

# WHAT WONDROUS LOVE IS THIS



## DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

2017

### PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

3530 Dayton Xenia Road

Beavercreek, OH 45432

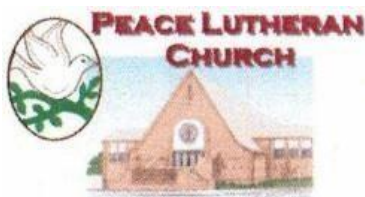
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# 2017

## Lenten

### Devotional

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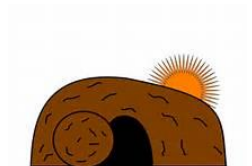
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**LENT ends on Easter**

**"He is risen."**

**"He is risen indeed!"**



## DAY 1

## Life Happens

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. <sup>9</sup> Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! <sup>10</sup> They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. <sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:7-11*

My daughter is collapsed in front of me. Crying. No, sobbing.

Why?

Because I won't let her wear her underwear as a hat to daycare.

We've also stopped her from cutting her hair, cutting her socks, using Daddy's chef knife to cut her plastic vegetables, and drying kitchen utensils in our dryer.

There were other close calls. Like that one summer night when we put her to bed, and Doug went outside to work on the house. Then, an hour later, she slipped out of the house, wandered all the way around the house and as Doug was standing on a ladder against the side of the house—she triumphantly called out, "Hi, Daddy!"

Parenting, it seems, is full of moments like these. And she's our first child. And she's only three.

These moments range from annoying to terrifying.

It doesn't take any work for the moment to pass, and it takes some effort to let your emotions calm down. But it takes a lot of effort to carry out the "debriefing" of the situation. You have to think about 1) what your child can understand at their age, 2) what you want to communicate to them, and 3) how you want them to feel about it.

It's that third point that I think about a lot. In my relationship with my young daughter, I've learned that I'm more effective in disciplining her when I give her space to feel her emotions, let her come to me in her own time, listen to her, acknowledge her emotions, tell her what I hear her saying, and then tell her why she can't do something or needs to do something else.

But, let's face it, when you're an adult, you so don't want to be on the receiving end of this advice. You would much rather be the person giving the discipline than receiving it. I mean, you've put in your time as a child and it's over. Right?

Then, life happens. "Endure hardship as discipline," Hebrews 12:7 tell us. Adulthood is full of hardship. Financial hardship, disease and illness, strained family relationships, grief, and job loss or change, just to name a few. I admit that when I'm experiencing hardship as an adult, I often don't see it as a moment when I'm being disciplined. My first impulse is to see it as an unjust turn of events. A tragedy. Or worse, a fodder for the nagging side of brain that doubts that God really exists.

"Endure hardship as discipline."

Somewhere along the line, we have bolstered ourselves with our own self-worth and lost the practice of humbling ourselves to the life's lessons. When we start to believe that we have nothing left to learn, we become fossilized in our ways.

We become what we don't want our children to be.

Sharon Glass

*Today's Prayer:*

*God, please help me to remain flexible and open to your will. Even when times are tough. Especially when times are tough. Help me to see Your Love and your discipline through this hardship that seems to be only tragedy.*

**DAY 2****For God So Loved the World**

*"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." Genesis 1:31*

Late on many a starry night, I lie in my hammock and look out from Spaceship Earth. Only on starry nights can we see where we are. During the day, the curtain of blue hides the stars, but on cloudless nights we can gaze through our atmospheric window. Even though the night sky is illuminated by our city lights; the brighter stars, constellations, and planets greet us. Through binoculars thousands of stars dot the heavens. Astronomers estimate more than 200 billion suns in our galaxy and more than a trillion galaxies in the Universe. There are more stars in the cosmos than all the grains of sand on all the Earth's beaches.

Carl Sagan, the late Cornell astronomer, suggested to NASA that our first robotic explorer of the outer planets, Voyager I, take a snapshot of our home as Voyager headed out from our solar system. In February 1990 billions of miles from Earth, Voyager recorded that image. The Earth was but a small blue speck, a mere dot in the blackness of space. Sagan wrote and talked about that speck, that "blue dot," where we have lived and loved and fought for centuries. On that dot has been written the history of our species. For Sagan, that image of a small dot, Spaceship Earth, underscored our insignificance in the vastness of the cosmos.

How different my experience! When I see the image of that blue dot, I am filled with joy. I am part of this grandeur! Some evenings watching the stars, I am overwhelmed by the love of our Creator. The God who transcends all space and time, the very Creator of space and time, cares about us, loves us. We are a part of the Universe. God's Universe. We can partake in the communion of the stars and planets. And God so loved us and God so loved this small dot, this speck, that He came among us and called us to Him.

John Ballard

*Today's Prayer:*

*O wondrous Father, creator of starlight, forgive our inattention to the miracles within and around us. Help us to seek after you under the stars and in the busyness of life. Give us the courage to reflect your light in moments of darkness and help us to share love on our cosmic journey.*

**DAY 3****What a Friend We Have in Jesus**

*"For God so loved the World that he gave his only Son, that who so ever believes In Him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:16*

**Meditate on:**

When I was a child I began to discover what my strengths were. I also became very aware of all the things and areas that were very difficult for me. This was very discouraging to me. This was about the time I was also learning about God and Jesus and His love of me. This is when I learned the hymn "What a friend we have in Jesus." It was and is very helpful and comforting to me.

**What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer.  
Oh, what peace we offer forfeit,  
Oh, what needless pain we bear  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer**

Edna Kimm

*Today's Prayer:*

*Gracious God,*

*Thank you for loving me. Help me to continue to participate in the work that you would have me do.*

*AMEN*

## DAY 4

## We are so Loved

*"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Gallatians 2:20*

How does this verse affect me or us? I think back to a song that we sang in church and Sunday school so many years ago:

*For God so loved the world, he gave his only Son to die for you and me--Our sins to set us free.  
Someday he's coming back--What glory that will be.  
How wonderful for you and me.*

Our pathway to forgiveness of our sins and our entrance to heaven and everlasting life is predicated on the fact that God sacrificed his only Son to die for us so that our sins might be forgiven and so that we may attain or achieve eternal life.

I have two children; both of whom I love and care for very much. I cannot imagine sacrificing either of my children for any mission or purpose. But, God so loved us that he sacrificed his only Son, Jesus, to die for us on a cross so that all of us may live in the life hereafter. Such love he demonstrated for all of us!

Anne Shale

*Today's Prayer:*

*Heavenly Father, we praise you for taking care of us with your tender loving care. What a sacrifice it must have been for you to oversee the crucifixion of your Son to allow to us forgiveness of all of our sins. We are forever grateful for your tender loving care. Amen*





**DAY 5**

**Inner Peace**

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid. " John 14:27*

One of my favorite bible verses when I was a teenager spoke about peace and illustrates that God 's love can provide peace in any situation. The poetic words from the King James version of this verse helped me to rely on God as I transitioned from a teenager through the different stages and events of my life.

God's peace is not what we can find in the world but an inner peace that will with stand the pressures of the world. When illness, loneliness, anger, world events, and so forth rear up in our lives, we can tap into this inner peace and know that God is with us. When we question God as to why bad things happen, we can look at the peace that God provides – like a mother comforting her baby – God's peace will comfort us in our fear.

Many times, we cannot control events in our lives or our communities, but we can control our reactions by seeking the peace and love of God, the peace that sets us free. The next time a crisis emerges, remember that God does care.

Marnita Eaddie

*Today's Prayer:*

*"Today, dear Lord, let me be still and know that you are God."*

Troubles I am releasing into God's hands:

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## DAY 6      God's Love Remains the Same

*"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:10*

I write this in late-December, while I am nine months pregnant with our second child, who is due in mid-January. So, as you are reading this during the Lenten season, I am most certainly in the throes of the "newborn phase."

If you've ever had a newborn baby in your house, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

It's a kind of insanity. A place where the past and the future are completely muted while you are mired in a seemingly ceaseless list of repetitive tasks. You exist only in the present and your present looks like this: feed, burp, feed, burp, feed, change, soothe, soothe, soothe. Fall asleep wherever you are. Wake up to crying. Feed, burp, feed, change...

You get the idea.

In her book, *The Philosophical Baby*, Alison Gopnik comments on how this constant care-taking affects parents: **It makes them love their child.**

Our culture often romanticizes birth as this miraculous event when love just descends on the mother, the father, and the child and unites them in an unbreakable bond.

But those of us who have lived through the process of bringing a new life into the world—complete with all of its immense joy and pain—suspect that this is not quite right.

At the moment of birth, we are exuberant and relieved. But once the euphoria has left, the reality hits you. You are now responsible for this tiny, helpless person. Who cries. Sometimes all day. Sometimes all night. Without an end in sight. Then the thoughts come. *How are we going to do this? How are we going to physically make it through this?*

The answer is simple, but harsh.

One moment at a time. One hour at a time. One day at a time.

Your days are full of moments when you choose to, once again, provide care. Even though you are exhausted. Even though you haven't showered in the last two days. Even though you don't know when you'll sleep next. Even though you are in pain. Even though the help has stopped coming.

Even though no one thanks you. Even though no one even witnesses your sacrifice.

In those constant moment-by-moment decisions to care for this tiny person, you knit together the beginnings of love. Each decision is another loop attached to the previous one. Each action that you perform shows you what it means to love purely. To give and give without asking for anything in return.

This is that pure, unrequited love that John talks about in the verses above. We don't consider newborns kind or intelligent or merciful or any of the many qualities that we consider worthy of our love or reward.

And yet we love them.

Just like the relationship between the newborn and the parent, God loves us before we can offer anything to Him. This is what our baptism symbolizes. Before we can be or become anything, God demonstrates that He loves us. Nothing we do can make God love us more or less. Even when we disappoint Him. Even when we please Him.

God's love remains the same.

Sharon Glass

*Today's prayer:*

*God. Thank you for loving me before I could ever love You. Help me to extend the same love toward my family, my friends, my neighbors, my church, and my community.*

## DAY 7                      Who is Greater?

*"For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." Luke 22:27 (New English Translation)*

This scripture, I just love; "Who is greater, ...I am among you as one who serves." It isn't the who is greater part that gets me, it is that serving is great.

I've felt God always calling me to serve. That was my calling. When I'm at the office, I know what to do and I'm pretty-darn good at serving others.

We, though, live in a world that tells us how important is money. More, of most everything, is better. The house we live in is important. The clothes we wear are important. We must this and we must that. We no longer elect people to the office who are less educated, yet better for the job. Fewer of the people we admire come from humble backgrounds. If you have a million plus dollars, no matter your character, you are something special.

And, I struggle with that at times, balancing the world's view of people, success and money with God's wish for us to serve. I struggle with the world's view of my being worthy or good enough.

While visiting with my best friend from high school who happened to be a high-level bank executive, my thoughts were about what I hadn't accomplished and how much she had. I worried about the air conditioner going out and my husband and I juggling paying that with two kids in college. My friend, I was proud of her. Yet, I consoled myself that I was doing what God had called me to do and I was serving others.

We walked out of the restaurant into the parking lot. There was a man sawing a 2x4 on the back of his pickup truck. The board bounced and moved as he was trying to saw. My thought was that was going to be a difficult task. My friend, well she turned and in her suit and high heels, grabbed the board to steady it.

The man cut through the board in record time. He looked a little in shock. Board cut she turned and started walking with me again. No comment, just going back to the conversation. My love for her grew in the moment. "I am among you who serve."

I learned a couple of things that night. One, I may be called to serving, but I certainly overlook some opportunities.

My friend stood in the parking lot holding down a board and proved to me that the one at the table, can also be the one who serves.

Throughout the Bible, we have great examples of people who are considered worthy and good enough servers of God. None of it equates to money or having the best or most, it usually equates to serving and loving others. It's not the job, it's not the money. It's taking the opportunity to serve and see the serving of others.

Be on the lookout to see where you see others serving today. There that's love.

Susan Lopez

*Today's prayer:*

*God, the qualities I see lived out so well in some people are a reflection of your own goodness, and I know that I have much to learn from other people who reflect your image and likeness. Help me to remain positive, to continue serving, and to see the serving spirit of others in the love you intended. Amen*

Here is where I saw people helping others today Lord: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**DAY 8            Let the Little Children Speak**

*"Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven." Matthew 18:10*

Our Pre-k and Kindergarten faith formation class and their leaders were given the opportunity to respond to this year's Lenten Question of **What is Love?** When asked "What does God's love mean to you?" and "How do you know Jesus loves you?" They answered:

*"God died to save me."*

*"Jesus loves me whether I am good or bad".*

*"Jesus will forgive me when I am not nice to my sister or brother."*

*"Jesus loves me so much, he died on the cross."*

*"I know Jesus loves me because he gave me a mom and a dad."*

*"God sent us Jesus at Christmas."*

*"There is a rainbow after it rains."*

*"I have teachers that help me."*

*"I will get see Jesus when I go heaven."*

*"Being able to come and sing songs and see the glow and understanding of our youngest learners."*

Peace's Pre-K & Kindergarten class

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear God, please help me to remember your love that surrounds me and see your love through the eyes of your youngest disciples. Amen*

## DAY 9

## Love in The Storm

*"My child, do not reject the Lord's discipline, and don't get angry when he corrects you. The Lord corrects those he loves." Proverbs 3:11-13*

The waves are crashing over us and the rain is pouring down. The rocks are falling out from under our feet as we are climbing a mountain and there is no end in sight. We feel alone and don't understand why this is happening to us. We can't feel the love promised to us by our Father in Heaven.

Storms, trials, lessons. We all have them. We've had them our entire life and they serve many purposes of God's plan. Sometimes we recognize them early on, other times we are deep in the middle before we realize what is happening. How easy it is to ask why? Why me, Lord? Why this? Why now?

James 1:2-5 answers this: *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation."*

And, James 1:12 *"But still, sometimes we just don't understand why. We have our own thoughts and plans, our own ideas of how this life should go. Our ways, however, are not on course."*

Isaiah 55:8 *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.*

When we have our heels dug into our ways and what we see for ourselves, it is God's job as our Father to correct us. Just as we correct our children when we see them on the wrong path, so does God do for us when we are not following the plan He has made.

Amanda McQuade

*Today's Prayer:*

*God, let me remember: You do not allow hardship in my life to hurt me, but to make me stronger. No matter how alone I feel, You are standing near me, waiting for me to take Your hand. Let me remember Your love is never failing. Amen*

## DAY 10      The Shade of the Lord

*"I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come.....the Lord Himself watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand, so that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in ... forevermore."*

*Psalm 121:1, 5-6, 8*

**Thought:** Psalm 121 is my favorite bible verse because of the hope and love it conveys to us directly from the Lord. At the Lutheran church I attended in Virginia along with Barbara and our children, this Psalm was read as an integral part of every baptism. The verse provides such a clear message of our Lord's love for us. He says, know throughout your life that when you need Me most, I'm there to walk with you.

**Life Experience:** In my personal life, I can think many instances when I needed the Lord's "shade" to survive, or at least cope, with an event or situation. The most recent of these was a mere two months ago, while visiting our son and his family. I decided it would be a great idea to take their 6-month old for a stroll around the block in his stroller in the dark of the early evening to settle him down before bedtime.

After getting the stroller ready, I went back into the house to get the baby. Unfortunately, while I was inside, the exterior house light, which only works with its motion sensor, had turned itself off. As I pushed the screen door with my shoulder that was attached to the arm holding the baby I was aware of two things: (1) I had no idea when our motion would trigger the light to illuminate the totally dark exterior, and (2) I did not know how many steps I had to navigate, baby in arms, to get to the cement driveway.

I got down the first step with no light and reached out my foot to find the next step. At that moment, I slipped totally out of balance for a moment – certain that disaster awaited the conclusion of my slip. It was at that point that the Lord pushed my right arm against the wall to bring both the baby and me to a solid – and upright – ending to the slipped step. The walk itself was glorious, as I knew it would be; but only because the Lord's "shade" did not let the "moon strike me by night".

Gary Poleskey

*Today's Prayer:*

*Lord, part of your grace to us is the comfort that you are always looking over our going out and our coming in. Let us live our lives with the confidence that comes with that reality, while using the skills and tools you have given to us to make your world a brighter and better place each day – and night.*

**DAY 11            Where You Lead, I Will Follow**

*"Where you go, I will go;  
Where you lodge, I will lodge." Ruth 1:16*

When I was a child, I used to imagine where I would live when I grew up. Sterling Heights, MI, was not one of those places. But, that is where I ended up when I married my first husband. Seven years later, we moved to Bowling Green, OH. Bowling Green was a nice place to live, and I liked living there. It was in BG that I met a woman named Lee Forse. She invited me to her church, Peace Lutheran. It was there that I met the Brandt's, who would be a guiding force in my life and the sponsors for my children. I joined the Lutheran Church while in BG.

I would have been happy to stay there forever, but we moved to Beavercreek in 1993. As we are often told, God has a plan for our lives. If I hadn't moved to Beavercreek, I never would have met Jim, had Caitlyn, or the many friends I now have. God led me here and put people in my life who love me. Sometimes where we end up is not where we wanted to be, but it is where God wants us to be.

Linda Borgert

*Today's Prayer:*

*Lord, let me be content that You will lead my life to places that include loving people. Help me to be one of those people in others' lives.*

**DAY 12      God's Unconditional Love**

*"We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19*

As we reflect on what love is during this Lenten season, I am reminded of several related words: grace, unconditional, and loyal. "We love because he first loved us" is a very simple scripture, yet so full of meaningful insight.

With these words we are reminded of God's grace as Jesus forgave those who betrayed him before his crucifixion. We are comforted by the unconditional love Jesus freely gives despite his closest friends who more than once denied knowing him before he sacrificed his life for ours, and we rest assured that no matter what sin we commit, he is fiercely loyal to loving us and sticking by our side even in our weakest moments. Jesus was crucified next to two criminals and was betrayed by his closest friends, yet he forgave them, offered his unconditional love to them, and remained loyal to them until his final breath.

"We love because he first loved us" is a reminder that even when our closest friends and family betray us, hurt us, and let us down Jesus wants us to love -- loyally love others, unconditionally, and full of grace.

Emily Schmidt

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear Lord, we thank you for sending Jesus to us as an example of how to love others despite our human flaws. Help and guide us to remember to offer grace to those who hurt us, give unconditional love to those who need it most, and to remain loyal to loving others as you would want us to love. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

Personal Thoughts & Reflection:

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**DAY 13****Send Us into the World**

*"People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them." Mark 10:13-16*

**How have you experienced God's love in your life?** I felt God's love in my life is when a hurricane swept over Virginia. My family and I survived the hurricane but the storm struck my home. God showed me the light to move to Ohio because of the living conditions. I'm grateful, because he saved me.

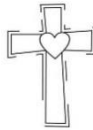
**How has love called you into Life Together?** When Grandpa Koester died, God called the family together and brought family from Virginia, Ohio and across Illinois. We were all sad by the passing of our grandpa and dad's father, but we were all happy to be together after many years.

**How has love called you into service in the world?** When we are born into this world we are all born with a purpose. God gave us this purpose because he knew if he took care of us we would worship him. People are not born without reason, all of us have a goal to achieve. Our family loves us and wants us learn about everything we can do in this world. God made us with this purpose we are all grateful.

Cole Koester

*Today's Prayer:*

*Gracious God we give you thanks for all the ways that You protect us, comfort us, and love us. Continue to draw us close to You though our family, church community and helps us to see Your purpose as you send us out into the world. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen*



## DAY 14      God's Reset Button

*"That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. <sup>12</sup> For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field." Leviticus 25:11-24 (ESV)*

*<sup>13</sup> "In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property. And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. You shall pay your neighbor according to the number of years after the jubilee, and he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops. If the years are many, you shall increase the price, and if the years are few, you shall reduce the price, for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you. You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God.*

*<sup>18</sup> "Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely. And if you say, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?' I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years. When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating some of the old crop; you shall eat the old until the ninth year, when its crop arrives.*

*<sup>23</sup> "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land.*

Leviticus is a pretty stern book detailing many of the laws and requirements levied by God on his people as they entered the Promised Land. The stringent decrees are put in place both to ensure the health and safety of the people and to set apart the Israelites as God's chosen people. *"Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out,"* declares the Lord in Leviticus 20:22 (NIV).

Are you faced with a large burden of laws and expectations that you feel you cannot escape? Have you failed to meet some obligation and are you faced with detrimental consequences? Most of us have experienced small omissions such as forgetting to pay a bill and having to pay a late fee. Some of us have experienced larger omissions with greater consequences such as facing a foreclosure of our homes.

Leviticus describes more extreme situations where the depth of poverty is only remedied by selling yourself into slavery. The laws are put in place to preserve health and safety for society but they can become burdens that seem hopeless. Is this the end of God's story?

Leviticus reveals a few facts in Chapter 25 that can help us adjust our own thinking to God's thinking. Note that God provides rest both for his people and the land. Every seventh year a Sabbatical provides rest for the land as well as the people tending the land. Every seventh Sabbatical is a Year of Jubilee. Israelites living as slaves are set free and people return to their family property. It's God's giant Reset Button that reminds us that we are not defined by our possessions but by being God's chosen people.

During Lent, take some time to think about the role your possessions play in your life. Do your possessions define you? Does your lack of possessions define you? If God declared a Year of Jubilee, would you be willing to joyfully give up claim to your possessions and take on God's claim on you as his child? I invite you to prayerfully consider your response to God's love and grace.

Mike Lassen

*Let us pray:*

*Dear Lord, there are times when the burdens and expectations of your laws are overwhelming. There are other times when I allow wealth or lack of wealth to define who I am. At those times, remind me of your Jubilee. You claimed me as your child...and for your grace, I am grateful. Amen.*



**DAY 15**

**Faith Formation**

*"Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." Proverbs 22:6*

Our middle and high school youth faith formation classes and their leaders were given the opportunity to respond to this year's Lenten Question of What is Love? When asked **"How have you experienced God's love in your life?"** they answered:

*"By praising Him."*

*"By worshiping Him."*

*"By being loved by those around me."*

*"When I got sick, I was taken care of."*

They were also asked **"How has love called you into life together as a community of faith?"** They answered:

*"By helping me through the tuff times."*

*"I come together with friends to worship him and love God."*

*"We serve together by helping others."*

And, **"How has love called you into service in the world?"** They answered:

*"Doing community service."*

*"He gives me opportunities to do service projects."*

Peace's Middle School & High School youth

*Today's Prayer:*

*Gracious God, as we struggle at time in our lives from too much work and the social pressures around us, help us remember that you are with us and that we can hear your voice through scripture but also in our worship, through other members of our faith community, and by servicing other. Help us to see your presence, hear your voice and feel your love. Amen*

**DAY 16****Fruit of the Spirit**

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this." Galatians 5:22-23*

As a teacher in the Faith Haven program at North Riverdale Lutheran Church, I have had the pleasure of working with amazing children and adults. One of the themes we teach is called "Fruit of the Spirit" and one I am particularly inspired by. Whereas all of the "fruit" comes from the Spirit, the emphasis for me is love. I feel it is not only the most important, but also the foundation for all the others. There is not a Wednesday goes by, that I am not filled with the Spirit when I witness the love that grows and spills forth from all of us there. And what strikes me is the people who I come into contact with from different backgrounds, different cultures, different economic status, and different ages. You can see the fruit of the Spirit taking hold and blossoming in even the youngest of hearts. We all gather and share this amazing gift God has given us, especially love.

To see adults and children sharing what they have, showing kindness and empathy to others, and expressing how thankful they are that God has put them in this place makes me feel the Spirit within myself. Although I will never be able to love myself or others to the depth of Christ's love, I will try to let the fruit of the Spirit in me continue to impact my life and how I love others. I hope I can do this with the fervor of the four year old who, when lifting his prayers to God, says, *"I love everybody!"*

Jan Frearson

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear Father in Heaven, thank you so much for blessing us with the fruit of the Spirit, especially love. May we continue to grow in faith through this gift. Let us show others this love and hope that the fruit of the Spirit grows also in them. Amen*

**DAY 17**

**Winter Wind Song**

*"I call upon thee, for thou wilt answer me, O God; incline my ear to me, heart my words, wondrously show thy steadfast love." Psalms 17:6-7*

The polar jet winds have come to ground tonight on the farm.

Trunks, branches, and twigs moan in the flow like vibrating harp strings.

I listen to the stream of notes

but all I can think about are elders wasting and dying,

their spouses weeping,

children clinging to memories.

Those memories play on the instruments of my woodland. It is cold.

I wonder if I dressed and walked in the frigid night into the woods

What would I find?

Perhaps the lives of good souls singing to me in the branches of the forest.

Perhaps God's purpose for us in the universe.

What would I find? I don't know.

Then, today, hearing my distress, God gave me strength to lift a widow into

my arms at her husband's Parastas wake. Her tears streamed against my

cheek -- whispers of love -- and I felt the strength and nearness of God.

The children of the deceased father embraced me

and blessed me with unexpected kisses.

Now I know the notes of the winter wind song.

What I strained to hear is clear.

There is a Savior and a Father who loves us beyond our expectations or deserving.

Who can know the full song of God?

Who could ever hope to sing it?

The full score thrums the branches of my forest and I rejoice.

Mike Case

*Today's Prayer:*

*I praise you O God for wisdom to discern your truth and your presence in our lives. Use me as an instrument of your love to serve you in service to others. Help me to hear your song and listen as you speak to me on my journey. Amen.*

What are some memories in your life that sing of love: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: This devotional was written by John and Emily Ballard's friend, Mike Case who resides near Hobbie, Pennsylvania.

**DAY 18****Unexpected Love**

*Then he (Jesus) said to him a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was upset that he asked him the third time and said, "Lord you know everything; you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." John 21:17*

When I volunteered to write this piece on LOVE, I had something in mind, but when I met my "Adopt-A-Family," during the holidays, my mind changed completely! Peace Church has so many wonderful projects, but I LOVE our "Adopt-A-Family" because it helps me feel I am doing God's work (feeding his sheep). But this year, the sheep fed me. When I took our Christmas gifts to "my" family, two of the five children and their mother were waiting for me – with handmade gifts and this beautiful note:

*"So many times in life we witness the bad in this world, whether it is portrayed through the media or first hand in life experience. Not enough, however, do we get to witness the good. Through your donations and thoughtfulness to our family we get the greatest gift of all: the reminder that there is still good in this world..."*

I think I got the greatest gift of all: love! The hugs and smiles from those two little boys and their grateful mother warm me every time I think of them. And, I want to keep thinking of them because they remind me that through the opportunity God gave me to show love to someone less fortunate, I received love so much greater. The mother told me that because of our church's kindness, they want to share with others, so they have all volunteered to help serve at a community Christmas dinner. Receiving and sharing God's love truly is the gift that keeps on giving.

Diane Phillips

*Today's Prayer:*

*Lord thank you for the opportunity to serve and thank you for bringing people in our lives who unexpectedly gift us too.*

## **DAY 19      Make a Joyful Noise**

*"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing." Psalm 100:1-2*

I have always enjoyed music and sang in my high school and church choir as a youth. When I met Bob, he was singing in his church choir and I joined him. As newlyweds and young parents, we joined the choir wherever we attended church. Then life got so busy. We didn't seem to have time for singing.

When Bob was so ill in 2011 that he couldn't breathe on his own. Doctors eventually had to cut an opening in his trachea. He required a respirator for over six weeks. In his "deconditioned" state, he had lost all his physical abilities; he could not sit up on his own or take nourishment. His recovery was a result of a great deal of prayer and highly skilled medical care. Once he came off the respirator, even though weak he slowly began to speak a little at a time. One day well into his recovery, I arrived at the acute care center to find him beaming with joy. He told me the speech therapist had just had him SINGING! The delight he experienced from that activity seemed to be a turning point. From then on, he began to take food and build up his strength to sit, stand and walk again.

Singing is just one way to show our Love for God. Each of us has gifts we can use to express ourselves, show our joys and praise the Lord. We may not always recognize or chose to use our gifts, but when we do, our spirit is enriched.

Lucy Wallace

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear Lord, thank you for blessing us with individual gifts and talents. Help us to recognize what we can do to show your Love. Bless those who struggle to express themselves and help them to find their way. Amen*



**DAY 20****Think About It**

*"In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets." Matthew 7:12 (NET)*

Through my working career, I have been around many high school students. And, there are times I've said to myself "What happened to common courtesy?" While I've been presenting students have pulled out phones, texted or done searches on line. Instead of asking their teacher permission to leave the room they've said where they were going, then just grabbed for the pass while leaving the room. Students saunter into the classroom after the bell as if it's no big deal, no regard to time or the teacher, presenter, or other students who were ready and on time. And, this is in the classrooms with teachers who have a fair handle on discipline.

I encountered this so much, I thought what can I do? This is not my classroom. Yet, I was there to teach them and I wasn't the normal speaker, in and out of the classroom. I would see these same students eight to sixteen times. What could I do? Could I do anything?

I believe God speaks to us at the oddest of times. I was visiting with my son in Cincinnati, but my mind was heavy on this classroom dilemma. I felt bad about that and kept trying to pull myself into this time with my son and he finally said, "What's going on?" After telling him, I ended with, "What do you think I can do?"

He answered, "You really like to take responsibility for other people."

What?

"Think about it," he said.

What in the heck does he think I have been doing? I'm consumed with thinking about it! Then I thought, *"You really like to take responsibility for other people."*

Aren't we supposed to help others?

I felt God shove into my mind, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Gulp.

Whose responsibility was it to get to class on time, to follow directions, to be engaged, and so on? It was each of our own responsibility. Mine and the students, each for ourselves. Whose responsibility was it to teach the students? It was mine and the teacher's.

I was letting something unacceptable go. I wasn't giving the students the courtesy of correction. Do unto others, doesn't mean we allow the unacceptable. Do unto others, "teach them," I heard God saying.

The next time I was in their classroom, they came into the room. I was standing in front on my cell phone. The bell rang. I held my finger up toward them, to wait a moment. When someone talked, I put my finger to my lips to shush them as all my attention remained on my phone. After a couple of minutes, it was clear many were annoyed or thinking how inappropriate this behavior was from their speaker.

Then we talked about expectations. What we each expected from each other. "And, plain and simple people," I stated, "its rude." Smiling I added, "And I won't hesitate at all to call you out on it any longer." They all ... smiled.

Do unto others. It's not all about turning the other cheek. Do unto others, hold them responsible. Teach them how and why they should be responsible. What have you been holding off teaching someone to make the world more engaged, more courteous, more accountable? Really, it's the loving thing to do.

Susan Lopez

*Today's prayer:*

*Lord, thank you for bringing into my life those that will help me grow. Please help me discern what my responsibility is. As well, help me discover what is someone else's responsibility and the ability to rightly give them respect by allowing them to be accountable themselves. Amen*



**DAY 21****Peace of Mind**

*"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10*

Three years ago, when I was diagnosed with a very serious illness, I called on God to give me peace of mind. I had a long struggle ahead of me, and I needed peace of mind to stay focused. I did not want fear to overcome me, to freeze me with anxiety, and to keep me from doing what I needed to do to get well. Within the two weeks that followed my diagnosis, I had to undergo doctor visits, blood tests, CT scans, a biopsy, a port installation, more blood tests, etc. The experience normally would have overwhelmed me, but I had God by my side holding my hand through it all. He gave me the strength to take one day at a time and to not worry about the next day.

Then, as the weeks went by, God provided me with numerous "angels" who supported me in various ways. Among them were my dear husband, my family, my friends, and complete strangers. Some prepared meals for us, some transported me to my chemo infusion sessions, others sent cards, called me, sent gifts, and visited me. Often, when I think of these "angels," tears of heartfelt gratitude flow from my eyes. They "touched" me so much. I know that God sent them to me, He cares for me through these "angels," He lifts my spirits, He strengthens me, and fills me with His Peace.

Although I'm still being treated for this disease, I know that God continues to be by my side-- strengthening me and upholding me with His righteous right hand. I'm His child, He loves me, and cares for me—ALWAYS.

Debbie Jones

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear Lord, please wrap us in Your loving arms and strengthen us as we go through our daily struggles. Please fill us with Your everlasting love and peace. Thank you, Lord. Amen*

**DAY 22****Clothe Yourself with Love**

*"Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Colossians 3:14*

**Allison Gains Reflections on God's Love**

**How have you experienced God's love in your life?** I've experienced God's love when I've been upset or messed up on something. God give me comfort and love

**How has love called you into Life Together?** Love has called me into life together by caring for all my friend and family and made me feel connected more with who I care about every day.

**How has love called you into service in the world?** Love has called me into service in the world by helping rake leaves off people's yards and caring for those who need help

**Matthew Theil Reflections on God's Love**

**How have you experienced God's love in your life?** Through the support of my family because God's love makes our family stronger

**How has love called you into Life Together?** It's made me more inclined to help people.

**How has love called you into service in the world?** It has allowed me to see how helping other people can make me feel good.

*Today's Prayer:*

*Gracious God we give you thanks for the ways that you show us love through family and friend, through your forgiveness, and your comfort. Help us to continue to know your love and to respond to your love by caring for our loved one, helping others in our community, and being kind and fair to all whom we encounter in our everyday lives. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen*

## **DAY 23      Peace Members, My Neighbors**

*"For this, Thou shall not commit adultery, Thou shall not kill, Thou shall not steal, Thou shall not bear false witness, Thou shall not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Romans 13:9*

To me, this scripture sets forth total and absolute behaviors which would not be condoned by our heavenly Father. Namely, God would not sanction or tolerate killing, stealing, lying, coveting or desiring to have what is owned by someone else. What God wants us to do unconditionally is to love our neighbor(s) as ourselves. Again, to me, this means that I shall treat my fellow members of Peace Lutheran Church ("my neighbors") with love as I would treat David and myself. I shall treat them with kindness and respect, looking out for their needs, offering prayers and comfort in time of sadness or loss, and celebrating with them birthdays and other happy occasions.

It also means taking the time to "listen" carefully to what my fellow members are saying and being willing to discuss even difficult issues with them. There are so many ministries at our church offering opportunities to reach out and assist others. Some of the obvious ones are being on the Casserole Ministry, assisting with meals at the Interfaith Hospitality Network in Xenia, being a Member of the Prayer Chain, and being involved with and interested in the members of our church community. I feel such a closeness with my fellow attendees at the Saturday evening Praise Service. We worship and pray together and truly "love" one another as ourselves.

Anne Shale

### *Today's Prayer:*

*Heavenly Father, you drew us to this Church and watched and prayed with us when we joined Peace Lutheran Church. Being a member of this church family has been such a blessing for me as I have become more familiar with my fellow members and neighbors there. Thank you for all the blessings you bestow upon all of us as we gather to worship in your name. Help us to follow your commandments and encourage us to grow in loving our neighbors as ourselves. Amen*

**DAY 24****Sent by a Loving God**

*"If I flew away beyond the east or lived in the farthest place in the west, you would be there to lead me, you would be there to help me." Psalms 139:9-10*

I can remember many instances when I have experienced God's love in my life, but one incident stands out in my mind. Our daughter Laura decided to quit the job she had taken right out of college and go to Cusco, Peru for six months to improve her Spanish and volunteer at an orphanage. At the end of her time there, Gary and I flew down to South America to do some touring with her.

We saw some amazing sights, Machu Picchu, Cusco, Lake Titicaca, and Arequipa, to name a few. The most amazing thing was seeing how well our daughter was functioning in such a foreign culture.

We three were flying home from Lima. We spent a day and half there sightseeing. After watching a military ceremony at the Capitol, we were headed to a beautiful church that had lots of bones in its basement. I consulted our paper map, for this was before GPS and Google Maps. As we headed over a bridge, a woman came running up to us, grabbing my sleeve, saying in slightly accented English, *"Where are you going? You shouldn't go over this bridge! It is very dangerous over there! Tourists get robbed and beaten up there!"* She gently steered us in the right direction, and then disappeared.

Whether she was an angel or a Good Samaritan I do not know. But I know she was sent by a loving God who was protecting his children. And I am very grateful for His love.

Barbara Polesky

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear Lord, thank you for being a loving father, willing to watch over his children. Thank you for your guidance, your wisdom, and your grace. I know you will not shield me from all the difficulties that life presents, but I do know that you will give me the tools to handle these challenges. In your Son's name I pray, Amen.*

## **DAY 25**      **Believing is Seeing**

*"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary. But what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:18*

Believing is Seeing. We've all heard it, most of us have said it; seeing is believing. We use it for a variety of things, both good and bad. If someone has mistreated you or has a pattern of poor choices and say they have changed we think, I'll believe it when I see it. When a person continues to repeat the same mistake, yet keeps saying they will do better next time, we think I'll believe it when I see it.

Although we feel we are protecting ourselves from disappointment, how much are we blocking ourselves from? How much growth are we blocking others from if we don't first believe they can change? If we don't allow ourselves to believe in the good without needing the proof first, imagine what we are missing out on that is right before our eyes.

The same holds true for God's plan for our life. As man, we want to know the why before we take the first step. We want to see the end before the beginning. We want to know if it will be worth it before we take a chance. Faith plays a major part in our ability to believe before we see. Faith in the good, faith in the lesson, faith in the pain. Faith in God's plan over ours.

If we had our way, we'd learn and grow without pain. We'd protect ourselves from all hurt caused by the trials we are given. We'd blindly get through the storm and go right to the glory, but without believing faithfully that the end results will be amazing, our fears and need to protect ourselves can prevent us from seeing at all. It is in the pain of these types of trials that we find strength from God to be more of who He created us to be. It is the alone feeling that reminds us who we are supposed to be turning to for strength in the first place. It is through these blind walks that we are reminded that we are unable to do anything without the love, help and strength of our God. If we are first able to believe, believe in the promises made to us, believe in His word and take the faithful step first without knowing the ending, then we will clearly see the rewards in the pain in God's perfect time.

*"What is unseen is eternal."* Thus, the reward of such faith, is seeing what you already believe.

Amanda McQuade

*Today's Prayer:*

*God, please help me walk blindly with you more often. Remind us all that with your love and strength, we can step forward in life no matter what comes, knowing even in pain your love for us endures. Amen*

**DAY 26      Focus on Love & Others**

*"...It (love) does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." 1 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)*

In this Chapter, Paul is writing to the church in deep trouble in Corinth, a church he founded. The people in Corinth were living in moral depravity and open factionalism. He was instructing and challenging the Corinthians to follow Christ's model of faith and love.

This verse really focuses on what we are doing and thinking about. It is about the impacts our behavior has on other people. Particularly now, following my mother's death last year, this verse causes me to reflect on her life and her behavior model, and mine. In many ways, Paul is writing the letter to the Corinthians, is also writing to me, these two thousand years later. But in this verse, Paul includes a reference to my mother's life as a model for me to embrace. She was always focused on others and never kept score.

Denny Jarvi

*Today's Prayer:*

*Lord, help me focus on others and not myself. Help me to not be rude. Help me to forget what I perceive as insults, slights, disrespect, and things that might hurt my feelings. Help live a new life each moment, new and refreshed. In the name of Jesus, I pray, Amen.*

**DAY 27****The Mind of the Spirit**

*"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:37-39*

A few days before Easter 2002, my sister, Marilyn, called me from New York to say that our mother, Lola Nordstrom, had fallen and broken her hip. Neither of us knew it then but that event began one of the most tortured periods in our family's history. Four surgeries, therapy, hallucinations and much pain later, our dear mother passed from this life one day before her 89<sup>th</sup> birthday – the 8<sup>th</sup> of May.

Marilyn and I knew that our mother was special to those of us who were related to her and special to others who had known her over the many years she served with our father, a United Methodist pastor in the western North Carolina. What we were unprepared for was the depth of admiration she had inspired among those with whom she had lived and served in her recently adopted home in rural New York State.

Her deep faith and her concern for others bore witness in all with whom she came into contact. Her pastor's husband looked to her as an example of how a minister's spouse should handle that role. The van drivers who took her to myriad appointments appreciated her courtesy and kindness. The nurses in ICU noticed her strength and courage. One of the nicest floral arrangements came from the Jewish leadership of the Assisted Living Residence to which she had moved only two months before her fateful fall.

At the memorial service, all of us expressed the ways in which our mother had borne witness to her faith in her daily living. We laughed and we cried and we shared stories and hymns. After her casket had been taken out of the church to begin its long journey to Illinois for burial, I thanked the funeral director for his help though all of this. He pulled me aside and told me that his helper that day had been worried about his home church and its approach to worship.

At some point during the memorial service, the man had turned to him and said, "Now, this is real worship." It hit me then that even through our grief over the loss of our mother, her life was continuing to bear witness. "Neither death, nor life, nor...." We are all connected to the Love of God always.

Alene N. Case

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear God, we give you praise for the example of servants who have shown us how to live for others in this world. Give us also the strength and courage to show this way to our friends and family and to all who need to know your love. Amen and Amen.*

This devotional was first printed by John and Emily Ballard's friend in 2003 in the Lenten Devotional of Church of Christ Uniting in Kingston, Pennsylvania. It is shared here with permission.

## **DAY 28 God's Presence in the Radiation**

*"Send flashes of lightning and scatter your enemies; shoot your arrows and send them running." Psalm 144:6*

Approximately 10 years ago, the words, "You have cancer" were spoken to me. I am very blessed that it was a very early stage, however, my treatment involved 2 surgeries, 33 radiation treatments, and 5 years of medication. At first glance, my verse doesn't seem to fit our theme of "What is Love?" However, I could feel God's presence in the radiation beams as the flashes of lightning and the arrows scattering the enemy cancer. Every morning before going to the radiation treatment, I would read this verse and feel God's love and healing.

Melinda Robbins

*Today's prayer:*

*Lord thank you for your love and healing presence in our lives. Amen*



**DAY 29**

**He Gave**

*But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." Luke 9:47-48*

Our 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade faith formation class and their leaders were given the opportunity to respond to this year's Lenten question of What is Love? When asked **"How have you felt God's love?"** They answered:

*"He has answered my prayers and made me well."*

*"By giving me the talent to play soccer."*

*"He answered my prayers by healing my sick friend."*

*"He gave me a pig."*

*"He gave me a game."*

*"He has blessed me with a loving husband, wonderful healthy children and an awesome support system."*

Peace's 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class



Our 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade faith formation class and their leaders were asked **"How God's love has helped them here at church?"** and **"How have you used God's love?"** They answered:

*"I am thankful."*

*"God's love brings us together to help one another." "With God's love, we were able to come together to put on the Christmas pageant."*

*"Introducing myself to a new person."*

*"Perseverance to do something hard."*

*"Doing a better job of sharing with my brother."*

*"Being a helper to my brother."*

Peace's 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, & 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear God, we give you thanks for all of the different blessings you have given us and all of the ways to bring us together. Help us to see your love in our community of faith as we welcome, help, share, play, and pray. Help us to grow in our faith through your love. Amen*

How would you answer the question, "How have you felt God's love?"

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How would you answer the question, "How has God's love helped you at Peace?"

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How would you answer the question, "How have you used God's love?"

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**DAY 30****Small Acts**

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." John 3:16 (NRSV)*

John 3:16, probably one of the most recognizable bible verses, and not only for Christians. We see it posted on walls and billboards, and even as a banner at sporting events. But what does this verse say to us? What does it mean to us? Even at first glance, this single verse has 3 important messages: God's tremendous love for us, the glorious gift of His Son, and the saving grace of that glorious gift.

We tend to focus more on the "saving us" portion, rather than the show of tremendous love God showers on us by giving his Son to us. We know a daughter or son is surely a most precious gift, and to present that gift to the world, knowing the path to be followed is an unimaginable gesture of love. This special love the Heavenly Father shows is so difficult to understand, and intimidating to emulate. But the love the Father wants us to show doesn't have to be so grand, so earth shattering.

Our love may not be limitless, nor our capacity to provide such an epic gift of the Divine Son. Still we have the power to make life changing impact on others with our sharing of God's love, and the gift of service to others. The light of God's love shining off us is so beneficial to the path before those we encounter. And to us, too. Often it can be difficult to determine the one receiving the most benefit.

We tend to overlook the little gifts of service and kindness we share with others. The little things we do will make a big difference to someone, even as they are small acts. A kind word, or encouragement much needed. A door held open, a hug or even a smile in a sea of grim faces. Serving a meal to a family that doesn't always know when, or if, the next meal may be available. These little things can make someone's day. It doesn't have to be earth-shattering to be important.

As we journey through this Lenten season let's work to soak in God's limitless love and pass it on. There's no need to worry about running short on that love. Let's serve others, and there's no need to worry that we will run short on ways to shine that love. And they will know we are Christians by our love.

Chad Hagedorn

*Today's Prayer:*

*Gracious God, help me to reflect your limitless love to your children in my daily walk.*

## **DAY 31      God's Loving Patience & Kindness**

*We live in such a way that no one will stumble because of us, and no one will find fault with our ministry. In everything we do, we show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love. 2 Corinthians 6:3-6 (NLT)*

*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NLT)*

*That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well." Acts 23:11 (NLT)*

You never know what God has planned for you. Paul thought he was going to die in Jerusalem when Jesus told him he was to testify and grow in Rome. Can you imagine his relief?

Paul's hardships were listed in 2 Corinthians 6:3-6; beatings hardships, imprisonments, hunger sleeplessness, hard work to name only a few. Yet God was comforting him with understanding, patience and kindness through the Holy Spirit and in pure love.

So, how do we endure our own hardships or even watch someone close to us endure theirs?

Our awesome God has helped each of us through a difficult time in our lives. He has held our hand, encouraged us to wait on his timing. He has helped you sleep when sleeplessness from hard work seems to fill your day. With patience, understanding and kindness God has given the Holy Spirit to help you persevere. However dark your feeling, God will be there to help you through it.

Because He has helped you, comforting others should be shown gently in understanding, with patience and kindness. Are you a good listener for the troubled or friendless? Share happiness and comfort from God because he has given it to you.

How do people see God when they look at you?

Karen Ruch

*Today's Prayer:*

*God, please help me to act in a manner toward others and myself in a way that is pleasing to you. Help me to show others kindness and be a comfort as you are to us. In your name we pray, Amen.*

## **DAY 32      Make a Conscious Effort**

*"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." Isaiah 49:15-16*

God's love has always been present in my life and I am forever grateful that I grew up with parents who fostered me into my relationship with God. I grew up going to church every Sunday - dancing and singing for church, going to activities, helping in the food pantry - anything and everything. My relationship with God was strong and I thanked and praised him every day.

When I left for college and was in a new territory, I let myself shy away from God. I felt myself losing my connection to Him. Even at times when I heard and felt His call, I never seemed to turn to Him. It wasn't until I made the decision to go to my church on campus one snowy morning freshman year that I invited him back in my heart. The whole service I wept - out of pain for realizing what I have been missing and out of joy to realize what I have always had. From that point forward, God's love is always present in my life because I make a conscious effort to remember to put my faith and trust in him.

Isaiah 49 versus 15-16 states, *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me."* God's love has always been with me - he never forgot me, I just forgot him.

His love for me has called me into this church in Beavercreek and he has been calling me to take action in my community of friends. I openly talk about my love for Christ with my classmates and I never feel ashamed of it. I pray with others. I invite friends to come celebrate Christ with me. My relationships within my family have become more strong and I now am the person who encourages my family members to go to church. I love to talk to people about bible stories and ways that God is present in their life. I make an active effort to try and love everyone I encounter and do things that will put forth good deed. God's love motivates me to continue to live through him.

Megan Valle

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear Lord, I pray to you to give me the guidance to remember your love always. Guide me into your will and teach me ways that I can better love myself and my neighbor. Give assurance to those who feel alone and let your light and love shine in people's lives who so desperately need it. Amen*

## DAY 33

## What is Love?

*"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." Ruth 1:16*

What is love? The Women of Faith Study Bible state: *"Sacrifice is a hallmark of genuine love."* Such can be said regarding the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi.

Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth find themselves in a time of crisis in their current homeland of Moab. Naomi's husband and her sons have died and times are hard. Naomi makes plans to return to Bethlehem. Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to their families as she has nothing for them. Orpah does just that but Ruth stands firm in her commitment to Naomi. Despite Naomi's strong urging for Ruth to "go home" Ruth declares: *"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay."*

This text is one of the most powerful and touching expressions of love and sacrifice we find in the Bible. In my own life, I experienced God's love very similarly as the story of Ruth. When I married, my "in-laws" became my family. We developed a very close relationship that endured even through divorce. Much like Ruth, I loved my "in-laws" as my own parents and I experienced abundant love through these two followers of God. The text also is about redemption. God longs to redeem us, ordinary we are, for extraordinary purposes. Ruth's story is about choosing God and her story is a promise that our Redeemer has chosen us, is committed to us and sent his Son to be obedient, even to death, that he might redeem us.

Sharon Wilson

*Today's Prayer:*

*Merciful God, we pray that we embrace Ruth's story, emulate her actions and choose God. You gave your only son to be both a sacrifice for sin and our example of godly life; help us to receive all that he has done for us and follow him. It is in Christ's name we ask these things, Amen.*

## **DAY 34      Take Care of Your Temple**

*"You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God Himself is present in you? No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple, you can be sure of that. God's temple is sacred—and you, remember, are the temple." I Corinthians 3:16-17*

Over 12 years ago, I experienced what is often referred to as an 'Ah-Ha!' moment when I realized that I couldn't catch my breath simply walking down the basement stairs. I believe that this 'Ah-Ha!' moment was given to me by God as I decided that I needed to make some lifestyle changes in my life. This meant choosing healthier foods to eat and making time to exercise. It also meant sharing this new knowledge that I was gaining with others.

In making the time to prepare and eat healthier foods and to exercise, I feel that God was showing His love to me in improving my health and quality of life. God showed me His love by encouraging me to impress upon others that in order to experience healthy emotional and spiritual lives we must make the time to take care of our physical bodies. In order to show God's love to all people and to encourage them to take care of their "temples," I decided, with the help of others, to have an exercise class at Peace.

God wants us to take care of our physical bodies so that we can serve others in healthy ways and reflect His love for everyone. As we take care of our physical bodies which in turn will lead to the healthy care of our emotional and spiritual beings as well, we are showing the love that we have received from God not only to our faith community but to all of the world as well!

Carrie Jez

*Today's Prayer:*

*Thank you God, for blessing us with the intricate makings and miracles of our physical "temples." Please help us to always remember to make time to take care of our 'physical' temples in order that we may not only reflect your love but also that we may help others in our faith community and in the world experience the miracle of your love through their healthy physical, emotional and spiritual care of their bodies. Amen.*

## DAY 35      ASAP ... Always Say a Prayer

*"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* Ephesians 3:14-19 - Apostle Paul's Love Letter to Church

What is Love? God is Love for us and is also our Love for Him. God is my joy in the morning when I awake to His gift of a new day. I thank my Heavenly Father for all my blessings, His gift of my Savior, Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells within me! Knowing the Lord's love for me is never ending, is unconditional, and is the best love possible I can experience really puts a smile on my face! Not to mention the fact He is always with me -- walking beside me as my best friend, walking in front of me to guide me, and walking behind me and above me to protect me in my daily life on this earth! Where can one find a friend who is so accepting, available and forgiving?

There are "bumps in the road" for everyone in experiencing health issues, the loss of loved ones, disappointments, and the list goes on. In 2014, my husband, Rich, and I were traveling home from Cincinnati in a car along with two special family members. I do not wish to re-live the details of the horrific accident, however, will fast forward to the miracle end of the story! Witnesses of the accident mentioned they did not know how anyone could walk away from that vehicle. All four of us were spared having no broken bones. We were shaken, of course, with bruising, aches and pains. It is hard to comprehend the breadth, length, height and depth of God's Love for us! I know in my heart He was not yet finished with us ... we are still "under construction"! The joy of the Lord is my strength!

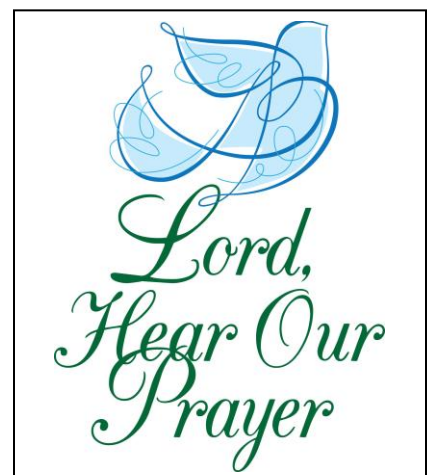
Karen Richey

*Today's Prayer for you:*

*It is my prayer for all who read this that they have or will have a personal and loving relationship with our Father in Heaven, who dearly loves and cares for us. He is preparing a place in Heaven for all who trust and believe in the ultimate sacrifice of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. May the Holy Spirit guide you in all you say and do! **Remember... ASAP ... Always Say A Prayer!** Trust and have faith the Lord our God is listening! God bless you in your journey, Amen.*

### Other bible passages that talk about prayer:

1 John 1:9, 5:14-16	Luke 6:12
1 Chronicles 16:11	Philippians 4:6
2 Chronicles 6:21, 7:14	Colossians 4:2
Ephesians 1:18, 6:18	1 Thessalonians 5:17
Jeremiah 29:12	1 Timothy 2:1-2, 8
Job 22:27	Hebrews 4:14
John 17:15	James 1:7, 43
Romans 12:2, 12:12	Psalm 4:1, 17:6
Romans 8:26	Psalm 102:17, 141:2
Luke 11:2-4, 18:1	Psalm 145:18
James 5:13, 5:16	Matthew 6:7, 7:11
Mark 11:24	Matthew 26:41
Matthew 5:44, 6:9-13	Proverbs 15:8, 15:29



*"So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." 1 John 4:16*

The first time I heard God loved me, it was from my Momma. I was a kid. Momma said God loved me more than she loved me and my Momma really loved me. "No way," I said. Momma was right, as usual. It took me a while to get down the path she had put me on. I've been working on that relationship with God for many decades now – checking Him out as He watched over me.

Manifestations of God's love surround us, embrace us. It was a school day not long after Momma told me of God's love. I rambled across the holler to the field in front of Grandma's house, who lived nearby. It was brilliantly sunny and cold with a good wind pushing through. I got tired and just sat in the broom straw. I was on the lee side of a terrace so I felt the warmth of the sun and not the cold of the wind. I remember watching the broom straw bend with the wind. It was so nice sheltered by the terrace, a warm beautiful day wrapped in light as the cold blew over. I was warm, safe. It was good. And in that instant, protected from the wind, graced with beauty and light, I realized this moment, this experience was a simple gift from God. And if only I paused more often, looked, listened with my heart, I would know His gifts, His love.

The One who gives life wants us to know His love. And He wants ours in return. For all that He has given, is now, and continues to give -- how can we not feel the love and want to give it back?

In tough times it may be hard. My cataract surgery was not supposed to be a big deal. But for me things did not go well initially. I could not see. Assurances to the contrary that all would be well were not convincing. But in that moment I heard Momma's voice and I prayed, *"Please hold me, my Lord."* Over and over I repeated that simple prayer until I heard and felt " I am holding you." **You are in His arms come what may. He loves you.**

Rev. Len Byers

*Today's Prayer:*

*O Father who made creation, who made all things possible, who gave His son, who loves us beyond all measure, who holds us closer than close, help us to feel your love and be instruments of your love. Thank you for loving us so abundantly. I love you, Lord. I love you. Amen*

Written for this devotional by John and Emily Ballard's friend, a hospital chaplain, who resides near Shelby, North Carolina.



## **DAY 37 How does love call us into service in the world**

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you, bind them around your neck and write them on tablet of your heart; Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Proverbs 3:3-4*

The ability to love is one of the most wonderful aspects of being human. It is the greatest joy we can experience, in our love for our children, our mates, our families, our neighbors and our vast love for the Lord our God. We are bound together in a convergence of spirit and wonder. We carry those we love forever in our hearts, many long after they have passed over.

True Love is like a wave of feeling in your heart and soul as though it were a blanket spreading over your entire body. I believe it is the ultimate life experience from one person to another. I also have the same wave of love that binds me to God. I experience God's love each and every morning as I awaken to another day, warm or cold, on this beautiful blue planet. We know He is the creator of our world and therefore the initiator of all that is in it. The very best of these being love.

As a mother of two beautiful daughters I have had the privilege of touching God's Love and seeing it up close and personal in their lovely faces. It has been an honor to give them life, watch them grow and helping them develop their own place in the world. I willingly accepted the responsibility of keeping them safe and guiding them to an understanding of faith, hope and charity. The pleasure of holding them in a big Momma hug and reassuring them whenever possible, while encouraging them to continue to move forward, has never been lost on them or me.

I believe these to be the same fundamentals of Love that God shows us, his children. All our lessons of love must include God's love for humankind, he is the ultimate example of love. Entering our world, the Son of God walked among us to experience our human need, and also the intrinsic nature of love and heartbreak of loss we feel for one another. He offers us life everlasting, safety in his loving hands, and encourages us to continue to be a child of love and service. We are assured that the offering of love and compassion to another wins favor in the sight of God.

Sandra Kennedy

*Today's Prayer:*

*Gracious Heavenly Father... As we anticipate the fullness of the presence of Christ Jesus, we are bound together with all humankind to praise you and thank you for the Grace you freely gave to all. You show us each new day the precious gift of LOVE for us to share. You model the way of truly loving others and being a servant to the world. We pray for wisdom and courage to show and share love with all, as we try to be messengers for you in all that we do. Help us remember the importance of seeking opportunities to show love, compassion and charity for others. Amen*

## **DAY 38            What is God's Love?**

*Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.” John 13:34-35 (The Message)*

*What is Love, or more specifically, What is God's Love* was not a concept easily grasped by my younger self. In my young mind, the idea of God, as in “Our Father, ...” was not something I embraced. The image of God as a loving “father” messed with me; a real turn-off. I would struggle with this for many years, well into adulthood. My parents divorced shortly after my second birthday and both had remarried two years later. My birth father chose to leave parenting to my mother and step-father believing, as I would learn from him many years later, that it was best for me, less confusing. My step-father chose a path of behavior towards me that cannot be described as that of a loving parent. The concept of “love” was foreign to me as “*I love you*” was not something I heard in my family of origin. The experience impacted my adult relationships on all levels. As I reflect over the years, I know now God never gave up on me. It was through the ministry and fellowship of our Peace family that God led me to this realization. It was here I began to heal, to forgive, to love, and to serve.

My mother died in November, 1984. We never had conversation about the childhood abuse and the family issues that it fostered. I would learn later that she had shared her story with Pastor Richard Pooch and it was he who gave me courage to begin my journey of healing. He was involved with the Dept. of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Miami Valley Hospital and lovingly directed me there for the professional help I needed. Pastor Pooch took it a step further with the recommendation to Trinity Lutheran Seminary that I be invited to explore the theological aspects of my spiritual healing. The image of God as “father” now messes with me in a totally different way. I know I am a beloved child of God, as are each of you, who danced with joy the day we were born! And in response, we love and serve one another.

The journey is different for each of us and I firmly believe God knows when we are ready to begin, who we need to walk the path with us, and then God leads us to others to walk along side of as they find their way.

Deacon Linda Cole

*Today's Prayer:*

*Loving God, Our Father, thank you for loving us so completely and unconditionally. Help us to always reflect your love to everyone we meet so that they know your presence and love. Amen.*

**DAY 39****Peace Be With You**

Having not grown up in the Lutheran Church, the passing of the Peace has been more of a greeting for me. I find myself say "good morning" or something along those lines. For some reason saying "peace of the Lord" or even simply "peace" makes me uncomfortable. Why?

These people I'm surrounded by are my family in Christ. Why would I feel uncomfortable saying these words to them? It must be important since even at the end of our service it is said one more time to us, that we are to "go in peace".

I think it's safe to say that we all want peace. Peace in the world, peace in our lives, peace in our relationships, peace within ourselves. Maybe we look for ways to find inner peace. These things might work for the moment, but what is it we are centering around? Peace of the Lord, of the LORD. We need God's peace. What exactly is God's peace?

Philippians 4:7 tells us, *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

When I feel God's peace it is an amazing feeling that is unmistakable yet indescribable at the same time. It is full of the promises God has made to us, to supply all of our need (Philippians 4:19), that His grace is enough (2 Corinthians 12:9), and that His love for us is everlasting (Isaiah 54:8)

How I long for all of those things! And that is what God's peace gives us! I want that for you, I want that for me, I want that for the world, to know and trust in God's love and promises to us. I want God's peace to overcome you as you face your day to day challenges of this world. I want you to be able to close your eyes and feel Him enter in and take over. I promise you as my family in Christ, when the time comes for me to pass the peace to you, I will do it with purpose, with intent and hope. As I look at you and say these words, know I truly pray you feel the peace and love of our Lord with you. If you say it first, I will return that prayer to you with meaning and heartfelt conviction as I say "and also with you".

Amanda McQuade

**DAY 40****He is Caring for Us**

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. Lamentations 3:22-25*

Faced with a second move in less than two years, I was less than happy. After all, I always said I would never marry someone who was in the military full time because I didn't like moving all the time. I like to stay "planted." So, I was less than happy and scared to say the least. We had made good friends in South Carolina and now we had to leave another comfort zone. I was pregnant with our second child on top of everything else and wasn't feeling too well.

So, we pulled up and left for a new city in a new state with new people. It took a month or so to get settled in to Charlottesville, Virginia, but slowly and surely things worked out for the better. My husband's new employer had wonderful health insurance (our total cost for prenatal care and childbirth was less than \$20 out of pocket), I found a good OB/GYN group to take care of me, we found a new Lutheran church that was just two blocks from my husband's job, our new townhouse had a fire place (how cool!) and we had nice neighbors.

What had I been so worried about? Where was my trust in God at that time?

Looking back months later, I could see how God's mercy and love was never ceasing in taking good care of us. He had things under control. It was amazing how things really fell into place when we needed it to. He showed his love by taking care of us then and has continued to do so over the years in other ways also. Thanks be to God!

Sharon Hagedorn

*Today's Prayer:*

*Dear Lord, Thank you for being every loving and merciful for us in our times of need. Please help us to trust you every day to provide for us. Help us to remember that your mercies are new every day. Keep in our minds and hearts the knowledge of your ever-present love. Amen.*





## What Wondrous Love Is This



1 What won-drous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What  
 2 When I was sink - ing down, sink - ing down, sink - ing down, when  
 3 To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing; to  
 4 And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on; and



won - drous love is this, O my soul! What won-drous love is this  
 I was sink - ing down, sink - ing down, when I was sink - ing down  
 God and to the Lamb I will sing; to God and to the Lamb,  
 when from death I'm free, I'll sing on; and when from death I'm free,



that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dread-ful curse for my  
 be - neath God's righ-teous frown, Christ laid a - side his crown for my  
 who is the great I AM, while mil - lions join the theme, I will  
 I'll sing God's love for me, and through e - ter - ni - ty I'll sing



soul, for my soul, to bear the dread-ful curse for my soul?  
 soul, for my soul, Christ laid a - side his crown for my soul.  
 sing, I will sing, while mil - lions join the theme, I will sing.  
 on, I'll sing on; and through e - ter - ni - ty I'll sing on.

**Text:** North American folk hymn, Public Domain  
**Music:** W. Walker, "Southern Harmony," 1835 Public Domain