how bad the smell was. The thing that just amazed me was, as gross as it smelled and looked, as soon as the bus doors opened you could have heard a pin drop. The kids got right up to the middle of the garbage piles and started digging. We were looking for any garbage that could be recycled.

There were people who lived in the dump and this was how they got money. When a new dump truck would pull in the residents of the dump would follow it so they could be the first to look through the new trash. The whole time we were there I was watching and listening. Our kids did not complain. I couldn't believe it. I know now it was the Holy Spirit working in all of our lives.

See next page.

Lenten Devotional

While we were there to help these people that lived in the dump, the Holy Spirit was there helping us gain a sense of humility. We left there with a little more appreciation for the privileges we have been given and a greater understanding of what true love God has for all His people not just the ones we see on Sunday mornings.

I left there with a little more than that. I left there knowing that those kids would have done all that work with that much dignity whether I was there or not. I left there with a little more trust in my children, your children well all children because they are Gods children and He is Good. He will use them for His good, it is up to me to trust that he will do just that.

Lauren Stikeleather

Lenten Devotional

March 29, 2010

Verses to think about: Philippians 4:13

Jenna Threatt tells the story about her time at Camp Joy this past summer. She had a challenging camper who was wheel chair bound. The camper wanted to do as much as she could by herself. Jenna tried to help her be as independent as possible. One day, the camper wanted to take a shower by herself, even though she was unable to do so. Jenna stayed outside the shower for an hour and a half as the camper tried to bathe herself. Finally, she asked Jenna for help.

Jenna said that it reminded her of her own relationship to the Lord and the way that she tries to be independent and do things on her own. Finally, she turns to him and asks for his help and direction.

As Christians we need to grow in realizing how much we need God's strength and grace to live our lives.

Jenna Threatt



Lenten Devotional

March 30, 2010

Man of Sorrows! What a Name
(Hallelujah! What a Savior!)
Words & Music: Philip P. Bliss

Man of Sorrows! what a name
For the Son of God, Who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;
"It is finished!" was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew His song we'll sing:
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lenten Devotional

March 31, 2010

Verses to think about: Psalm 130

One summer, I left for a mission trip to Mexico in a pretty desperate spiritual state. I was feeling distant and doubtful, and rather hopeless that I would ever experience God, first-hand, in a real and powerful way again. I had forgotten who my God is. I had forgotten his abundant love; I had forgotten his unending mercy; and I had forgotten his amazing grace. I left for Mexico with an intense longing in my heart, but a sure knowledge that I would return with that longing unfulfilled. I had forgotten. But God, He had not forgotten.

God, in His abundant love, mercy, and grace, saw fit to come and give me what I needed even when I didn't deserve it. It was none of God's doing that I had become distant, doubtful, and hopeless. I did that all by myself. Nonetheless, God met me.

One of the most potent experiences I had with Him was during a time of prayer where I was earnestly seeking His leading. Everyone in the room had agreed on a course of action for our day and I had a distinct leading from the Lord that I was to go a different direction. I was feeling insecure about sharing with the 25 or so others in the room, what I felt that God had spoken to me and I was having a bit of a "mule moment" with the Lord. I believe that my prayer to Him at that moment was, "heck no, I'm not sayin' that."

In response to my own prayer, I was thinking, "what would God say to me right now?" I answered myself, "Joanna, I want you to....". The end of that statement is where things got very interesting. My mind finished it like this, "Joanna, I want you tosay it." At the exact same time, in a way that I cannot fully describe here, there was a voice in my head, overpowering my own, finishing my statement with.... "trust me." "Joanna, I want you to.... trust me."

See next page

Lenten Devotional

I cannot explain this to be anything but God. *I* was answering *for* God at the same time *He* decided to answer *for Himself!* WOW! God is gracious! I didn't deserve to be spoken to in a personal way, but He met me where I was and gave me what I needed in order to remember—Himself, up-close and personal.

I did trust Him that day, and I did say it, and a young girl became a Christian because of the Lord's promptings that afternoon. Through this unique experience, I remembered that God is never too big or too busy to do even the most menial tasks for his much beloved and forever floundering children.

Joanna Rockness

Lenten Devotional

April 1, 2010

Verses to think about: Ephesians 3:20 + 21, Philippians 4:6

This past December, 2009 my husband and I were very concerned about a white oak tree that was over 45 feet high and dead in our front yard. Our home insurance wouldn't cover having it removed. We had several tree removal estimates ranging from \$800-\$2000 which was too much for our budget. I was fervently and specifically praying about it.

God sent a complete stranger with all the skills to cut down the tree. He was a praying Christian and he shared with me when he was done how God told him to come and help us. And he did it for free!

Not only was the blessing for us to have my prayers answered with the tree being cut down but God blessed many others that were in need as well. For example: a couple driving past needed fire wood. They were going through hard financial times. Friends of ours, a husband who's been without a job and wife who just had a baby, needed wood to heat their house. Another friend said he could use some fire wood; another friend called and her brother and sister-in-law needed fire wood. A landscaping business used two 15 foot sections of the tree; and the man who cut the tree down took some for himself. We now have a new friendship between this man and our family.

If this tree had been cut down any sooner none of this would have taken place. God's timing and plan are always Perfect! My children and others witnessed God answering prayer. To God be the Glory! He cares for those who trust in Him.

In what area of your life do you need to trust Him more and surrender to Him in prayer? Remember God cares about every detail of your life. He knows your circumstances before you go to Him. So don't hesitate or procrastinate. Go to your Heavenly Father. He is waiting for you! No prayer is too big or too small for God. - Pam Alfred

Lenten Devotional

April 2, 2010

Lord, I just want to say THANK YOU, because . . .

This morning I woke up and knew where my children were. This morning my home was still standing. This morning I am not crying because my husband, my child, my brother or sister needs to be buried after being pulled out from underneath a pile of concrete. This morning I was able to drink a glass of clean water. This morning I was able to turn on the light. This morning I was able to take a shower. I was not planning a funeral. But most of all I thank you this morning because I still have life and a voice to cry out for the people of Haiti.

Lord, I cry out to you, the one that makes the impossible possible, the one that turns darkness into light. I cry out that you give those mothers strength, give them peace that surpasses all understanding, that you may open the streets so help can come. May you provide doctors, nurses, food, water, and all they need without hesitation.

For all that have lost family members, give them peace, give them hope, give them courage to continue! Protect the children and shield them with your power. I pray all this in the name of Jesus!!!

To all my friends, please, continue to forward this so that we can pray together for the people in Haiti. We here are truly blessed!!!!

Written by a friend of Connie Ott

