

Devotions - March 30-April 5
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Sunday, March 30

"I tell you the truth, My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.
Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive
and your joy will be complete." John 16: 23-24

The power of prayer is a wondrous gift from an awesome God. When we pray, we are ushered into the very presence of God and His power is released in the lives and circumstances of those for whom we pray. Throughout Scriptures we are invited, and admonished, to pray without ceasing. To pray without ceasing is not to spend all your time on your knees. Prayers need not be lofty or wordy. Our Heavenly Father knows what is in our hearts and minds, our every need before we pray. What He wants is an intimate loving relationship with us, His children. He wants us to talk with Him throughout the day, to be involved in all areas of our lives.

Awake each morning with a prayer on your heart. "I love you triune God, be with me and guide me today. I thank you for this day, help me do Your will and rejoice in it."

Talk to Him in the car, while doing chores, and at school or work. Ask Him to be with you, to empower you by faith to give words of love and encouragement to others, to open doors of opportunity and to be courageous in sharing the Good News with others. Give Him thanks daily. *Thank Him* for the free gift of salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Thank Him for specific blessings and answers to prayers. Praise Him. Tell Him that He is the Lord of your life. Praise Him for His goodness and love. *Pray by name* for those with special needs, for anything on your heart. Pray for pastors, churches and ministries that they would do God's will, preaching the word in purity and truth. Pray for all entering churches that they would grow in relationship with our Lord, return to worship and go out into the world and spread the gospel. *Quote Scriptures* to Him. You are the rock of my salvation. Your mercies are new each day and endure forever. Your grace is sufficient for me, for by your grace I am saved. As you speak the Word in prayer you are praising God and reaffirming your faith.

End your day, thanking Him for His love and guidance during the day and always. Ask Him for His protection during the night. Above all, pray with confidence, trusting and believing that Our Heavenly Father hears and answers every prayer.

Dear Lord thank you for your living word that assures us that you hear and answer prayers. I thank you that I can pray in Jesus' name with assurance that it will be granted according to your perfect will and purpose. Amen.

Monday, March 31

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Phillipians 4:6-7

My husband, Ron, was told in 1990 that he had two years to live without a heart transplant. Since that time prayer and medication allowed him to live a productive life. In 2001, after having a cardiac arrest, he had a defibrillator implanted and was placed on the heart transplant list. In 2003 the doctors were amazed at his improvement and removed him from the list. We were told that this never happens and asked to what we attributed this miracle? We affirmed the power of prayer and God's grace.

This spring Ron's heart rapidly began to deteriorate. When he saw our local cardiologist, we were told to go immediately to Minneapolis. What a storm-filled time in our lives! We left home moving to Minnesota with our future and lives in turmoil. Ron was admitted to the University of Minnesota Fairview hospital on 7/31/07. His hospitalization was a roller coaster ride of uncertainty. His care plan changed day by day and at times within hours. After several weeks of failing treatments, Ron was put on the A-1 list (14 days at the top of the list for transplant.) We weren't given much hope for a heart because of his blood type.

During this time as always, God was our refuge and our strength. Ron and I did not pray for a heart, but for God's perfect will in our lives. We knew that in all circumstances we were in God's loving hands. Prayers of the faithful surrounded us. When I was too tired to pray, we felt the support of being uplifted by the prayers of family and friends.

On 8/27/07 as I was walking to the hospital, the assurance, when two or more pray in agreement the prayer will be granted, kept repeating in my mind. I began to pray and give thanks for the many donor families, who in their grief give life to others. After a day at the hospital I returned to the apartment. Ron called me at 4:00 pm and told me that he had a heart! What a feeling of joy and gratitude! I returned to the hospital where Ron began the preparation for surgery. We prayed with thanksgiving for this gift and for the donor's family in their grief. Hospital staff, his room mate, family and friends rejoiced with us. Ron had a successful heart transplant on 8/28/07.

This experience has truly been a miraculous time of blessings - the miracle of a new heart, new life and birthday, and the blessing that I experienced of God's peace - his peace that surpasses all understanding. During this storm of life, I found that surrendering myself to God's perfect will filled my heart with a calming stillness. Surrounded by his loving presence, I was assured that all was and would be well according to his purpose!

Dear Lord, thank you for your peace given to all who submit their lives and will to you. Thank you Lord for the assurance that you are with us always even to the end of the ages. When we live or die in Christ, we are victorious! Thanks be to God! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday, April 1

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

During Ron's hospitalization, I spent much of each day in prayer. During these conversations, I was comforted by familiar passages of scripture that would come to mind. I was uplifted knowing that family and friends were praying for us. I prayed with thanksgiving for God's gifts of faith and the Holy Spirit and His many blessings. I asked that God would enable me to use His gifts to further the work of His kingdom in all circumstances. I was comforted each day by His loving presence in my life.

Most of Ron's hospitalization was spent in the Cardiac ICU. Families congregated in the ICU lounge. I was blessed to get to know many of them and to share our concerns for our loved ones. Our stories varied, but we were united in our circumstances. I shared both in their joys and sorrows. God used me in many ways. I offered to pray with families for their loved ones and was never told no. God gave me the words to share in prayer - words of His love and concern. I shared the Good News. I witnessed that God is in control in all circumstances. Trusting in Him, we are assured that He is with us always - in life and in death. We rest in His assurance of that life which is eternal through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

During this time, I was truly blessed. When I prayed and witnessed, God strengthened my faith. In sharing with others, God reaffirmed His goodness, blessings and mercies to me.

Dear Heavenly Father, help us who you have blessed to be a blessing to others. Help us who you have comforted, comfort others. Use us Lord, as instruments of your love in the lives of others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Wednesday, April 2

"Jesus said to them, Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." Mark 16:15

On Sunday mornings, I worshiped at a small church before going to see Ron in the hospital. I would arrive early to pray and to listen to the organist prior to the service. Lost in my prayers, I felt a tap on my shoulder and a small voice in broken English ask, "Do you come here often?" I turned to find a young oriental girl behind me, and said "No, I am a visitor." I invited her to sit with me.

She shared that she was 18 years old from China and waiting for classes to start at the University of Minnesota. She told me that she did not attend church in China, but that their family had a Bible. Although she had never been in a church before, she was drawn to the building because of the cross on the steeple. When I asked her if she knew Christ, she replied no. When I mentioned Jesus, she beamingly smiled and said, yes!

Before the service I showed her the bulletin and explained the service - hymns, liturgy, old and new testament readings and prayers. One thing she asked about was all the singing. I was able to tell her that singing is a form of praying and praising our triune God. As communion was being prepared, she wanted to know what was happening. I asked if she believed that she was a sinner and that Jesus died for her sins and the sins of the world. She responded yes. Holding hands at the alter she received for the first time the body and blood of Christ in communion with her brothers and sisters of faith. After the service, I introduced her to the pastor and asked that he would welcome her to this church. She told us that she knew no one and missed her parents very much. We encouraged her to return for worship and that she belonged to the church family as a child of God. I told her that I hoped to see her next Sunday and that I would pray for her and her family.

How blessed I felt as I shared Liwenzhu's first worship service. What a joy and reaffirmation of my faith experienced as I shared with this new Christian.

We serve an amazing and awesome God! The power of his word in a country where it is forbidden and punished when read. God's presence proclaimed by a cross atop a church that welcomed a stranger as a symbol of God's love. The Holy Spirit, who by his presence and power, arranged for two lives to touch in a little church and to share their faith. By faith we are given the gift of prayer by which all may make known their every need at the very throne of our Heavenly Father. Thanks be to God!

Dear Lord, empower us with your Holy Spirit, so that we will be open to your will. Holy Spirit, give us your words to use and the courage to speak. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Thursday, April 3

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage- with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth." 2 Timothy 4:1-3

How blessed we are as a congregation of Our Saviour's to have pastors who faithfully preach God's word in purity and truth!

Have you ever attended a church when you seldom or never heard the name of Jesus in a sermon? Was the proclamation of the word only in the readings, the gospel message, litany or hymns? I have.

The first Sunday that I worshiped in Minneapolis, the sermon was on the upcoming ELCA convention. Its focus was the rights of all qualified to become pastors and bishops in our church and unity. The next Sunday, I sat uncomfortably in the pew listening to the outcome of the convention. The pastor bemoaned the fact that the delegates votes were not swayed. The pastor shared stories of pastors and bishops "coming out" and demanding that they too are in all ways doing God's work. They asked that they not be disqualified for church leadership because of their lifestyles and be accepted as they are. The focus of the prayers of the church was asking God to unite our church in accepting all and to strengthen them in their continued move toward victory. During the prayer, I was moved to pray for this church, pastors and its members, that the Holy Spirit would enter this congregation and uphold God's word. I asked that He would prevent the Lutheran Church and all churches from condoning and promoting sin. I prayed that all who have fallen astray be called to repentance. As I prayed I felt the Holy Spirit's presence and His words of prayer contradicted that which I heard. During the offering as I reflected, I felt moved to continue to worship here rather than to find another church. I felt that I was called to pray for them

Each Sunday I heard sermons expounding political correctness and social justice. One sermon stands out in my mind because it followed the Minneapolis bridge collapse. The message attributed the collapse to the wasting money on the war and not meeting our financial responsibilities to our communities and the poor. At the end of the message the congregation was called to be bridge builders, peacemakers, and to care for the earth and all creation. As I left the church, I had the opportunity to talk to the pastor about this sermon. I reminded him that we are called as Christians to do many things, but first and foremost we all called to the Great Commission. Nothing else is relevant to God's free gift of salvation to those who hear and believe. He looked taken aback, but thanked me for reminding him of this. I continue to pray for this church, its pastors and congregation, that God would work his perfect will and that he would guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Dear Heavenly Father, remind Christians everywhere of our responsibility to pray daily for the whole church of God, its pastors and members. Holy Spirit, bless and empower all in church leadership to do your will. Be with churches everywhere ensuring that they are places of love where all are welcomed, called to repent and to receive the forgiveness of sin by God's grace and faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Friday, April 4

"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel." Mark 16:15

We are all familiar with the call to the great commission. Jesus requires that all who follow Him are to spread the Good News to those who do not know Him as Lord and Savior.

During my many hours in the ICU waiting room, I got to know Cutter, a young Muslim man, whose wife was in ICU. She had given birth to a son, but during her labor experienced a stroke. Every day he told all who would listen, that he prayed five times a day for all the sick people in the hospital and had his mosque praying also.

Although I talked to him about many things, I did not respond to his witnessing about his prayer life as a Muslim. It was out of my comfort zone to witness to a true unbeliever. But God had a different plan of action. One morning I awoke with the command to quit preaching to the choir and to tell Cutter about Jesus. I was truly uncomfortable with this. I did not want to do it! What was wrong with me? Here was this Muslim, with no hope of eternal life, witnessing about a faith with no power or truth, while I knew the living Lord and Savior. After praying about this, I asked the Holy Spirit to give me the words He would have me speak as promised in John 14: 12, 20 "Truly, truly, I say to you, who can believe in Me will also do the works that I do...I am in My Father, and you in me, and I in you."

The same morning my sister, Ronda, and I found Cutter alone in the waiting room. As we began to visit, my sister remained in the background praying for the Holy Spirit's presence and blessing. I asked him if he knew of Jesus. He explained that all Muslims know that Jesus was a good man and prophet. The Holy Spirit enabled me to calmly and lovingly explain that Jesus is the son of God who came to save us from our sins. He acknowledged that there is a god in heaven. I explained that no one can come to the heavenly Father except through His son, Jesus. Salvation is a gift freely given to those who believe that Jesus died for our sins on the cross, was buried and rose again and by Christ's death and resurrection we who believe are assured of eternal life in Heaven. Those who refuse to believe will spend eternity in hell away from God's presence.

During our conversation, point and counterpoint were made. Ronda said that he often rolled his eyes while squirming in his chair. Do I know if my witnessing made a difference in his life? No, but I do know that my only responsibility was to share when called and to leave the rest to the Holy Spirit. I continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will water the seed planted in Cutter and that he and his family will accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. I hope some day to see him again in heaven

Lord Jesus, precious Savior, empower all Christians to take seriously your command to go and tell. Time is short and night is coming when no man can work. Help us to be your presence in the world and gift each of us with that which is necessary for our ministries. Amen

Saturday, April 5

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true." 1 John 5:20

What an amazing experience I have shared with my Lord and Savior during this time of crisis. How blessed we are who believe in Jesus and his promise that He is with us always, even to the end of the ages!

Each day of our lives, we know that we are not alone because Immanuel, God is with us. Christ, true God and true man, experienced all of life's joys and sorrows as he traveled the road to the cross. He took upon himself all of our sins and iniquities and became our substitute who absorbed all of God's wrath and punishment. Because of His death and resurrection, we who believe are assured of His presence in our worldly and eternal lives.

The struggles and trials of life we face have the ability to change us. God can use them to test and strengthen our faith. By relying on Jesus at all times we are triumphant. By surrendering our will to God's perfect will, we experience His peace that surpasses all understanding that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!

Having a trusting and personal relationship with Jesus guarantees that in all times we are in His loving care. In life and in death, victory is assured to those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior!

Immanuel, I thank and praise you for who you are and all that you do. For you are the great I Am, who was, is and ever shall be. You were with me in the past, are today, and will be forever. Thank you for your loving and constant presence in my life. Please continue to work within me, oh Lord. Help me to be the person you would have me be and use me as you will. Amen