

**Devotions – January 1-7, 2017**  
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**January 1, 2017**

Psalm 65:11 “*You crown the year with your bounty.*”

**Happy New Year!**

A brand new year: 2017! What will happen in our world, nation, state, community, family and our own personal lives in the year before us? We can make some guesses, much of the year will be “same old, same old,” there will be some surprises and disappointments. Guess though we might, we have no way of knowing what great joys and deep sorrows might come our way.

Some of us will try to modify our futures. New Year’s resolutions will abound: Take off a few pounds, exercise more – eat less, save more, be more attentive as spouses, parents, friends and family members. Try as we may, many of our good intentions will be broken before February 1 rolls onto the calendar.

What are we to do? Where are we to turn? The psalmist gives us a clue! Come what may, resolutions kept or broken, catastrophe or exhilaration, we can turn to God. God will never abandon us and in one form or another, our year will be crowned with bounty!

A Jewish New Year Prayer says it well:

Eternal God,  
grant us gratitude enough  
to look backward  
and be thankful;  
to look forward  
and be hopeful;  
faith enough  
to look upward  
and be humble;  
kindness enough  
to look forward  
and be helpful.  
Amen!



**January 2, 2017**

Psalm 31:3 *“You are my rock and my fortress, for your name’s sake lead me and guide me.”*

How’s it going? Only the second day of the New Year! Are you keeping your resolutions, embracing the new year with hope and anticipation, assuming a “can do” attitude that come what may you’re up to the challenge!

Are you “Showing Some Spine?”

I like the story about a teacher, who due to a back injury, had to wear a plaster cast around his upper body. It fit under his shirt and wasn’t noticeable at all. On the first day of school, still wearing the cast, he walked confidently into a classroom full of rowdy students.

After giving a lecture and assignment, the teacher opened the window and busied himself at his desk. When a strong breeze made his tie flap, he grabbed his stapler and stapled the tie to his chest. Needless to say, the teacher had no trouble with discipline that year.

As we continue our journey into the new year we affirm that God is our rock and fortress, He will lead and guide us, come what may! In God we too can “Show some spine” as we face a new year.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father we do not know what we will face as we journey into 2017. Help us to pin our hopes, dreams, fears and aspirations on You, knowing that we will not be disappointed. Amen.*



**January 3, 2017**

1 Cor. 13:7 *“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”*

If you are like me, you have friends who like to forward “pearls of wisdom” from the internet. I received the following “Daily Survival Kit for the New Year” based on various “props”:

Toothpick: To remind you to pick the good qualities in everyone, including yourself.

Rubber band: To remind you to be flexible. Things might not always go the way you want, but it can be worked out.

Band Aid: To remind you to heal hurt feelings, either yours or someone else’s.

Eraser: To remind you everyone makes mistakes. That’s okay, we learn by our errors.

Candy Kiss: To remind you everyone needs a hug or a compliment every day.

Mint: To remind you that you are worth a mint to your family and God.

Gum: To remind you to stick with it and you can accomplish anything.

Pencil: To remind you to list your blessings every day.

Tea Bag: To remind you to take time to relax daily and go over the list of God's blessings.

Prayer & Duct Tape: Because who can get along without them!

This is what makes life worth living every minute, every day.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, grant me love, gratitude, friends to cherish, caring, sharing, laughter, music and warm feelings in my heart in this New Year. Amen.*



**January 4, 2017**

Matthew 6:6 *“When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

The following prayer, author unknown, sets an appropriate tone as we move into a new year:

“Lord, keep me from the habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details... give me wings to get to the point.

I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others' pains. Help me to endure them with patience. But seal my lips on my own aches and pains... they are increasing and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint... some of them are so hard to live with... but a sour person is one of the crowning works of the devil.

Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people. And give me, Lord, the grace to tell them so.

Make me thoughtful, but not moody, helpful, but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all... but you know, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end. Amen.”



**January 5, 2017**

Luke 6:21a *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”*

As a bishop, and when I met with the ELCA Conference of Bishops, we dealt with some difficult issues. Humor was often a “saving grace” to get us over some of the rough and tough times. Believe it or not, bishops do have a sense of humor! I jotted down a few of the pithy sayings of the bishops and will share them with you. As we move into the New Year some humor might be helpful. Note: I have not included bishop’s names to protect the innocent and have omitted some of the “ribald” anecdotes so as not to offend your sense of propriety!

- A woman was heard to say “Last year my husband and I traveled around the world. Next year we plan to go some place else!”
- Being a pastor today is like being a stray dog at a whistling contest!
- In discussing the mandate that a pastor should be a “non-anxious presence in the congregation,” one of the bishops said: “The only time I was a non-anxious presence was when I was on valium!”
- You know you’re getting old when you associate “multiple” with “vitamins.”
- What happens when you cross a Jehovah’s Witness with a Lutheran? You get someone who knocks on doors but has nothing to say.
- Being a bishop is like being a herder of cats!
- A bishop is like a mushroom. You’re kept in the dark, people pour manure on you and when you stick your neck out, they cut it off!
- How do you recognize a gregarious and outgoing Lutheran? They stare at your shoes rather than their own.
- Observing a bishop about to swallow his morning medications another bishop said: “I see you’re about to swallow your Senior Trail Mix!”

What would we do without a sense of humor: Bishop, pastor, or parishioner?

Prayer: *Help me to maintain a sense of humor, not only in the challenging times, but in course of my daily life and living. Amen.*



**January 6, 2017 / Blessed Epiphany!**

Matthew 2:11 *“Going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasure they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”*

A confession: I am very offended when I see Christmas trees abandoned on the curb on December 26 for garbage collection! Don't people know that Christmas is not over? There are thirteen days of Christmas spanning from the birth of the Christ Child on December 25 until January 6 when the Wise Men arrive at the manger!! Bear with me, I want to do some educating and this devotion will be longer than the others.

There are twelve days of Christmas and they are celebrated in the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas." From 1558-1829 Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. Someone during that era wrote a carol as a catechism song for young Catholics. It has two levels of meaning: The surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of the church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality which the children could remember:

- The partridge in a pear tree was Christ.
- Two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments.
- Three French hens stood for faith, hope and love.
- The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- The five golden rings recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.
- The six geese a-laying stood for the six days of creation.
- Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: Prophecy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Contribution, Leadership and Mercy.
- The eight maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes.
- Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self Control.
- The ten lords a-leaping were the Ten Commandments.
- The eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful disciples.
- The twelve drummers drumming symbolized the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.

Now you know. There are twelve days of Christmas: December 25-January 6 complete with leaping lords, French hens and a partridge in a pear tee! The tree should not go on the curb before January 6. So there!

Prayer: *Help me not to be so anxious to get over Christmas. Help me to keep it alive for at least the twelve days and, if it's not too much, help me to keep Christmas in my heart all year long! Amen!*



**January 7, 2017**

2 Corinthians 6:2c *"Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation."*

Well, how's it going? Seven days into the New Year of 2017, are you keeping your resolutions, faltering or "plowing ahead" with determination? I share with you an article printed in "Parish Publications, Inc." 1992, that I've found helpful when I'm tempted to procrastinate, like my resolutions for the New Year:

### "Some Day"

"Most people live on an Eight day week – not just a seven day week. They have Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and SOMEDAY!

It often seems that some of the most important things in life are reserved for SOMEDAY. Someday we will tell our friends how helpful they have been. Someday we will write the letter to our parents or children. Someday we will consider what gift of time and abilities we ought to make to God's work. Someday we will think about our need to give proportionately... a Godly percentage of what the Lord has entrusted to us.

The grand tragedy of life that SOMEDAY is never part of any week. SOMEDAY never comes! Because SOMEDAY never comes, many of the important things in life never get done.

The work of God must never be a SOMEDAY project. Now is the time to make your commitment to the work of Christ. What gift of time and money will you make to see that Christ's work is done on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday during all of 2017?"

Prayer: *I am moving each day more into the year 2017. Help me to make faithful use of each day in declaring your praise, serving you and serving others in you Name! Help me to be an everyday person in your service not a SOMEDAY disciple. Amen.*

