




# The Baruch Devotional

52 WEEKLY DEVOTIONALS





*Barnch Senior Ministries  
seeks to honor God by  
serving people as they age.*

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# Thank You

Thank you for celebrating Baruch Senior Ministries' 25th Anniversary with us. As a faith-based organization founded on Biblical principles, Baruch is grateful for the opportunity to care for seniors throughout the state of Michigan. As we look ahead, we are challenged to remain true to Baruch's founding principles and mission to honor God by serving people as they age. With this in mind, we reflect on the biblical origins of the name 'Baruch'.

In the Bible, Baruch came from a princely family, the son of Neriah. His name meant "blessed" by the Lord. Later, he became the closest companion and loyal secretary to the prophet Jeremiah.

As Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch held the deed to land Jeremiah purchased and placed it in trust.<sup>1</sup> He transcribed Jeremiah's words as the prophet dictated them.<sup>2</sup> He accompanied Jeremiah on the long road of exile to Egypt and, as his companion, learned to resist the temptation of ambition and be content with his lot.<sup>3</sup> It is quite likely Baruch was responsible for the compilation of the Book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah purchased land to ensure his people long term security. He placed the deed in Baruch's hands to display God's commitment and faithfulness to His people. Thereby, Baruch served as an instrument for assuring God's people that they would never be abandoned. Baruch felt deeply for the suffering of the people of his day. He was a man of prayer who was often found fasting and praying. He brought hope to his people, those who were forced to leave their homeland and live in exile, lost in despair. He pointed them to a God who knew their needs, cared for them, promised them a final reward, and resting place.

Just as Baruch selflessly and faithfully carried out his charge, Baruch Senior Ministries promises to uphold its commitment to provide seniors and people living with disabilities with housing and a continuum of care that promotes the value and dignity of every person. Additionally, just as Baruch faithfully proclaimed the message from the Lord to the people, we are committed to bringing the message of God to people and to fully integrating faith and work. At our core is prayer for the needs of those we serve. We give them hope by understanding their needs and providing them with personal and spiritual care that brings them comfort in this life and prepares them for the life to come.

Our prayer is that you will be blessed and inspired by this devotional. A special thank you to the members of the Baruch team that contributed to this publication.

## WEEK ONE

# God is With You

***The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17 NIV)***

Many of us wish that life would return to normal. We miss the ‘good old days,’ when life was less complicated: pre-COVID, pre-inflation, pre-intense cultural wars, pre-whatever else is going on. We cannot deny that these are uncertain and restless times. Zephaniah lived through a similar period in Judah. Amidst great upheaval, the story of Zephaniah, and the history of the kingdom of Judah, encourage us not to look back or wonder helplessly about the future but to look forward with confidence and certain anticipation of God’s perfect plan for us.

God’s plan assures us of His presence, and consequently His delight and His joy. You can be certain that no matter what transpires in the uncertain future, God is with you. He is with you and rejoices “over you with singing” as a loving parent cradles and sings over a child he loves (Isaiah 66:13). He is with you and “...delights in you” as He waits to welcome you into His presence for all eternity (Isaiah 62:4b).

As God rejoices in you, you can rejoice in Him too, confident in the knowledge that you are His child through faith in Jesus Christ. Your future is secure in Him because His plan for you is perfect (Jeremiah 29:11). Therefore, give thanks and be glad as you face this uncertain future. Know that your God is good, and His love for you endures forever and in all circumstances. Rejoice and give thanks for the “Mighty Warrior” truly saves.

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK TWO

# Thriving in God's Peace

*But Jesus immediately said to them, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."  
(Matthew 14:27 NIV)*

In Matthew 14, we read the story of Jesus walking on the water. The disciples are in the fishing boat, on the water, waiting for Jesus. As darkness descends, the disciples exclaim that a ghost is walking towards them. Immediately, they are afraid! However, they soon recognize that it is Jesus! Peter resolutely steps out of the boat to walk on the water with Jesus. While Peter's eyes are focused on Jesus, the winds begin to blow, and as soon as Peter takes his eyes off Jesus, he begins to sink... **Jesus immediately reached out His hand and caught Him. O you of little faith, why did you doubt? (v.31).**

There are days when I feel like Peter. I desire to walk with Jesus, to see what He sees and hear what He hears. However, when the waters of this life rise and fall and the winds blow hard, I focus on the water and wind, rather than on the hand that Jesus is immediately holding out to me.

When Peter began to sink, he cried to the Lord, "**Lord, save me**" (vs.30). Jesus will save you and me when we cry out to Him. We do not need to be afraid because Jesus' hand is always ready to save us from sinking. Let us be like the disciples, who, when they got into the boat and the wind ceased, they worshipped God! What a perfect way to end our fear and begin thriving in the peace of God.

Rev. Val VandeHaar



## WEEK THREE

# Be Still



***Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. (Psalm 46:10 NIV)***

I can't count the number of pictures I have on my phone of sunsets and sunrises. As my husband would say, I have an obsession with sunsets! There is something magical about watching the most perfect sunset and how the sky changes colors. I find them to be peaceful and gorgeous reminders that God is in control. It is in these moments of enjoying sunsets (and sunrises, depending on where I am and how early I want to wake up) that I experience a sense of peace and allow myself to just be for a few minutes.

But I also often find myself caught up in the busyness of life, day to day activities, schedules, planning, reading news headlines, trying to control how my life should go, and the list goes on. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." What exactly does it mean to be still? It means to be quiet, cease doing, and listen to God. It is a time to refuel and replenish. It brings us closer to God, but even more, it means to stop striving, to make yourself let go, to stop fighting, to willingly submit to God and His control, to surrender, to relax.

When we are still with God: We decrease; He increases. We surrender our will and accept His. He reminds us we are not alone. We begin to put our trust in Him. His whispers are heard, and His peace found. We discover who He is and find rest in Him. He is in control. Can you "be still" and surrender? Can you answer the call to stop fighting and believe He is in charge? Do you fully trust Him?

Marissa Brinks



## WEEK FOUR

# Our God, Our Guide

*.... And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12: 1-2 NIV)*

It was Super Bowl season and an advertisement came on TV about two brothers, Brian and Robin McKeever. Both had become cross-country skiers, winning competitions and going to the Olympics. Brian also was blind.

Brian began losing his eyesight when he was 19 due to juvenile macular degeneration. He lost his central vision and has limited peripheral vision. He skis with the help of a guide. For many years, his brother Robin was his guide. In 2022 at 42 years old, Brian competed in his last Para-Olympics. He has won 16 Gold medals overall!

Brian shared that it wasn't easy at first. He had to build trust with his guides. He had to learn to listen well. It took practice to learn to follow. In time, he was able to keep up. His guides also had to be able to stay ahead of Brian when he gained strength and experience. They had to know him well. When skiing in competitions, guides wear gold vests with a large G on them. Skiers are about 10 feet behind. They plan together, practice, and stay in constant communication.

What a great image of how to live life with God. We all have limited spiritual vision in one way or another. How important it is to learn to listen and follow well as we go through life. Spending time with God, communicating often and well through prayer, and moving with perseverance through life, we fix our eyes on Jesus and follow our Guide.

Rev. Karen Henderlong

## WEEK FIVE

# Our Old Age

*Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you. (Isaiah 46:4 NIV)*

Emma was celebrating her 90th birthday. Her pastor and a small group of friends came to see her. They brought a cupcake for each person. After they sang “Happy Birthday,” the Pastor asked Emma what it was like to be 90. Emma looked at her friends, “Ninety? Oh no, I’m not 90. I’m 60 years old.” People smiled. Slowly the friends realized Emma thought she was 60. With kindness they said they were here to celebrate her 90th birthday. Emma reflected, “No, I’m not 90. I’m 60. But sometimes I feel like I’m 90.” Everyone smiled and laughed with Emma.

Emma reminds us that it is difficult to adjust to the changes that come when we grow older. Sometimes we wish we could be 60 again. At the same time our body reminds us of our actual age. It is a common struggle as we age. God isn’t surprised by anything our mind and body goes through when we age. He has seen it all. He promises that He will be there to carry us through.

God understands when we go through our biceps becoming triceps.

God cares when the arthritis in our joints keeps us from a favorite activity.

God sees us even when our macular degeneration keeps us from seeing like we used to.

God hears us even when our hearing aids are squealing.

God delivers us when Alzheimer’s takes us through the unknown.

God cares for us the same in our old age as He did when we were younger.

Rev. Jeffrey Meyers



## WEEK SIX

# Children of God

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 John 3:1a NIV)*

There is a story about a woman who had two children, one was natural born and the other adopted. One day someone asked her, "Which of your children is adopted?" She stared into the distance for a moment and then said, "I can't remember."

This is how it is with God. He lavished His love upon us, "**while we were yet sinners**" (Romans 5:8). Yes, we may not yet be fully what He wants us to be, but He sees us as we will be when Christ appears. He sees us through eyes of love and bestows upon us the privilege of being called children of God.

In a world where differences are often magnified, who do you see when you go to work, to the mall, or when you walk on the streets? God calls us to be like Him. He calls us to love humanity just as He loves us; without prejudice or favoritism. Will you heed this call? Like the woman in the adoption story, may we experience holy amnesia in our interactions with each other, so that we will be able to see all people through His lens of agape love. As we continue to grow in Him, may He give us the grace and the ability to extend the same unearned dignity and privilege to others, as He has done for us, that the world will know we are truly children of God. My prayer for all of us today is that God will lead each one of us to someone who needs a demonstration of His love. When the opportunity comes, please say, "Yes!" so that many will join this incredible family.

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK SEVEN

# Be Filled With Joy

*The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.  
(Psalm 126:3 NIV)*

Upon my birth, my parents used Psalm 126:3 on my birth announcement card. This Psalm reminds us about gratitude for what God has done. It says: “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”

Did you wake up this morning? Do you have a place to sleep at night? Is there food in your refrigerator and on your table? Do you have a job to go to each day? Do you have a Savior who has forgiven you of all your sins and who loves you unconditionally? If you can answer “yes!” to these questions, you have a lot to be joyful about, and the Lord has done great things for you. God is our very present help in trouble, our hiding place during the storm, and our strength when we are weak. He protects. He provides. The Lord is good!

Now, does this mean that we are overjoyed every single minute of every single day? Definitely not! There will be times of pain, suffering, and sorrow – we see that, in our personal lives and in the world around us. A lot of people are going through difficult situations and are not filled with joy. But these times of trouble won’t last. Sorrow will be turned to joy and tears to laughter. Psalm 103:2 says: “Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things He does for me.” We ought to marvel at how God has helped us in the past and trust Him to do it again.

What has the Lord done for you that you can be thankful for and JOYFUL about in your personal life? Take a few minutes each day for a moment of gratitude.

Marissa Brinks

## WEEK EIGHT

# Thrive!

*The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives.  
(Romans 1:17 MSG)*

The word thrive means to grow vigorously; to prosper; to progress toward or reach a goal. You know how vigorously babies normally develop. The apostle Peter challenges us with the following, **“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”** (1 Peter 2:2); and in Psalm 122:6 we read, **“They shall prosper that love you.”**

God wants us to **“be like the runners in a race—run with all your might toward the goal!”** (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

The book of Proverbs is filled with sound advice on how to flourish:

- **“If you accept my words and store up my commands within you...you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God” (2:1, 5).**
- **“A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (11:25).**
- **“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (16:3).**
- **“Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord” (16:20).**
- **“He who cherishes understanding prospers” (19:8).**

As you read through and reflect on these scriptures, may you find yourself **THRIVING** in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Rev. Val VandeHaar



## WEEK NINE

# Love That Transforms

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:12-14 NIV)*

What is your favorite Christmas movie? These days, you can watch holiday movies 24 hours a day heading into Christmas. Most of these movies are about a self-centered person who changes after meeting a wonderful person. Others involve two people going through difficult times in life who fall in love. These movies share how love can change people. I suspect we are drawn to them because they reflect in small love stories the Big Story of God's love for us.

The Good News of Great Joy is not only that God loves us, but that God's love changes us. We are a weary world and often we point fingers at others saying: "They need to ..." or "why don't they..." or "they'll never..."

This week I was reading the Christmas story when an older woman with dementia spoke up. She said, "How amazing would it be if, every day, we heard a baby crying, and looking down, saw it was Jesus?" Imagine, the Christ Child being born in us every day. Like Mary, keeping our hearts open. Like the shepherds, actively sharing the good news. Like the Magi, keeping our focus on the true Light. God invites us to join in this miracle of change within us. Instead of pointing fingers at others, let us be light, love, and hope to others at home, in the office, in our world.

Rev. Karen Henderlong



## WEEK TEN

# Do Not Be Afraid

*But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” (John 6:20 NIV)*

Have you ever been in a storm? Did you feel afraid or terrified? These responses are completely human. In fact, fear can sometimes drive us towards safety. Jesus’ disciples felt terrified when a sudden storm interrupted their idyllic trip to Capernaum. Even though they were close associates of Jesus, their faith faltered in the face of the dangerous waves that threatened them. Their humanity quickly became evident even as ours is evident when we feel threatened. As they focused on the approaching storm, their fear grew and their confidence in Jesus’ ability to protect them, was diminished.

Amid their fear, Jesus responds with the assurance of His presence in the storm. He says to the frightened disciples in the boat, **“It is I; don’t be afraid” (John 6:20)**. My translation for this is, *“I am present even in the chaos that surrounds you; don’t be afraid, just trust me.”* Often when we encounter challenges in our daily lives, we might assume that God is absent. This is especially true when we pray but our situations grow increasingly worse. The lesson here is that God is always in the details, always near us, and in control, even when we do not see or feel Him. Therefore, we should never be afraid.

However, the call to banish all fear is a tall order. Fear is our instinctive response to the threats we face. Fortunately, Jesus understands our frailty and He continuously calls on us to trust Him in the various ‘storms’ that interrupt our lives reminding us, constantly, **“It is I; don’t be afraid” (Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 55:9; Romans 8:28)**. As you go about your week, expect some unexpected ‘storms’ and believe that Jesus is right there with you in every ‘storm’, calling you to Himself, and giving you the strength to make it through.

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK ELEVEN

# Our Refuge-Shelter-Encourager

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*

*(Psalm 46:1 NIV)*

The event occurred on a farm in early April. The animals were in the fields when an end of season snowstorm came in fast. Skies darkened; snow fell. Four inches, 8 inches, and it kept coming. The family had gone out to get the livestock. When most were in, the snow was falling so hard that the barn and house couldn't be seen. The boys were still in the fields and dad went looking for them. The boys had followed a fence until they felt a familiar gate, which is where Dad found them. Holding onto a rope so they wouldn't get separated, they slowly made their way to the barn. When safely together, the family each held onto the rope with Mom in the lead and Dad at the back making sure no one got lost. Offering encouraging words and their presence, the parents led their children slowly back to the house.

When going through life and hard times, none of us can do it alone. The good news is that we don't have to. We have God who promises always to be present with us. Like the parents in the snowstorm, God stays with us in all situations. We are God's beloved family. God promises to be our refuge, shelter, and encourager. We can thrive in life because God is WITH us and God is FOR us.

As you go through each day this week, spend some time simply focusing on God's Presence. And remember that "the One who goes ahead of you, opening up the way, is the same One who stays close and never lets go of your hand." (Deut. 31:8)

Rev. Karen Henderlong





## WEEK TWELVE

# Blessed Beyond Measure

*Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things He does for me. (Psalm 103:2 NLT)*

A few years ago, I was shopping with my girlfriends, and I came across a sweater that said: "Blessed Beyond Measure." This sweater was cheap, cute, and perfect for a lazy fall Saturday. So of course, I "had" to buy it! But this sweater has a saying that I think is really important and should be a daily reminder to us all of God's blessings in our lives. It has become one of my favorite sweaters, not just for the comfort of it, but for the reminder and meaning of what it says.

Scripture is full of verses that contain a similar theme. For example:

**"And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:8 NIV)**

**"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)**

Do you recognize a common theme here? God's plans, a prosperous future, and blessings upon blessings! Yes, we must do our part, because God has already done His. Think about this: God wants you to have overflowing blessings! But what are your expectations? What do you really believe? Have you placed limits on what God can do for you? Are you dominated by doubt or hindered by fear? Be on the lookout for His blessings this week and share your blessings by blessing others, because we have all been **blessed beyond measure!** May we never forget the good things He has done for us.

Marissa Brinks



## WEEK THIRTEEN

# Choose Light

***And the judgment is based on this fact: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19 NIV)***

If you have ever been in a dark room where there is only one source of light, you will find that your eyes are instinctively drawn to that light. It is the only point of reference for where you are positioned in that room. The writer of the gospel of John states, “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 5). Then in Ephesians, Paul says, “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:11).

It is impossible to deny that these are dark days punctuated with fruitless deeds and yet it is also true that Jesus has come into the world, and the light of Christ shines brightly in the dark. The light shines through God’s inspired and Holy Word illuminating the path of those who fear Him. The light shines through every person who walks in God’s truth exercising love, kindness, forgiveness, compassion, and care for others. That light shines through you, as you serve, “the least of these”, whomever they might be, or wherever they may be.

The unique thing about light is that it takes the focus off the darkness and captivates its audience in its brightness. Consider the performer, encircled by light on a darkened stage. All eyes are trained on him/her. Likewise, the world is your stage. Therefore, walk in the light, so that all people will be drawn to Jesus Christ, our Savior. Choose light and let your virtuous deeds through Jesus Christ, overcome the darkness.

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK FOURTEEN

# An Invitation to Thrive



***“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”***

***(John 16:33 NIV)***

Last week I tended to some plants whose leaves had faded and roots were either rotten or dried out. These plants were NOT doing well. When healthy, they bloom, grow, reach out, and engage with the environment. They thrive. I know what thriving looks like for my plants, but what about us? What does it mean for us to thrive?

We are struggling with many challenges that seem unending: family worries and discord, violence, world crises new and ongoing, grief and loss, and unfamiliar situations. Often it may feel like we are simply surviving, just making it from day to day. When his disciples were struggling, Jesus reminded them that struggles aren't the final word. God is. Jesus reminds them, and us, that our lives are meaningful even in the world's chaos.

With my plants, I made changes to help them. How about for us? What changes do we need to thrive at home, with family, at work? What does thriving look like as a whole person: body, mind, and spirit? I encourage you to read Isaiah 35:1-10 for some great imagery about people and society thriving. I also encourage you to think about what changes you need to make to really thrive. In 2022, we entered the year of Baruch's 25th anniversary. With God's help and direction, and excellent work from staff, residents, and communities, Baruch has thrived through the years. Our hope and prayer for you, and for Baruch, is that we thrive this year and for many years to come!

Rev. Karen Henderlong

## WEEK FIFTEEN

# Our Place of Refuge

*The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.  
(Deuteronomy 33:27 NIV)*

As a young child, I loved to lean on my mother's chest and feel her warm embrace. As I lay there, wrapped securely in her arms, I would listen intently to the rhythm of her heartbeat, and something about that steady LUBB and DUB sound made me feel completely at ease. No matter what else might have been going on around me, in that moment of leaning, I experienced love, acceptance, protection, certainty, and serenity. My mother is with the Lord now, and yet, whenever I close my eyes, lean back, and relax in a quiet place, I can still recall that steady, unfaltering rhythm of her heartbeat, and I am once again transported to my place of refuge.

Deuteronomy 33:27, reminds us that God is our place of refuge, and He provides steadiness when life is in upheaval. In times of danger or distress we can run to Him and find shelter in His everlasting arms. He alone is our safety and our comfort, and, in His arms, we will find peace even when there is no peace around us. Besides, if we run to Him often, His presence and His peace will be imprinted upon our hearts through His Word, and then we can return to this shelter, this place of refuge, again and again.

Today, make time for serenity breaks. Slow down, lean in and hear His voice. Let His truth draw you close to Him and let His truth imprint itself upon your heart. Breathe in deeply, shut your eyes for a moment and take in the comforting peace of His presence. "He's got this!" Whatever "this" might be for you, just let go and rest in Him. His Word, His truth, His presence, this is where you will find refuge.

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK SIXTEEN

# What's in Your Life Bag?

***Are you tired? Worn out? Burned Out? 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. (Matthew 11:28-30 MSG)***

Some women I know enjoy walking around campgrounds. This year, one campsite had a huge motorhome and large fence for their dog. One was sparse, a small tent and nothing else. And another displayed a statue that made everyone laugh! When traveling, people pack all kinds of provisions. Some travel light, some travel heavily loaded.

In our journey of LIFE, what provisions do we want? What do we truly need? Do we “pack” the right stuff? Are there some things we need to leave behind?

Jesus shared that we are to focus day by day, praying and knowing that God gives what is needed for the day. Matthew 11:28-30, also, describes Jesus sharing how to travel lightly.

Jesus knows that it was and is not an easy world. And Jesus shared the truth with people then and now...that God provides for us and provides what we truly need.

When we follow Jesus and His ways...when we pack our lives with time with God, with rest, with learning the way of love, we are going to a spiritual gas station of sorts. Jesus shows us how to be filled with God's presence, and how to unhook the heavy things from our lives that weigh us down. And Jesus rides along with us, providing direction along the way.

Rev. Karen Henderlong

## WEEK SEVENTEEN

# The Humble Christ

*She gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7 NIV)*

This well-known verse from the Christmas story is a real lesson in humility. The omnipotent, omnipresent Lord of the universe appeared as a baby, crying the cry of life, probably weighing less than ten pounds and measuring fewer than twenty-four inches in length. This amazing event is simply described as “she gave birth to her firstborn.” Jesus willingly left the halls of heaven to come to earth as an infant child.

Mary treated Jesus the way any mother would treat a newborn baby. She wrapped Him in swaddling cloths. Mary and Joseph cared for Jesus like any other beloved child. That’s the way we are to treat one another, too. We are to care for each other just as if we are neighbors. We don’t look down upon our neighbor and elevate ourselves. We don’t elevate our neighbor and look down upon ourselves. We wrap ourselves with humility and treat one another just the way we would want to be treated.

Mary laid the baby in a manger. This was a simple feeding trough for animals. When Christ entered the world, He came to a place that had some of the smelliest, filthiest, and most uncomfortable conditions. This is the wonder of Divine grace. Jesus humbled Himself to be born a baby that would grow up to die on a cross as a substitute for human sin. On the cross He would carry some of the smelliest, filthiest, and most uncomfortable conditions of human existence. He did this out of humility. He did so because He so loved the world. Let us humbly love.

Rev. Jeffrey Meyers



## WEEK EIGHTEEN

# Is This The End?

*"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky?"  
(Acts 1:11 NIV)*

Around the world, Prophets and “prophets” are trying to predict what will happen next in a cosmic drama that we humans did not author and cannot edit. Many of these prophecies focus on when the world will end. Humanity has been fascinated by such predictions as far back as anyone can remember. The men of Galilee were curious, too.

Scripture is clear: **“Do not worry...”** (Matthew 6:25-34); **“No one knows... not even Jesus”** (Matthew 24:35-37). To borrow words from a song in the movie Frozen, “Let it go....” Still, some are preoccupied, just like the men of Galilee, in trying to determine when Jesus will return. This is an empty pursuit. Our human obsession with dates and times will not change God’s timetable (Job 42:2; Isaiah 46:8-11). This is God’s story and only He can determine the closing chapter.

Instead of **“looking into the sky”** as those Galileans did, Christ calls us to look to Him. What a relief it is to know that our God has a plan, and that you and I can rely on it by faith through Jesus. His plan is perfect, it is unfathomable, it is unchangeable, and it is good (Jeremiah 29:11). Indeed, it is a great blessing to be in such loving and capable hands. With this in mind, let us live daily, as if every day were our last day. Let us live in anticipation that Christ will return in the same way He went to heaven. It could even be today. Can you live with that?

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK NINETEEN

# Responding to the Spirit

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*  
(Galatians 5:22-23 NIV)

My friend's toddler was practicing her "no's." Getting dressed..."NO!" At meals..."NO!" And at bath time, she looked at the water and let out a large, long "NOOO." Many of us reading this are adults, but I believe we all have recently had times when we've felt like this toddler. "NO!!!" We feel like saying this to many things going on in life.

Saying "No" can be motivated by small things like what foods or TV shows you like or dislike. Other times saying "No" is about big issues. Recently we celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day, where we remembered people who took a stand for justice. As people who are called by God to help the oppressed and vulnerable, it remains important to say "No" to injustice-- to right wrongs and to protect the vulnerable. These "No's" often are motivated by the Spirit of God.

We also need to practice saying "YES." Our "YES" can be even more powerful than saying "No". YES to God. YES to changing our ways to better ways. YES to kindness. YES to love. YES to patience. YES to respect. In memory of those who have led the way, both in social justice and in the people of faith, spend some time with God. Listen for where God is asking you to say "NO" and is inviting you to say "YES." **For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**

Rev. Karen Henderlong





## WEEK TWENTY

# You Are My Joy!

***I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. (John 17:13 NIV)***

Did you know that God is a joyful King (1 Chronicles 15:25; 1 Chronicles 29:9; Job 38:7)? Joy is part of His nature, and His desire is that our lives be filled with His joy. Too often, however, stress, worry, depression, and other challenges interfere with our ability to be joyful. This should not be the case. The essence of true Christian joy is not based on circumstance, but on the person of Jesus Christ. Knowing who He is to us should fill us with assurance and serenity.

Jesus reminds His disciples, “I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them” (John 17:13). This is a reminder that our ability to overflow with His joy is not based on our circumstances, but only on His Word. It is His Word that served to remind His disciples to have the full measure of joy within them and it is that same Word that will make our joy complete in this present life. Let us therefore, read the Word daily and reflect on it regularly so that our joy also may be full.

Only when we are nourished by Him and satisfied in Him can we genuinely declare, ‘You are my Joy.’ As you go through this day, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK TWENTY-ONE

# Where is Your Focus?

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2 BSB)*

Sometimes I feel a little distracted in the chaotic world in which we are living. From time to time, I find myself focusing on the wrong things. Or sometimes I find myself not even focusing on anything at all. You have probably heard it said before that focus determines your direction. Another phrase you may have heard, “Our lives are always moving in the direction of our strongest thoughts.”

Sometimes life is overwhelming, and we feel like we are out of control. We find ourselves focusing on whatever is going on in our life. When striving to keep things under control and in order becomes our sole focus, we lose sight of God. Are we giving more attention to our situations than to God? When our minds wander down a wrong path, we must interrupt those thoughts and replace them with God’s truth. We need to realign our thinking to what His Word says and refuse to believe the lies that keep us living from a place of weakness – that’s not living life in abundance! Hebrews 12:2, reminds us to take our eyes off ourselves and our circumstances – off the “walls” in our lives – and fix them squarely on Christ.

This week let’s try to focus on the following: His strength instead of our weakness. His victory instead of defeat. His hope instead of depression. His love instead of fear. His peace instead of anxiety. His forgiveness instead of condemnation. His freedom instead of bondage. His joy instead of despair. His provision instead of our lack. His righteousness instead of sin.

Marissa Brinks



## WEEK TWENTY-TWO

# Thriving in God's Promises

*The Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night...then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8 NIV)*

Life is filled with laws. Laws are written to keep us safe, to bring justice, to provide civil and social rights, and to give us a peaceful and pleasant life. Our homes, workplaces, and even our churches have laws.

In the first five books of the Bible, God gave His people, the Israelites, laws, in order **that they might prosper and have good success**. In Genesis through Deuteronomy, God set out laws for how to cook, how to be clean, and what animals to eat. He even provided the Ten Commandments as a summary of how to live. The Israelites did not always follow God's laws: They worshiped the golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai, rather than worshiping God. Moses struck the rock for water after God told him not to and as a result, he could no longer enter the promised land. Uzzah, even after being told not to, touched the Ark of the Covenant when it began to tip, and he was struck dead.

Even though God's people were disobedient, God's message to Joshua is filled with His promises – the promise of entering the land of Canaan, God taking them safely over the Jordan, and giving them the land. In that land, they will be honored by others and God will never leave them or forsake them. For when they meditate on God's Word, they shall have good success! This assurance was true for the Israelites and is true for us. God does not go back on His promises. As we meditate on His Word, we, too, will prosper and have good success!

Rev. Val VandeHaar

## WEEK TWENTY-THREE

# A Good Foundation

*Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20 NIV)*

Machu Picchu is one of the wonders of the ancient world. Located in the mountains of Peru, Machu Picchu is a quiet testimony to the engineering ability of the Incan empire. Most people who visit Machu Picchu will see the Temple of the Sun, The Urban Sector, the sun dial, and the Temple of the Condor. What most people will not recognize is that 70% of the engineering that went into Machu Picchu is not visible above ground.

The terraces around Machu Picchu serve two functions. One is to provide a place for agriculture. The second purpose is to secure the foundation for the buildings above. Each terrace is constructed with a bottom layer of larger stones covered with medium gravel which is covered with sand and fine gravel. The top layer is soil. There were no short cuts in building the terraces or the rest of the buildings. For over 400 years the structures on Machu Picchu were abandoned. During that time, they withstood the elements of the Andean Mountains because they had been built with a good foundation.

The household of God has been built on a good foundation, too. There really are no shortcuts to building a good foundation. We need to spend time learning the teachings of the apostles in the New Testament, learning the teachings of the prophets in the Old Testament, and learning the teachings of Jesus. For over 2,000 years, the church has withstood the many challenges of this world because we have been built on a good foundation.

Rev. Jeffrey Meyers

## WEEK TWENTY-FOUR

### Turning Points

*After six days, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. (Mark 9:2 NIV)*

Our lives are filled with turning points. Some turning points can lead to good destinations while others may lead us to places we did not intend to go. When King David looked out from the rooftop of the palace and saw Bathsheba's nakedness, that became a downward turning point in his life. But when he turned from his sin that became an upward turning point.

Peter, James, and John experienced a significant turning point when they accompanied Jesus up the mountain. He was transfigured before their eyes and from then on ceased teaching, preaching, and healing, and turned His face resolutely toward Jerusalem and to His suffering and death (Luke 9:51). The disciples, on the other hand, got an intimate glimpse of Jesus' glory (the transfiguration) and greater revelation of His identity as the Christ. You could say they were in the right place at the right time.

Have you ever wondered what it took for the disciples to accompany Jesus up that mountain? It must have been a strenuous and intimidating journey for them, and yet they followed Him all the way to the top, where a deep revelation awaited them. Daily, Jesus calls us to scale the 'mountain' with Him. We can choose to trust and follow Him as those disciples did, or we can hang back. Our greatest blessing lies in being in the right place at the right time; in following Him closely wherever He leads. Today, take time to be alone with Jesus. Ask Him for faith and strength to climb those 'mountains' that have intimidated you in the past. It could very well be your ultimate upward turning point.

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK TWENTY-FIVE

# Keep Calm and Carry On

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 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 transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4: 4-7 NIV)*

Some seniors recently studied the book Anxious for Nothing by Max Lucado. It seemed timely with newscasts full of bad news. We are surrounded by so much suffering. It's easy to let that fill our minds, bodies, and our spirits.

In the book, Max Lucado encourages people to find peace by practicing C.A.L.M. amid life's turmoil:

***Celebrate*** God's goodness. Remember who created the universe. The God of the universe is still with us in all things. This helps us maintain perspective.

***Ask God for help.*** God not only created the universe, but still actively cares about each one of us, and wants us to share our lives. Tell God what is on your mind and ask for guidance.

***Leave your concerns with God.*** Many of us share our concerns with God, but then we keep ruminating on them in negative ways. We often take them back and forget to fully trust God.

***Meditate on good things.*** We hear and see so much bad stuff. Take just as much time (or even more) to focus on the Word of God and other good news. Each day look for God and look for good. Can you find 10 things every day that you are grateful for? Where have you seen God at work? Where have you seen good?

May you find your CALM!

Rev. Karen Henderlong

## WEEK TWENTY-SIX

# You Are His!

*“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased.” (Mark 1:11b NIV)*

There is nothing that nurtures a child’s spirit as much as quality time and words of affirmation from a loving parent. When Jesus stepped up out of the cold water of the Jordan River, He was met with the warm embrace of His loving Father. God spoke from the heavens saying, **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** Jesus had not even embarked on His earthly ministry, and God was already laying claim to Him as “...my beloved Son.” In doing this, God confirmed Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, and affirmed His ministry here on earth.

There are situations in life that may cause us to question our identity, significance, and worth. We live in a world where titles and labels matter and sometimes we may feel ‘left out, forgotten, and marginalized’ because we lack worldly status. It is helpful to remember that, because we are cleansed through the Savior’s blood, God sees all His children through the lens of His Son, Jesus Christ. We cannot earn the privilege of being children of the living God through human effort. This status is conferred freely through Jesus Christ and only through Him do we find our significance.

As we approach His throne of mercy and grace, God says, yet again, to all who will listen, ‘You are mine.’ If no one else says it, shows it, or knows it, you need only know that God lays claim to you because YOU matter to God. Today, bask in the warmth of your Father’s unconditional and perfect love, and rejoice in the knowledge that your significance is in Him alone. You are His child, and He is pleased with you.

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK TWENTY-SEVEN

# God's Delight

***Praise the LORD. Sing to the Lord a new song, His praise in the assembly of the saints... For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation... (Psalm 149:1,4 NIV)***

The fire crackled and snow drifted down outside. Domino stretched out, soaking in the heat from the fire. Callie pawed at the air. They weren't cleaning the house, serving the community, or running a business. They were simply being themselves and who they were created to be. Looking at them, I felt delight.

When Jesus was a young boy, He played, did chores, and studied. When older, Jesus continued to grow in faith and understanding. He was living out who He came into the world to be. In Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus was baptized by John and began His formal ministry. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." Before Jesus began His formal ministry, God delighted in Him.

Sometimes it's easy to think, "Of course God was pleased with Jesus. Jesus was perfect!" We can't imagine God feels the same about us. Yet, the original Greek word in Matthew for "well pleased" points to a Hebrew word in Isaiah and in Psalm 149 that is translated as "delight." The way God felt about Jesus is the same way God felt about Israel and the same way God feels about us. God delights in us. It is not what we do, how we look or what we own. It's whose we are. God delights in us because we are His family through Jesus Christ. We are simply to come with who we are, and each day let God's light shine through us. Praise the Lord!

Rev. Karen Henderlong





## WEEK TWENTY-EIGHT

# Be Humble, Gentle, Patient

*Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.*  
(Ephesians 4:2-3 NIV)

How do you react towards the faults of others? Ephesians gives us three fruits of the Spirit that teach us how we should handle the faults of others: be humble, gentle, and patient. However, this is not always easy. First, we tend to look out for ourselves, as our human nature tends to lean toward self-protection. Second, we point our finger at other people's faults so that our faults don't look that bad. Third, we place blame on their faults so that we don't have to feel guilty for our own. When tensions arise in relationships, we look for where we can blame others, either to justify our own actions or so that we can say, "I might have been wrong, but not as wrong as they!"

But let's look at what it means to be humble, gentle, and patient.

- Humility means being free from pride and arrogance. Rather than being self-centered, one is other-centered.
- Gentleness is the quality of being kind, tender, or mild-mannered. It is a polite and restrained behavior toward others.
- Patience is having the ability to endure – whether it be a tedious task, a trial, or annoyance – without getting riled up. It is about remaining calm.

People are not perfect. They will mess up, make mistakes, let us down, disappoint, and even hurt us. And if we are honest with ourselves, we have all been similarly imperfect. God's Word exhorts us to forgive others, as Jesus has forgiven us. This week, spend some time asking God to show you the areas in your life where you are not humble, gentle, and patient with others.

## WEEK TWENTY-NINE

# Removing Idols

*When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, ...."  
(Exodus 32:1-4 NIV)*

I recently listened to the Bible from Genesis to Psalms. These books are the Story of God's relationships with individuals, and then a nation of people, with the goal of eventually blessing the entire world. It also is the story of the people's habit of going astray, over and over and over again.

In Exodus, as well as in times before and after, God's people experienced delays. They wanted to go their own way. Failed to trust. And they created idols out of the stuff around them. They created objects as idols, but also made idols out of behaviors and attitudes like pride, desire, power, and greed. Listening to all of that, I was reminded that we aren't all that much different today. We all have idols at times in our life-- some big, some small. Idols are things or people that at times become more important to us than God.

Scripture reminds us constantly of God's deep and abiding love for us. God doesn't give up on us and always invites us back into a deeper friendship. Take time to reflect this week: What thoughts, behaviors, or items do we lean on at times as a replacement for leaning on God? What gives you strength? What do you tend to do first after a rough day? How do you spend your time? These things can be good things. But when we go to them first, or more than we go to God, we may be making idols.

Rev. Karen Henderlong



## WEEK THIRTY

# Complete Surrender

*But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." (Mark 8:33 NIV)*

At some point we have all sung hymns of commitment and surrender to God. Perhaps it was, "I Surrender all" or "Take my Life and Let it be". But did we really mean it? Was it all about total surrender or was it the catchy tune and the electric atmosphere of believers worshipping together that merely gripped us for a moment?

When Jesus was going about His earthly ministry, the disciples were willing to surrender to Him. They were willing to leave everything, including their professions and families, to be with Him. But when Jesus reveals that He is about to undergo great suffering, rejection, and death, Peter will have none of it. He seems to say, "I am cool with teaching, healing, and doing all kinds of miracles, Jesus, but I am not cool with suffering, rejection, and dying" (Mark 8:32-my translation). To this Jesus responds, "Get behind me, Satan..." (Mark 8:33). We may be tempted to judge Peter's response harshly, but if we are honest, haven't we all felt the same way occasionally?

Complete surrender to Jesus means:

- **Denying self:** Rejecting those things that separate us from God and from each other.
- **Taking up our Cross:** Dying to self and living victoriously through Jesus Christ.
- **Following Jesus:** Living as Jesus lived, suffering like He suffered, and being willing to die like He died.

Today, the Holy Spirit invites us once again, to count the cost of following Jesus. The price is complete surrender. Are you ready? Are you willing? Then, sing away! God is listening.

## WEEK THIRTY-ONE

# Building an Altar of Gratitude

*An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it. And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it. (Exodus 20:24 NIV)*

Over the years, I have toyed with the idea of building an altar, asking myself why and for what purpose? I have never built an altar. Maybe because of our culture or even more, because of my uncertainty about building one. I have seen an altar in the home of a Buddhist surrounded with fruit, flowers, and trinkets. I have seen Cairns – a group of stones laid one upon the other, used as landmarks, and a place of remembrance. Throughout the Old Testament, we read of stories where people built altars to the Lord. In Genesis 8:20, Noah built an altar after leaving the Ark. Abraham and Lot built their first altar in Canaan when they parted ways and Abraham built an altar to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22.

In Exodus 20:24, I was struck by the simplicity of how God wants us to build an altar. He wants an altar of earth, built with raw stones and a humble heart. When we read of the biblical events explaining why an altar was built, we see it is because God wanted to come to His people and bless His people because of the events He brought into their lives. Through those events the people remembered what God had done for them. The altar of their heart was where they found His blessings and offered their gratitude.

As you journey through life, like the Israelites, may your heart be an altar of gratitude to God, and a storehouse of His blessings.

Rev. Val VandeHaar

## WEEK THIRTY-TWO

# Whatever You Do

***Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:23-24 NIV)***

Writing to the Colossians on the issue of work, Paul says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23-24). What a wonderful principle to live by. Rather than working to impress or compete with others, Paul instructs the Colossians to labor diligently for an audience of one--God alone. Their reward is the inheritance they will receive from God when their work on earth is done (Matthew 25:23).

Sadly, in these modern times, many of us are caught up in a rat-race. In our endless pursuit to get to the top of the ‘success’ ladder, we forget that our service to human bosses results only in short-term rewards. Even those within the church have fallen prey to this culture. The late great missionary C.T. Studd (1860-1931) once summed it up this way: “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past; Only what’s done for Christ will last.” As we labor today, let us remember to do it as though God were watching. In truth, He is!

What have you been called to do? Are you serving with all your heart as serving the Lord, or are you just trying to get through the day? Are you serving selflessly, or do you have ulterior motives? Is your soul in it? Are you doing it for God’s glory? Paul says, ‘whatever you do’ do it for God. So, whether you are a janitor, teacher, doctor, pastor, parent, or whatever you do, put your whole heart in it. If this instruction was good for the Colossians, it is good for us too.

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK THIRTY-THREE

# The Beauty of Harmony

***Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8 NIV)***

Choral music has different voices singing different notes at the same time. This harmony provides a unity of sound with a variety of notes. Sometimes the composer deliberately arranges a chord with notes that are in musical tension. The listener and the singers can hear that something isn't quite right. The composer resolves the tension with the four parts singing a beautiful chord.

Sometimes life is like a melody. We get together to watch the Detroit Lions play football with other Detroit Lions fans. We are together with other people who like the same thing we do. Sometimes life is lived in harmony. I like being at a Bible study when everybody brings a different translation. The different translations add a variety that enriches our understanding of God's Word. Another example of living in harmony is a good church pot-luck meal. People bring a variety of foods. It is the variety of food that makes such a wonderful meal. The meal is harmonious. We are united in mind with different foods.

Harmonious relationships appreciate the different gifts and talents that we have. At the same time, harmonious relationships bring us together through sympathy, brotherly love, kindness, and humility. Harmony is a beautiful way to live.

Rev. Jeffrey Meyers



## WEEK THIRTY-FOUR

# A Fresh Beginning

*“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*  
(Luke 23:34 NIV)

Three men hung on a cross that day at Golgotha. One criminal felt it was all over, while the other joined the crowds in taunting Jesus, **“Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”** he shouted. The first criminal waited to hear words of condemnation, but all he heard Jesus say was, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** In that moment he knew that the man in the middle was the *One*; Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah; the *One* who demonstrated a love that never gives up. This was the *One* who hung out with those on the fringes of society. He was the *One* who promised us that God’s love was so great, it even included us in His all-encompassing embrace.

And as the first criminal listened to the second criminal berate Jesus, he had to intervene, so he shouted, **“Be quiet! Do you not fear God? We have been condemned justly, but this man has done nothing wrong”** (Luke 23: 40-41). Then he turned to face Jesus, while acknowledging his guilt he said, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”** To which, Jesus responded, **“Truly, I tell you, this day you will be with me in paradise”** (Luke 23:43).

We are like those criminals, but Jesus looks at us with love because He understands that we do not know what we are doing. He knows our flaws, and still, He invites us to return to Him. When we do, we will hear Him say, **“Truly, I tell you... you will be with me in paradise.”** It is never over and never too late with Jesus. At any point, when we turn towards Him, it is just a fresh beginning. Thanks be to God! Do not delay, return to Him today.

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK THIRTY-FIVE

# He Cares for You

*Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7 NIV)*

The songwriter, Jimmy Owens, wrote a beautiful song titled “He Cares for Me” (1971). It is about God’s care for us. The first verse and chorus are as follows:

*Our God is far greater than words can make known.  
Exalted and holy, He reigns on His throne.  
In infinite splendor, He rules over all.  
Yet He feeds the poor sparrows, and He knows when they fall.*

*His power is great and will ever endure.  
His wisdom is peaceable, gentle, and pure.  
But greater than all these glories I see  
Is the glorious promise that He cares for me.*

God is willing to come alongside us and help us with our hurts, habits, hang-ups, and general things we worry about in life. Why does He do this? The answer is: “because He cares for you.” Another way to translate “He cares for you” is to say, “You matter to God.” Do you know why you matter to God? Because He loves you. Let that sink in. It will melt your heart. The One who is far greater than words can make known says, “He cares for you.”

Rev. Jeffrey Meyers





## WEEK THIRTY-SIX

# Yet, We Will Rejoice

*...yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.  
(Habakkuk 3:18 NIV)*

By all measurements, we are living life “in the thick of it.” Our lives are beginning to feel dystopian. The foundations we once counted on no longer seem stable. How can we thrive when the future seems so bleak, so fragile, and so uncertain?

The prophet Habakkuk may have something to teach us about thriving. As he looks at his nation, he is worried about the lackluster spiritual landscape he sees. He complains to God about the violence, the strife, the injustice, the paralysis of the legal system, as well as the spiritual complacency around him, but quickly adds, “**...yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior**” (Habakkuk 3:18). And that one word ‘yet’ says it all. Despite the destruction around him, Habakkuk chooses to rejoice in the LORD. He exercises his will, aligning it to God’s will by leaning toward joy.

In these distressing and anxious times, Habakkuk calls us to the ‘yet.’ He encourages us to rejoice, not so much in a God who changes our circumstances, but in a God who is in the midst of our circumstances. Thriving in these times requires that we cling to the hope present in the ‘yet.’ This is sometimes hard to do, but thankfully we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is present to strengthen us when our faith is tested, so we can confidently declare with the Psalmist, “**The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress**” (Psalm 46:7). As the days ahead unfold, may the Lord give us the courage and strength to hope and tarry in the ‘yet,’ and may He give us the will to be joyful in Him no matter what.

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK THIRTY-SEVEN

# Barriers Along the Way

*Then he [Jesus] told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13: 3-9 NIV)*

One way to learn from scripture is to look at it creatively, imagining yourself in the situation. When have you felt like you were in a rocky or thorny place? What was it like? When have you felt “pecked?” What blocks you from seeing and experiencing God?

A few years ago, there was a great solar eclipse in the United States. In centuries past, an eclipse could be scary as it blocked the sun, and everything turned dark. But times when the sun has been blocked have also led to great growth. During eclipses, scientists have learned about the shape of the earth, the sun’s corona, earth’s atmosphere, and the size of the moon to name a few.

Rocky, thorny, bird-pecking times in life can be painful, especially when our sense of God is blocked. Even so, they too can be opportunities for growth if we remain spiritually open. Ask God for help to learn from your circumstances and to have what you need to grow during difficult times.

Rev. Karen Henderlong

## WEEK THIRTY-EIGHT

# Thriving in God's Presence

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1 NIV)*

This is a familiar verse. We have spoken it, heard it, and read it in the Bible. God is our refuge, and He is strong. But what does this mean that God is our very present help. We find in Genesis 3, that God was in the Garden with Adam and Eve when they sinned. In Exodus 40:34 we read that **“the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”** Leviticus 9:23-24 tells us that **“Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.”** In these scriptures we see God’s presence in disobedience, in His glory, and in fire!

The Spirit of God is the presence of God bringing refuge and strength to the people of God. Matthew 18:20 reads, **“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them”** and Hebrews 13:5 reads, **“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”**

God was physically present among His twelve disciples as they were fishing for fish and for humankind, preaching God’s love, healing the sick, and casting out demons. God’s Presence was with them when Jesus broke bread with tax collectors and walked on water. In the Garden of Gethsemane, God’s Presence was among the Roman soldiers as they arrested Jesus.

We may not see Jesus physically, yet His presence is very real. Are you looking for His presence? He is with you.

Rev. Val VandeHaar

## WEEK THIRTY-NINE

# From 'Blah' to Blessing

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13 NIV)*

Have you ever experienced Monday morning blues? These are days when crushing fatigue, dreariness, or mental fog leave us wondering if we are ever going to make it. Sometimes this feeling can become the theme of our lives. We glance in the mirror and all we can see is 'small, wretched me,' rather than the masterpiece God created.

In this age of relativity, meaning is often determined by personal context: How I feel, what I think and so on. Paul reminds us that we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength, even on a foggy Monday morning. His starting points are not personal feelings or personal ability. Paul's starting point is God's Word and God's ability. He reminds us to have confidence in the Lordship of Jesus Christ over our lives. He testifies that no matter how he "feels," he can trust in Christ's strength in every life situation. If Paul can do this, so can we. Yes, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

How are you feeling today, about your life, marriage, parenting, work, finances, the future, and so on? What does God's Word say about your situation? Consider this, despite their "blahs," the likes of Paul, Abraham, Moses, David, and Sarah achieved great things and experienced miracles through God's Word, and you can too. Put your trust in His Word no matter how impossible your situation may appear and watch Him turn your 'blah' into a blessing. To quote someone else, "Let your test be your testimony." Yes, it is true, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. May His grace be sufficient for you today and every day and may His Word fill your heart with abundant faith, assurance, blessing, and peace.

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK FORTY

# Blessed and Approved

*Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life. (James 1:12 NIV)*

“All sunshine makes for a desert” (Arab Proverb). Have you ever thought of life this way? That too much of anything, even a good thing, may not necessarily be beneficial for anyone? It is natural to want things to go our way all the time, but we must admit that life does not always work like that. Real life is much more complex. Sometimes tough times come. Relationships are damaged. Financial worries plague us. Change interrupts our best laid plans. These challenges are good when they help us develop healthy coping skills.

Concerning trials, Jesus says, “In this world, you will have trouble” (John 16:33a), and then He adds, “Take heart. I have overcome the world” (John 16:33b). Jesus reminds us that He has already won our battles. By trusting Him and leaning on Him, by believing in His promises for us, and by persevering in His truth, we will get through any trial and achieve the crown of eternal life. These times of testing serve to mature our faith.

Therefore, consider yourself blessed as you go through trials. It is in these seasons that your faith is nurtured and shaped by God himself. God’s Word assures us that once proved, your harvest will ripen, and your reward will be waiting. What a wonderful promise for anyone going through unexpected hardship right now. Your reward for obeying God is the crown of life. Every trial eventually ends. My prayer for you is that you will persevere and let God give you His strength for the journey as He shapes you into the person you are meant to be.

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK FORTY-ONE

# A Culture of Encouragement

***Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV)***

I've noticed people are quick to put others down. Discouraging words are spoken daily. I've heard words that I didn't even know their meaning. I knew it was a putdown word by the inflection of the speaker's voice. There must be some unhappy people in this country.

Let's be encouragers. Let us even go a step further and create a culture of encouragement. Let us be so full of encouragement that it flows from us to people we encounter throughout the week. Encouragement begins with being thankful. Thanksgiving is appreciating an action that is completed. Encouragement is providing emotional and spiritual support for an action we are currently doing or are going to do in the near future. These two attitudes are like bookends. Being thankful and encouraging go together in creating a culture of encouragement.

I remember when I was in second grade. (That was five decades ago!) The students in my class took turns reading out loud. After we finished reading, my teacher said, "Jeff you read well. You'd be good at speaking in front of people." I've been speaking in front of people ever since. Encouragement can produce terrific results. Let us create a culture of encouragement.

Rev. Jeffrey Meyers



## WEEK FORTY-TWO

# Where is the Light?

***Again, Jesus spoke to them saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12 NIV)***

Have you ever put something in a good place and later forgot where you put it? At my house, this means we can never find a flashlight when we need one! This is so frustrating! But, when we find the flashlight, we are excited because now we can see where we are going by following the light.

In Jesus' day, it was sometimes hard for the people to see the light. The Roman government was persecuting Christians, the Pharisees wanted people to live by the law, and there were divisions within the church. The Jews and Gentiles were not accepting of one another. And the words Jesus spoke and the miracles He performed created great unrest among the people. Jesus' first miracle He turned water into wine at a wedding in Cana; He performed miracles on the Sabbath Day, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees; He used a whip for clearing the moneychangers and animals out of the temple; He told Nicodemus, a grown man, to be born again; He healed the sick and raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus told the people He was the Truth, the Bread of Life and the Living Water. The people felt confused and afraid.

It is sometimes hard for us today to see the light of Jesus with all that is happening in our lives and in this world. God's Word reminds us that those who follow Jesus will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Let the light of Jesus show you the way today and every day.

Rev. Val VandeHaar



## WEEK FORTY-THREE

# Trustworthy God

*God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?  
(Numbers 23:19 NIV)*

If you live long enough, you will discover that human beings will lie, they will renege on promises, and they will let you down; but, God will never lie, He keeps His promises and will never let you down. Those who desire to experience His overwhelming goodness must learn to walk by faith and trust in what they cannot see. They must continually summon the strength to leap into the arms of an unfathomable God who is constant and true and will never fail them.

This God has already proven His commitment toward us who believe by sending His One and only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins and eternal death. What is it that can be more difficult than this? What can be more proof of His love and devotion toward us? If you are currently facing a situation that seems impossible, think on this, “God is not a man, that he should lie.” This trustworthy and ever-faithful God says to you and me, “Call on me in the day of trouble; and I will deliver you” (Psalm 50).

So, today, call upon His name and remind yourself that He is the God who makes the blind to see, who makes the lame to walk, who sets the prisoner free, who rescues some from the fiery furnace, and who saves others from the lions' den; His promises for you, are true! You can count on Him even when you do not understand or see Him in your situation. Simply trust in His character and in His unchanging Word and then be patient and wait for Him.

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK FORTY-FOUR

# Get Up and Go

*Jesus got up and went with Him, and so did His disciples.  
(Matthew 9: 18-19 NIV)*

I received a text recently that began thus, “I know how busy you are, but I was wondering if...” In an instant, conviction hit me. I thought, “Hmm! Is that the vibe I am emitting to the world?” My friend needed my time but was hesitant to ask for it because she felt she might be bothering me. How terrible, and yet, if we are honest, how often have we uttered the phrase, “I am so busy.”

I was inadvertently putting up ‘Stop!’ signs rather than ‘Welcome!’ signs in my daily interactions with others. In contrast, when Jairus interrupted Jesus to ask Him to help his sick daughter, Jesus welcomed the interruption; Jesus got up and went with him. He moved towards a father in desperate need. Jairus approached Jesus without hesitation, possibly because Jesus’ ‘sign’ said, “Welcome!” Despite the responsibilities before Him, Jesus welcomed Jairus’ interruption. He was not ‘too busy.’ Similarly, He is never too busy for us; He is always available and near when we call.

In a world where people need your time, are you open to interruptions or are you ‘too busy?’ Will you welcome the interruptions that come your way today? Will you get up and go? Jesus got up and went to Jairus’ side. He got up and went to Mary and Martha’s house. He got up and went to Calvary for you and for me. Now He beckons us to get up and go as the Holy Spirit enables us to attend to His will and purposes. As you attend to His people, God will attend to you. So let us encourage one another today.

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK FORTY-FIVE

# Thriving in God's Peace

*In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:8 NIV)*

Peace does not come easily in this life. If we do not have peace, we do not have sleep. Our verse assures us that we will both lie down and sleep when we dwell in the safety of the Lord.

We read Psalm 4 as an expression of David's confidence and trust in the Lord. David is running for his life while being pursued by his conniving and manipulative son Absalom (2 Samuel 15)! I would imagine David was afraid and yet, because of his close relationship with the Lord, he let go of his fear and focused on the Lord. David begins by asking for God's grace (vs. 1) and urging his enemies to stop rebelling against God (vs. 2). David is assured that, as a faithful servant, God hears when he calls to Him (vs.3). Then David says, 'do not sin', think about what you are doing, search your heart, offer righteous sacrifices (this means do not repay evil for evil, rather offer a blessing) and trust in the Lord (a key word to peace and safety). David seeks God's face shining in favor (vs.6) causing David's heart to be filled with joy, like the joy of an abundant harvest of grain and new wine! At last, with David's strong trust in the Lord, he was able to both lie down and sleep, not toss and turn, dwelling in the safety of the Lord!

Tonight, when you lay your head down, remember, God is taking care of everything. Trust Him! Be confident in Him, for you are dwelling in the safety of His presence.

Rev. Val VandeHaar



## WEEK FORTY-SIX

# You Are Worth It

*...you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:31 NIV)*

When Jesus sent His twelve disciples out into the world, He gave them a series of instructions, among them, “do not worry” (Matthew 10:31). But we humans like to worry about the unknown. We like to meddle, and we like to try to fix things on our own. Many of us find it difficult to trust, and yet God calls us to trust Him because we are valuable to Him.

Consider the current real estate market. The price of homes has skyrocketed, as potential homebuyers try to outbid each other. You may have wondered, “Are these homes even worth the price?” This is an important but tricky question, because considering the reality of the real estate market environment, a house, in the end, is worth what someone is willing to pay for it.

In like manner, we were sinners, helpless and condemned, set aside for judgment and punishment---worthless. But God was willing to purchase our salvation. Noting that we were incapable of paying for our sin, He paid the ultimate price, giving up Jesus’ life in exchange for our lives. Now by His grace, we are worth what God was willing to pay for us---the blood of His Son. The world might sometimes wonder, “Am I worth it?” You may even wrestle with this question yourself. And God’s response would be an affirmative and resounding, “Yes, you are worth it! You are worth every drop of blood my Son shed on that Cross.” This is Good News. Stop doubting yourself. You are worth it because God has ordained it! If He cares about the sparrows, how much more does He care about you? Take time today to reflect on this truth; you are worth it. You are worth more than many sparrows.

Rev. Joan Cornelison



## WEEK FORTY-SEVEN

# Words Matter

***But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. (Matthew 12:36 NIV)***

Words matter. Words have the power of life and death (Proverbs 18:21). The writer of the gospel of Matthew says, "For by your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37; See also Luke 12:3). Jesus was addressing the Pharisees who had just accused Him of being demon-possessed. This is a clear warning to us and especially to anyone who holds influence over others; tame the tongue. The writer of Proverbs is even more blunt, "Too much talk leads to sin. Be sensible and keep your mouth shut" (Proverbs 10:19). Ouch!

Someone once said, "Think of whom you speak, of what you speak and how you speak, before you speak." That is a whole lot of thinking that is meant to limit gossip and lies. Empty words have a high cost. They have caused countries to go to war; they have destroyed relationships; they have even broken business partnerships. Get this--the serpent's empty words in the garden of Eden launched Adam and Eve on the wrong path and humanity has never been the same since.

People listen to what we say, and it tells them who we really are. As we go about our day, may our words be like balm to wounded souls. May we build up, fill up, and lift up, rather than break down, hurt, or destroy. For "those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity" (Proverbs 21:23). In this era where cruel, careless, and untruthful words are threatening the foundations of our nation and of our lives, let your words be few, let them be true, let them be wise, but above all, let them be kind.

Rev. Joan Cornelison

## WEEK FORTY-EIGHT

# Thriving Among God's People

*And they, the fellowship of believers, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42 NIV)*

This past weekend I was thriving among God's people. We talked, we laughed, we listened, we played games, we shared food, and we prayed together. We had a great time of fellowship! It reminded me of Psalm 118:24: **"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!"**

There is a Greek word for fellowship. It is *koinonia*. Pronounced *coin-o-knee-a*. It is defined as Christian fellowship. Jesus and His disciples experienced *koinonia* while feeding the 5,000, healing the sick, and breaking bread together at the last supper. As Christians, we experience *koinonia* like the disciples when we devote our time to God's Word, building one another up, sharing in Holy Communion, and simply praying together. When we are in fellowship, our focus is on Christ, His desires and His purpose for our lives. Christian fellowship helps to sharpen our faith. Proverbs 27:17 says, **"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."**

We need Christian fellowship for our faith journey. We cannot journey alone. This week, seek the *koinonia*, the Christian fellowship, and enjoy your journey together with others in the family of faith!

Rev. Val VandeHaar



## WEEK FORTY-NINE

# Welcome to the Table

*So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.  
(2 Samuel 9:11 NIV)*

Summer is a good time to share a meal around the family table. Many people like to cook on their grill. Grilling is a good reason to sit outside and have conversations with family and friends. In 2 Samuel there is a story about a man named Mephibosheth. He is Saul's grandson. He is Jonathan's son. Saul and Jonathan have passed away. Mephibosheth is the surviving member of his family. He is alone.

Four times in the chapter we are told that David invites Mephibosheth to "eat at my table regularly." What David is doing is treating Mephibosheth like he is part of the family. He is including him in the family mealtime. The church is the family of God. It is a blessing to be invited to share a meal with other members of the family of God. We can share the meal in our kitchen or on the deck. We can share at a restaurant or at a picnic. The location is not important. The important thing is that we treat one another like family.

When we share a meal, we often start talking with one another about what has been happening in our lives. This leads us to opening the Word of God. The physical meal turns into a spiritual meal. We talk, we listen, we laugh, we share, we care, we pray. We treat one another like family. This week, let us take some time to share a meal with others. We are enriched when we treat one another like family.

Rev. Jeffrey Meyers



## WEEK FIFTY

# The Name of Jesus

*...let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. (Acts 4:8-10 NIV)*

Peter and John had just healed a sick man, but when questioned about the source of their power, they acknowledged Christ's centrality to their work, stating, **"this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth."** They gave Jesus credit. How about you, by whose power do you perform your charitable deeds? To whom do you give credit?

In a world that thrives on personal achievements, self-promotion, personal branding, public acknowledgements, and praise, it may be tempting to take credit for the work we do, and the results that follow; but God's word reminds us, **"I am the LORD; I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols"** (Isaiah 42:8).

As we go about our lives this week, let us pause occasionally to reflect on the true source of our talents, spiritual gifts, and power. Let us, like Peter, give glory where glory is due. God's Word is clear, He will not yield His glory to another. That includes you and me. He alone is worthy of adoration, praise, honor, and majesty. His name is higher than any other name and without Him we would be nothing and would achieve nothing. His name is Jesus. Take time to lift His name up today.

Rev. Joan Cornelison





## WEEK FIFTY-ONE

# Prayer that Transforms Us

***Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2 NIV)***

It is hard to not conform to the ways of this world. Every day we are pulled into the events of the world - a political stance, an environmental issue, church disagreements, and family difficulties. It is so easy to get caught up in our thoughts and opinions that we forget to search God's Word for the right way to be transformed.

One way to renew our minds is through prayer. Prayer is a mystery. It describes a relationship. It is a way of speaking to God throughout the day. Through prayer, our minds are renewed by the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us to discern the will of God and then choose how to act upon it. The author and priest, Henri Nouwen writes, "Prayer, therefore, is the act of doing to all that we consider to be our own and of being born to a new existence which is not of the world."

Prayer takes practice and commitment. We can begin with scripture, such as Psalm 23. We can pray Romans 12:2. We can pray in our cars, in our easy chair, at work, alone or with others. As we continue to pray, we develop a rhythm of talking to God and keeping company with Jesus. As we continue to pray, we will see what God sees, hear what God hears, and discover ourselves listening to the voice of God.

John Stott writes, "Men and women are at their noblest when they are on their knees before God in prayer...to pray is not only to be truly godly, it is also to be truly human." As you are developing your prayer life, allow it to transform you "to a new existence which is not of the world" (Henri Nouwen).

Rev. Val VandeHaar



## WEEK FIFTY-TWO

# God's Blessing

***The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.  
(Numbers 6:24-26 NIV)***

Dallas Willard is quoted in the book, Soul Keeping, as saying: “Churches should do seminars on how to bless and not curse others.” He’s got a point worth thinking about. Blessing is not just a word. Blessing is the projection of good into the life of another. We bless with our minds, our words, our actions—with our very being. That is why blessing is done by the soul.

When we say, “May the LORD bless you,” we are asking the Lord to constantly bring good into your life. The words we say are seeking God’s goodness in the life of the person we are blessing. To understand what is meant when we say, “make His face shine upon you,” you need only see the face of a grandparent looking at a grandchild. The face of a grandparent shines. It is interesting to see the face of the grandchild beam and shine in response. “Lifting up a countenance” is what we do to let someone know we are fully present. We are present when we lift our face from our cell phone or laptop and look at the other person. It is a great act of love.

Our world needs more blessings and less cursing. Let us be a source of blessing!

Rev. Jeffrey Meyers



# Notes







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