

**Devotions - August 19-25, 2007**  
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**Sunday, August 19**

**Hebrews 12:1 “Therefore since we are surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses...”**

I have read and heard people talking about memorizing bible verses, and thought, maybe. There are some that we have heard many times and could recite and many that we should know and do not. This verse though, like John 3:16, is such an important one. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, our faith is strengthened and grows through the positive influences at church. Where else though? What about around the dinner table during grace before eating, through caring conversations during dinner? What about out in the community? The July 2007 Lutheran talks about bringing your faith to work and how a businessman, being himself, was witnessing to others. That gives us something to think about, you are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, but who is adding you to their cloud? Are you a Christian more than on Sunday? You do not have to be standing on a street corner proclaiming, but do your actions proclaim your love for God and Jesus and kindness and love onto others? No one is perfect, and we all have our weak times, but not only do we have an example to strive for, we have support from those around us. As TV personality Red Green says to his audience, “We’re all in it together.”

*Lord, we are not perfect. Sometimes we stray as lost sheep, but you have provided us with help, both through your Son and through those around us. Help us when we are in times of trial and give us strength to help others in difficult times. In Jesus name, Amen.*

## Monday, August 20

**1John 3:1 “See what love the Father has given us; that we should be called children of God...”**

I never went to camp as a youth and have only recently visited any. From June of 2006 through March of 2007, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the last of a three-year grant to train youth and family ministry leaders. It was offered through the Wisconsin Bishop's Initiative, nicknamed SPUNGE (our Synod covers from Rhinelander, WI East) and the training was done for a week at Wartburg Seminary and then one weekend a month for six months at a different camp in the six WI/UP Synods. Upon graduation, you are certified as a Youth and Family Minister. During the training I visited many camps, from rustic to modern. Our first weekend was at Fortune Lake, and since that first visit, I volunteered a week this summer to help during summer camp. The theme this year is, “God is Calling” and I led a devotional on that topic as well. God has called us all, and I talked about how we are given gifts and I see those in everyone that works at the camp. God's love is very visible in how the counselors work with the campers. Our synod is blessed with Fortune Lake, the Christian love and fellowship there is incredible. And it is not just for youth, there are many retreats and activities for adults there as well.

*Heavenly Father, please bless those who work to share your love with youth. Grant them patience and perseverance when things do not go as planned. Help them to show your love, to help foster those on their faith journey and raise up the next generation of Christians. Lord, we pray, Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 21**

**Mark 15:34** At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Have you felt like asking God why he abandoned you? Why is this happening to you? I have. Last summer my Mother was told she most likely had cancer and would need two lymph nodes biopsied. Small surgery, no problem. In the tests prior to that, there was a spot found on her lung. After many tests and being referred to Mayo Clinic, we were told the spot is most likely cancer, and they wanted to do surgery. With prior health issues, it would not be the easiest surgery, but we were told to expect about a five day recovery.

We came home one week short of five months, being in five facilities and numerous times of not knowing if she would make it through the hour. At one point she had a massive GI bleed and was given 11 blood transfusions, Christmas Eve morning her CO2 was 153 and they did not have a reason why she was still alive, and we were told that she might be ventilator dependant for life. Many times I felt like crying out, "Why, God?"

At a SPUNGE training, we were given a bookmark with the Poem "Footprints" and it tells the story of how a person thought God left him, but God said that it was really where He carried the man through the hard times. Mayo has 24/7 Chaplain services and they were there for me. Christmas Eve, a volunteer chaplain came in and prayed with me. Friends and a local Pastor from West Allis came to be with us while her blood pressure dropped to 60/30 and stayed well into the night. Hard working therapists and specialists worked with her and got her off the "vent" earlier than anyone thought possible. My employer held my job for me while I was gone for five months.

I have never seen God in person. I have talked through him through prayer. I have never been hung on a cross, my hard times were minuscule to when Jesus cried out. There have been times I have felt that God was not with us during times. Looking back afterwards, not only was he with us, but instead of three sets of prints in the sand, he was carrying both of us most of the time. When he wasn't, there was a wide path of many footprints of those he placed around us to get us through the hard times and to celebrate those milestones.

***Lord, we know not to question your ways, your will be done. You are always there for us during our difficult times. Help us to always remember that when there is one set of footprints in the sand, that yours are those. Thank you so much for being there when we need to talk, for never putting a closed sign on your door. Please use us for others when they are struggling. Amen.***

**Wednesday, August 22**

**1 Corinthians 13:13 And now faith, hope, and love abide...**

One of the ideas we are taught in our SPUNGE training was that “Faith is Caught More than It is Taught.” So much of faith fostering and growth is done in the home. A perfect example of this is the music video for “Watching You” by country singer Rodney Atkins. If you are not familiar with the song, it starts out with the boy repeating a four-letter word, “*It started with ‘S’ and I was concerned. Now I said, ‘Son, where’d you learn to talk like that?’ He said, ‘I’ve been watching you Dad, ain’t that cool?’*” The father didn’t agree with the boy’s assessment and after arriving home, went to the barn to pray for help. In the music video, the boy is shown in the background watching his father praying. That night while being tucked in, the boy got down on his knees, “*Talked to God like talking to a friend. I said, ‘Son, now where’d you learn to pray like that.’ He said, ‘I’ve been watching you Dad, ain’t that cool?’*” I think this time, humbled by his son’s comment, the Dad would agree.

My faith has been strengthened through my Mom, grandparents and others. Most of the time, I was watching and later doing myself. How do you think He would respond to us following His example, “I’ve been watching you Jesus, ain’t that cool?” We are encouraged to follow His example. Remember, others are watching you with how you use and live your faith, are you living it up? You are an influence to others.

***Lord, you gave us an example to watch. Shepard us back when we stray off Jesus’ example. Remind us that we have others watching how we act and project being a Christian. Strengthen us on our journey, and help us to help others on their journey. In Jesus name, Amen.***

**Thursday, August 23**

**James 5:16 ...The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.**

When you think of someone who prays, who do you think of, a Grandparent or an elderly member of the congregation? I am sure that your pastor comes to mind as someone who can come up with just the right prayer on cue, that his or her prayer is coming from a “pro.”

I am on our congregation’s Transformational Ministry Team. One particular area that is stressed during monthly meetings and semi-annual retreats is prayer. We are not professionals at prayer, we don’t even have a cheat sheet of models to pray off of. The person that is leading just “wings it.” All Christians know that we are to praise and worship God, and that can be done through prayer as well. It doesn’t have to be fancy or eloquent, just straight from the heart. God knows what is in our hearts, our needs and concerns. Everyone feels a little intimidated at first, especially those who are used to praying in private, but after each one, it gets easier to share and grow in Faith.

Remember also, prayer does not have to be at bedtime. You can offer both requests and praise at all times of day and night, not only long prayers, but short ones as well.

*Lord, you taught us to pray. You also listen to those prayers we lift as we go through the day. Thank you for listening to those long requests, and the short “Instant Messages” we pray quickly. Thank you so much for listening to us. Amen.*

**Friday, August 24**

**Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**

I live on a country road a ways from anything resembling town. Co-workers ask me why I enjoy my 26-mile drive to work. Granted, during a winter ice storm the drive is not as nice. Where I live, I am surrounded by family, a cousin ¼ mile south and a cousin ¼ mile north are the first houses around us. There are yard lights, but when I turn mine off, it gets dark.

I also spent 16 years growing up on Mackinac Island. When you would ride your bike at night or snowmobile in the winter, you go to the backside and it is not hard to see the stars. Especially on a bike, if you do not have a flashlight, you need to go slow and listen to hear if you are on the trail or road. It can be very easy to go off and depending on where you are riding, crash into something very unpleasant.

Can you imagine going down the road of life without the Word of God to guide you? There is a song that is sung frequently at Fortune Lake called “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.” Take the first letters and you have Bible. If you didn’t have that book for a guide, where would your path go? Would you even have a path? Would it be like walking through a field in the dark, not knowing where you are going or where you have been, just surrounded by darkness? It is hard to have hope and comfort when you don’t know where you are going.

A few years ago I read a good story about a Bible that was given to a church. It was dog-eared, notes and underlines on every page, duct taped and a few pages fell out when it was opened. The owner had passed away, and left it to the church. It was not what most people would call a proper Bible. It was so much more. It stood as a testament to that man’s faith. It did not sit on a shelf, it was not abused but thoroughly used. It guided that man from beginning to end and was an example to others afterwards.

***Heavenly Father, you have given us your Word as a map, directions to help us on our faith journey. When we are in dark and troubling times, we can use that as a light and beacon to illuminate our path. We can use it anytime to make sure we are headed in the right direction. Thank you for providing it for us. Amen.***

## Saturday, August 25

**Revelation 21:3-4 God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more....**

I was delayed in writing this last devotional. I was at the Youth Leadership School. It was an incredible experience. I was co-leader with Sarah, who had been a student several years. We had an incredible week, but that came to a halt. I had talked with my mother on Wednesday, and after trying all day Thursday, my cousin checked on her on Friday morning and found that she had passed away. I think back to what I wrote about her being in the hospital and again, "Why?" is on my mind.

We spent five months together, side by side. She was there when I came home from SPUNGE training and saw my certificate. She was there to know that I was signing up to return to college. She was there to hear about the approval to work on a youth and family ministry at church. She was there for the past 27 years to help me become the person I am today. Just like the boy said to his father, I would say to her, "Mom, I was watching you, ain't that cool?"

As preparations for the funeral progressed, we had three pastors that were going to talk about her. We had two soloists to sing hymns that she loved. Twenty people came from Mackinac Island and down state to attend the funeral. There were so many friends and family that came. I talked with a former pastor and friend, and I said that it is unfortunate that you do not get to see the funeral, to see who comes and hear the stories of how that person influenced them. He told me though, that was not Mom. She did not live her life to imagine her funeral and how many people would be there, she lived to help others, to work on what needed to be done and to serve her Lord.

I wrote the prayer for her memory card. There were a lot of choices to choose from, but after helping her so many times, I wanted to do something special for her. I know I will see her again. Next time though will not be as short though, we will have time to catch up and see if I paid enough attention to her example.

*Heavenly Father, Thank you for the gift of life. Thank you for the gift of family and friendship. Help us to live our lives as Mom has, to help others, to enjoy family and friends and to make You the most important part of life. Only You know the exact time we have on earth. Guide us along our journey, remind us to live each day as a gift from You and to be a blessing to each other. You have called each of us to certain duties, and when those are complete, you call us to rest, to see those who have gone on before and to welcome those who are coming after. Comfort us in our time of grieving and remind us that there will be a time when all grief and pain is over, when joy lasts for eternity. Amen*