

**Devotions - September 16-22, 2007**  
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**Sunday, September 16**

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'" Psalm 122:1

I used this scripture with the children as Sunday School classes at First Lutheran Church began on September 9, and everyone sang "If you're happy and you know it clap your hands." Rally Day was off to a good start!

Church attendance is a privilege. We recognize that some people cannot attend because of physical problems or other legitimate reasons. But what about those who make other excuses. The singing, prayers, fellowship and teaching of God's Word are just what is needed for the week ahead. A story in a Nashville paper reported that 81 year-old Ella Craig had perfect attendance in Sunday school for 20 years. That's 1,040 Sundays! The article also raised these questions:

1. Doesn't Ella ever have company on Sunday to keep her away from church?
2. Doesn't she ever have headaches, colds, nervous spells or is just tired?
3. Doesn't she ever take a weekend trip?
4. Doesn't she ever sleep late on Sunday morning?
5. Doesn't it ever rain or snow on Sunday morning?
6. Doesn't she ever get her feelings hurt by someone in the church?

The article concluded by asking, "What's the matter with Ella? The answer? Nothing at all."

*Dearest Jesus, Forgive our weak excuses that keep us away from your house. Teach us to enter your sanctuary with glad hearts. Amen*

## **Monday, September 17**

"Command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him." Deuteronomy 3:28

Part of the schedule for the year for Sunday School teachers and support staff at First Lutheran is four meetings on Sunday morning during the regular meeting time to provide support and encouragement for teachers and helpers.

In Deuteronomy 3 we read that Moses encouraged Joshua as he was about to assume leadership of the Israelites. No doubt Joshua was filled with fear and a feeling of inadequacy to fill Moses' shoes. The Lord therefore told Moses to encourage Joshua.

All of us need a word of encouragement from time to time to nudge us on when we are facing a major new challenge. But we also need words of appreciation as we carry out our daily responsibilities at home or at work or in a church setting. Encouragement can come in a word of recognition, a caring smile, a warm handshake, and an honest expression of appreciation for the good we see in them or in their work.

Let's made a decision to encourage (not flatter) at least one person each day. It could do wonders!

*Lord, help us to do our part to give an expression of encouragement to those around us. Thank you for those who encourage us. Amen*

## **Tuesday, September 18**

"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." Psalm 136:1

You don't have to live very long in this world before it becomes painfully clear that nothing lasts forever. I just traded in my car (I really loved it) because it was starting to have some costly repairs. Clothes become worn or go out of style and end up at St. Vincent de Paul or given to the Sewing Circle for quilt making. The roof eventually leaks, the appliances break down, the carpet needs to be replaced. And relationships we think will endure forever often fall apart.

Nothing lasts forever – nothing but God's mercy. Twenty-six times we are reminded of this truth in Psalm 136. Twenty-six times the writer gives us something for which to praise the Lord, and then he reminds us: "His mercy endures forever." Think of what this means. When we sin and need forgiveness, His mercy endures forever. When our lives seem a jumbled mess that we can't control, His mercy endures forever. When we can't find anyone to turn to for help, God's mercy endures forever. When each day is a struggle because of illness, despair, or conflict, His mercy endures forever. Isn't it great to know that no problem can outlast God's forever mercy!

*Thank you, God, for your heart always overflowing with mercy ... for me. Amen*

## Wednesday, September 19

"You shine as lights in the world." Philippians 2:15

Two things come to mind as I think about light. As a young girl I didn't like the dark and I still keep a flashlight handy to go outdoors at night. I know where candles and matches are in the house, and I like singing "This Little Light of Mine."

Did you know that the moon is nearly 240,000 miles from Earth and is only 1/400th the size of the sun. With no light or heat of its own, it reflects the radiance of that greater heavenly body. It appears to be relatively insignificant. Yet, the moon quietly and almost imperceptibly moves the oceans of the world by its gravitational pull.

Most of us may not seem all that influential or well-known. We don't have the giftedness, the wealth, or the position to make much of an impact on our society. Our names don't appear in the newspaper, nor are they mentioned on television. We may think that all we can do is practice our faith in the humdrum routines of everyday life. But perhaps, unnoticed by us, we are having an influence on the people around us by our Christlike attitudes and actions. Jesus commanded, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" Matthew 5:16.

*Today, Lord, I feel like a very small light. Help me to know that even the smallest light can make a difference in the darkest night. I want to make a difference for you. Amen*

## **Thursday, September 20**

"I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God.  
"Therefore turn and live!" Ezekiel 18:32

In my Bible and in many of my prayer journals I have written these words ... Break my heart with the things that break your heart, Lord.

During the past year, cars, trucks, tires, toothpaste, and toys have been recalled by their manufactures. In every case, the message was similar. "This product is defective or dangerous and could cause serious injury or even death. Return it to us and we will correct the problem." But it's up to the consumer to heed the warning and return the dangerous item.

What if God put this warning on the heart and soul of every person: "Because of a fatal attraction to sin and willful misuse, this item is defective. Failure to correct this problem will result in certain spiritual death." Through the prophet Ezekiel, God said that the hearts of His people had become adulterous (Ezekiel 6:9) and as hard as a rock(11:19). Yet the Lord longed for their hearts to be softened, and for them to come back to Him. He said, "Get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies ... Therefore turn and live!"

*Thank you for your power, God, that can turn our hearts from sin and your love that makes our hearts and lives clean and new. Amen*

## **Friday, September 21**

"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." Philippians 4:11

This is scripture that convicts me. I fall short and often ask forgiveness for not being content. Each generation it seems raises the content bar. With new technological advances, we seem to need more and more things to be satisfied. My parent's generation knew nothing of a family having more than one car, both my husband and I have vehicles, as did our sons when they lived at home. When I was growing up, we didn't have computers, and today people complain because the one they have isn't the latest model.

The standards for true contentment, though, know no calendar. The 21st century will bring all kinds of marvels to our world, but it won't bring a better definition for contentment than the 2,000 year old words of the apostle Paul. The secret of contentment is found in Christ – not in man's inventions, creature comforts, techno-toys, wealth, acclaim, or amusement. It's accepting what God has given us, and by His strength making the most of it. The 19th century author, Maltbie Babcock said, "Contentment is the grateful, faithful, fruitful use of what we have, little or much."

*Jesus, thank you for all that I have. Teach me that my contentment lies in you. Amen*

## **Saturday, September 22**

"He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit;  
for without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

The word abide isn't used much in every day conversation. I like the poetic ring it has and the rich meaning behind it – to remain, to stay, to dwell. The Pharisees had asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" John 6:28 How bold of any of us to think we can do the work of God. If I am to accomplish anything, it must be done by faith, with Christ's power enabling me. "Without Me," Jesus said, "you can do nothing."

It's not easy to stop trusting ourselves and rely on Christ. In this world, the message we hear is that value comes from what we do, what we earn, and what we accomplish. If we believe that, life becomes a prolonged struggle to fix everything that's broken and strive for perfection in all we do. We become driven and compulsive, busier than God ever meant us to be, trying to do extremely well what He never intended us to do.

Jesus was never that busy. Throughout His public ministry He had much to do and only a little more than three years to do it, yet His pace was measured and deliberate. God's work must be done by God. We must rely on Him every step of the way.

*Dear God, as we begin this day, thank you for the work you have in mind for us to do. We trust you to work through us. Amen*