



Lutheran High School

Devotional



2020





Devotional

2020

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A Forever Holiday

February was all about the love.

In fact, it started in January. The minute Christmas decorations get restocked, stores have filled the aisles with every kind of Valentine you can imagine. The smell of chalky conversation hearts takes many of us back to our grade school Valentine's Day parties when we constructed shoebox mail slots, held secret crushes and gorged on candy (maybe some of you are still doing that...) For some of us those are happy memories, and for others not so much.

Valentine's happiness is founded on chocolate and flowers and the reminder that you should have love in your life. If you're not feeling very loved, the holiday can leave an empty, gaping hole. And that happens pretty frequently in high school.

When you're in the thick of teen emotions, reality can get distorted and it's easy to believe you're not as loved as you really are. It's easy to believe your parents just don't get it sometimes. They may tell you they love you, but it sure doesn't feel like it when they ground you. Your friends didn't include you the last time they went out. Your homecoming date didn't want to date you, even though you did. You're watching all these romances on Netflix and Taylor Swift is singing about boyfriends and you just want someone to love you for who you are.

These are all valid feelings. This is also the time in life you will experience some of the most extreme feelings you will ever have.

But today's news is bigger than the next great love song. Today you get to hear that there is someone whose love for you never wavers, no matter how big your feelings or doubts or insecurities.

This year, sit down with the person who has loved you from the beginning of time, knows you inside and out, sins and all, and gave his life for you. Maybe you've sang "Jesus Loves Me" thousands of times, but God still wants to reveal his affection for you in new, fresh ways. Just like we hope our loved ones will say "I love you" more than once, Jesus reminds you in His Word every day that his love is a forever holiday.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness (Jeremiah 31:3).

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

"Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:2-5).

"His banner over me is love" (Song of Songs 2:4).

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 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 4:9-10).

PRAYER: *Father, you lavished love on me from the start. Before I had a heartbeat, you loved me. When I mess up, you love me. After I've sinned and I'm afraid to come back, you welcome me. Every day I wake up, help me listen as you whisper "I love you" once more. I never get tired of hearing it! I pray all this in your name. Amen.*

A Sea of Purple

As this blog is written, more than 20,000 youth and adults are packed into the city of Minneapolis at our church denomination's [National Youth Gathering](#). Held every three years in different cities since 1980, the mountain-top, life-transforming event draws high school youth all over the country into one place to worship, learn, serve, and yes, to throw themselves against a velcro wall as many times as they want. It's the biggest, coolest youth group experience you can imagine.

I had the amazing opportunity to attend twice as a high schooler. I will never forget looking down at the "Sea of Red"—all the people wearing their red NYG backpacks and flowing like waves into the doors of the stadium in Atlanta. I was floored by God's reminder that I was not alone in my faith journey. All across the country were youth like me trying to make it through high school and understand who God was in all of it.

Today high schoolers face even greater challenges, and this year's Gathering is addressing topics like gender identity, pornography, eating disorders, mental health, science and faith, abortion, and what the Bible teaches about all of it. The goal is for youth to leave this gathering, their "Sea of Purple," encouraged by teachers, peers, friends, and leaders who remind them they are not alone in their faith journeys.

When the Apostle Paul visited the city of Thessalonica, he and the Thessalonian Christians were also feeling alone. They were heavily persecuted for their faith in Christ. They faced challenges like ours and many others. But Paul knew that one of the most important callings of Christians is to encourage each other, so he wrote them a letter and sent his friend Timothy to help them. When Timothy returned with his report, Paul was lifted up, too:

“But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good

news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10).

This is such a powerful word about the importance of encouragement! God used Paul and Timothy for the Thessalonians and to teach us how to walk with each other through difficult times. We help each other up when we fall. We bandage each other’s cuts. We hold each other accountable when we want to give up. We make each other laugh. We remind each other what we believe. We inspire each other to stand firm in our faith. The National Youth Gatherings, the LuHi community, and our own churches are God’s support systems for us.

It’s not always easy to be real and present with people. It’s easier to sit at home alone and virtually “go to church” any time or day, watching online sermons, listening to worship music, and connecting on social media with other people. And those are all really great things—as long as we don’t allow them to replace a real-life connection with other Christians, whether it’s 20,000 people at a special event or a weekly small group of eight.

But we can learn from Jesus, who gave up everything to be present with us. He was God in skin and bones, zits and facial hair. He was God sharing bread with sinners at the table. He was God accepting a clay jar that belonged to an outcasted woman. He was God using saliva and sand to touch and heal a blind man’s eye. And he was God on a cross; God who was resurrected from a tomb so we could live in real, present bodies on this earth and for all eternity with Him.

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

PRAYER: *Jesus, help me to be real and present with the people in my life. Give me courage, vulnerability, time, patience, and deep steeping in the Word and prayer to know what you are calling me to offer each person. Help us be a Church that loves lavishly, just as you loved us and gave yourself up for us. Amen.*

An Unlikely Gift

In the fall of my senior year at Denver Lutheran High, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. My family and I were shocked, scared, and confused. Suddenly the certain future we all took for granted was full of questions, and they no longer concerned what dress I would wear to Homecoming. Instead, it was: what treatment will she need? Will it be painful? How much will it cost? What will it do to her body? How will it affect our family and her work? And scariest of all, will she make it through?

One night I was with friends at a Tuesday night worship service when we sang these words:

*Broken I run to you for your arms are open wide
I am weary but I know your touch restores my life
So I wait for you
So I wait for you
I'm falling on my knees
Offering all of me
Jesus you're all this heart is living for.*

— **“Hungry” by Kathryn Scott**

I am not an easy crier. But these words immediately brought me to tears, reminding me of my fear, broken heart, and what I finally felt as desperation for God. Never before had I needed him in such a real way, and it brought me the closest I had ever been to Him.

We will all face brokenness and pain in this life. Whether it's experienced in close proximity, like a sick parent, a broken friendship, a failed grade or a lost championship, or whether it's more distant, such as war, poverty, or natural disasters, all the evil in the world weighs heavily on us and reminds us of our sinful world.

The Apostle James would have known trials all too well as a persecuted follower of Jesus and as Jesus' brother. He saw Jesus mocked and hung on a cross, he experienced persecution with the Christians around him, he lived under the control of the corrupt Roman government, and in the end, he was a martyr for his faith. And because of all of it, this is what he writes:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything...Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him” (James 1:2-4 and 12).

The Message translation says it like this: “Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides.”

A gift?! Really?

James is teaching us that when we face trials or see big problems in the world, it's an opportunity to work out our spiritual muscles. If we lead an easy life and never have a chance to test our faith, we wouldn't know how far we can trust God. Like the team-building activities that the freshman go through on their retreat, God gifts us opportunities, like trust falls, to teach us to jump into his arms.

He does not cause the pain in the world—that's all a result of sin. But instead of leaving us to atrophy in our self-reliance, God allows struggles to teach us to fall to our knees and see how much we need him. It's in our vulnerability that we acknowledge that Jesus alone has the power to rescue us, and he alone can help us develop our faith muscles to walk through this life *with him* until we reach eternity.

PRAYER:

The next time you are faced with a personal struggle or with the overwhelming sadness in this world, say a prayer of thanks:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that this world is not the end.

Thank you for making all things new.

Thank you for teaching me how to need you and how to trust you.

And then, pray the last verse of the Bible as a prayer:

“Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

Because when Jesus comes again, he will banish all pain and sorrow and tears and we will be face to face with our Savior and King for all eternity.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

Bold Humility

Have you ever struggled to accept a compliment?

Of course we all love to be praised for the things we do and the people we are, but the truth is there are times we feel awkward receiving them.

For example, you may feel awkward receiving an award your friend thought he deserved, and yet he congratulates you. You may feel guilty or fear his jealousy.

Sometimes self-doubt raises its deceitful head. Let's say you worked really hard on an assignment but it's not perfect in your eyes, and your teacher commends you for a job well done. You might tell yourself that you don't deserve the compliment, and therefore you distrust it, and now you actually feel worse about yourself.

Maybe you led a song in Chapel and a friend says your voice moved her to tears. Thoughts jumble around in your head, "This is worship, not a performance. What should I say?" You mumble something indiscernible and walk away.

At the heart of the awkwardness is a muddled confusion about humility. As Christians, we sometimes believe humility means rejecting compliments, putting ourselves down, making light of our gifts, or blending into the woodwork, not drawing attention to ourselves. But is that really what God wants from us?

Let's dive into God's Word and look at the heart of the confusion: the difference between true humility and false humility.

True Humility

“Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life.”

Proverbs 22:4

True humility begins by understanding that God is God and we are not. He is a holy, righteous, and perfect God, and we are imperfect, human sinners who need Jesus. Everything we are and everything we have comes from Him.

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!” 1 John 3:1

True humility comes by going to God’s Word and hearing over and over again how loved we are! Our self-worth is found in God, so we don’t need anyone else’s approval or good opinion. If we fear a compliment will puff us up or is unmerited, we go directly to God to find out what he has to say about it.

“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Galatians 1:10

False Humility

False humility is cleverly disguised as true humility. It is the belief that we are being humble by rejecting a compliment. However, the opposite is true: not accepting the gift of praise is actually a symptom of pride. It’s a bit like a pity party, which focuses the attention on our unworthy selves rather than pointing to God’s amazing work in us.

Ultimately, it strips God of His glory.

That’s a difficult thought to digest, isn’t it?

Henri Nouwen has this to say about humility: **“Often we are made to believe that self-deprecation is a virtue called humility. But humility is in reality the opposite of self-deprecation. It is the grateful recognition that we are precious in God’s eyes and that all we are is pure gift. To grow beyond self-rejection we must have the courage to listen to the voice calling us God’s beloved sons and daughters, and the determination, always, to live our lives according to this truth.”**

Bold Humility

God in his wisdom gives us encouragement through his Word and through friends and family. Proverbs 27:2 says, **“Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips.”** Praise is good! Praise is a gift from God!

Bold humility is allowing God to do his best work through us, whether it’s singing on stage, calculating numbers, strength training, or writing reports. Bold humility is living out our calling with gratitude as His beloved sons and daughters.

So the next time you receive a compliment:

1. Simply say “thank you” and smile.
2. Receive it as a gift from God and thank Him for glorifying himself through you.

PRAYER: *God, you are holy and worthy! Thank you for lavishing love on me. Thank you for giving me gifts and abilities to glorify you. Help me accept compliments graciously and to point back to you. Let me not shrink back from those gifts in timidity, but let me live boldly for you in your name! Amen.*

Championship Courage

If you're a human being, you've faced fear. Maybe it was on the basketball court or before performing a solo on stage. Maybe it was during a difficult conversation with a friend, applying for college or standing up to peer pressure.

Let's imagine that your fears are like what Joshua faced in the Old Testament just before leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. But for a change, let's place it in the setting of a modern day high school.

The Set-up: *You play on the underdog football team The Israelites. Coach God has appointed Moses as the star quarterback and led your team through forty long games this season. The players haven't always followed Coach's Playbook so there have been disappointing losses. But you've seen Coach work miracle plays. Those miracles have led you to the championship game.*

You, Joshua, are the second string quarterback. You've been Moses' shadow for the whole season, listening to the strategies and training hard, hoping that one day you might be sent on the field. Coach calls you into his office the day before the big game.

The Scene:

"Joshua, I have news for you," says Coach God.

"Yes, Coach?"

"Moses disobeyed me and I suspended him from the team. You'll play for him in the championship game. The opposing team is ranked #1 and it'll be tough, but you've been training hard."

Your adrenaline rushes, but then fear consumes you. “Uh, thanks Coach, I really appreciate it. But I don’t feel ready.”

*Coach looks you square in the eyes. “Joshua, **be strong and courageous**, because you will lead your team well. **Be strong and very courageous**. Be careful to obey all my plays; do not turn from them to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you throw. Study my Playbook all day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and courageous**. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for I will be coaching you from the sidelines, and will be with you wherever you go” (loosely translated from Joshua 1:6-9).*

Just like quarterback Joshua, Biblical Joshua faced intense fear, but his fear was in facing enemy nations who wanted to wage war against the Israelites and keep them from the Promised Land.

God knows that it’s easy for anyone to be paralyzed by fear. He reminded Joshua to be strong and courageous three different times! Whenever our fear shows up, God gives us the same encouraging promises he gave Joshua:

Be strong and courageous

This does not mean mustering up our own courage. Instead, it means thanking God for our weaknesses which require us to rely on God’s strength (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Meditate on my Law day and night

God has given us everything we need in His Word. When we spend time daily with Him, it is like strength training; he gives us wisdom, truth and endurance to accom-

plish the tasks he sets in front of us.

Do not be terrified or discouraged

Fear is not our default mode. “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). Courage is choosing to act in faith in God’s power, even when you’re fearful.

The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go

God has given us the Holy Spirit to go with us wherever we go, and through Him the same power lives in us that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20). We can ask for no greater power!

PRAYER: *“I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies” (Psalm 18:1-3).*

Chariots, Horses and Cathedrals

I saw Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris for the first time while on a Denver Lutheran High tour of Europe. It was nineteen years ago that our group adventured through London, Paris, Rome, Versailles and the Amalfi Coast, and it was a trip I'll never forget.

After the tragic burning of the Cathedral on April 15, I picked up my cherished scrapbook and found pictures of my high school self standing in front of the 850-year-old French Gothic work of art. I remember that when I stood close enough to touch the ancient stones, the sheer immensity of it took my breath away, especially when I realized it was built between 1163 and 1345. 182 years of construction without modern technology makes it even more impressive to witness.

As the French capital and the rest of the world mourns the loss of “Our Lady of Paris,” Artist Scott Erickson reminds Americans why European cathedrals were so vital to people pre-Reformation. He says that in America, “we build religious buildings for a teacher. We don't build buildings to *be* a teacher.”

Cathedrals were built during a mostly illiterate era when common people didn't have the opportunity to learn about their faith through God's Word in their own hands. They depended on their priests and the stained glass imagery, sculptures, and architecture of their cathedrals to point them to Christ. The Notre-Dame represents people hungry to know God.

Soaring church spires, national icons, and sacred landmarks are all gifts to us on this earth. They point to God as we see His creativity displayed through human craftsmanship and genius. However, they are earthly, temporary things. The Notre-Dame fire is a reminder to us that they are not unshakeable. They can teach us about God, they can glorify our God, but they are not God.

King David wrote, **“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm” (Psalm 20:7-8).**

As the 2018-2019 school years soon draws to a close, you may be heading off to new places. Some of you will be graduating and going to college, some of you will be starting careers, others will be traveling or taking on other challenges. Before taking your first steps, take a moment to reflect on these questions:

Where does my strength come from?

When I am afraid, who or what do I turn to?

Whose opinion matters most to me?

Am I trusting in my own chariots and horses (abilities, resources, money, relationships) to succeed?

Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” None of us has the ability to get through life with our human strength. But because Jesus went to the cross for our sins and gained for us an eternal, unshakeable future, we can count on him living in us and going before us and fighting for us.

So when you take your first steps into the days ahead, remember that Christ will help you rise up and stand firm. When you get up in the early morning after a late night of studying, He will be your strength. When you face work challenges, you can put your trust in Him. If you experience fear or sickness or death, His is the powerful name you can call on for help.

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29).

PRAYER: *Eternal God, you are the Great I AM. You are greater than things on this earth and greater than my inadequacies. Fill me with your Spirit for the days ahead, and help me put my trust in You. Go with all our students and teachers as they spread out to different corners of our city and country and the world as we begin new journeys. May all that we do be to your glory! Amen.*

Don't Forget Your Hope

When was the last time you experienced deep darkness?

I don't mean the kind of darkness lit by the light of an exit sign, night light or stars. I mean darkness without any trace of light—the kind that leaves you feeling a little afraid, alone, facing the unknown.

Even with the hope of a new year and a new start, some of us can relate to that deep darkness experience. It's the feeling we have when we've prayed over and over without the answer we want; when we face a challenging day and want to crawl back under the covers; when the new year is just around the corner and we feel like we barely made it through the current year. It's a feeling of hopelessness.

Let's read a story told by Jesus about the importance of never leaving home without hope:

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said,

**‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’
“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”
(Matthew 25:1-13).**

Israelite weddings were big deals. In fact this was probably the party of the year. So why in the world did some of the virgins not bring their extra oil? Maybe they got too busy with work and forgot to pack it. Maybe their bag was full because they packed too many outfits. Maybe they didn’t really think he would come and they lost hope.

It’s easy for us to leave our hope at home, too.

But hope in Jesus reminds us to prepare our hearts in the darkness when we can’t see yet. If we trust who He says He is, then we can trust He will come back for us. We keep our lamps lit in the deepest night because Jesus is coming.

In the deepest darkness of despair, when the Jewish people couldn’t see how a Savior would rescue them, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2).**

These words are for us, too, the people living after Christmas, wondering how God is working in our lives when we can’t see. When we can’t yet see and we find ourselves struggling to hope, we can remember these three promises to keep our lamps lit:

- God sent his Son as a baby into our world to die for us so that sin and death would have no more power over us.
- We are in a season of waiting, but it is promise-waiting, not pointless-waiting. God

is always working for good in the deepest darkness, even when we can't see.

- Jesus will come again to make all things right and we will live with him forever in eternity!

As the newness of 2020 already starts to wear off, ask God to make himself known to you each day, and wait expectantly with hope to see how He is working in your life.

PRAYER: *Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... thank you for the promise of your second coming! Light my lamp with hope. Help me to wait patiently. Let me live for the glory of your promise that you are making all things right, and you will come again to bring peace! Amen.*

Fear Not

One of the strangest words I ever had on a vocab test was “triskaidekaphobia,” which means fear of the number thirteen. Strange for sure, but that’s not as weird as it gets. “Linonophobia” is the fear of string; “arachibutyrophobia” is the fear of peanut butter sticking to the mouth; and most recently, linguists came up with “nomophobia” to describe the anxiety that arises from being out of cell service range, without a charged phone, or with a lost phone. The struggle is real!

You probably don’t need to Google the long list of peoples’ odd phobias to know how fearful people can be. You feel your own worries on a daily basis, and sometimes they can seem impossible to overcome.

That’s why it’s not surprising when God speaks in Scripture, His most common, comforting command is this:

Do not be afraid.

God spoke these words directly to Abram when God told him to pack up and move so he could become a great nation. **“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and your very great reward” (Genesis 15:1).**

God gave this command to King Jehoshaphat as they faced an insurmountable enemy. **“Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s” (2 Chronicles 20:15).**

David wrote about trusting in God during some of the darkest moments of his life. **“The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1).**

God spoke to the prophet Isaiah, **“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).**

Jesus taught on the hillside about the silliness of worrying. **“So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:31).**

Before being taken to the cross and giving his life for our sins, Jesus said, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).**

Do not be afraid.

When the Son of Man appeared to the Apostle John in his Revelation, He said, **“Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever!” (Revelation 1:17-18).**

Do not be afraid.

We hear it over and over again, so it’s obvious these are words for us today. When we face daily life, fear rises up: bad grades, injuries, college applications, breakups, abusive words, regrets, consequences, a lost game, job changes, and more. So we try to beat fear with control. If only I can study enough... if I hide long enough this problem will go away... if I eat healthier... if I give up, I won’t care anymore... We believe if we can control everything that goes into making us happy in this world, then we can cover up our fears. But the truth is that nothing will make us happy or peaceful except relinquishing control to God.

It’s not easy, but that’s why we go to His Word and His Spirit in us, always there with

four simple words: **Do not be afraid.** He reminds us that he is worthy of our trust. He cares for all of our needs, great and small; He is our refuge and ever-present help; and He has proven himself faithful to the very end, once dead, now alive forever.

“Do not be afraid” means trusting God with everything. We breathe out fear and breathe in God’s Word of protection and promise.

Action Steps:

Take a few moments in prayer right now to ask God what you fear today.

Fear is ever-present unless we replace it with trust. To remind yourself of God’s loving protection, read over the verses above and insert your name in each one. For example: “Do not be afraid, _____. I am your shield and your very great reward.”

PRAYER: *“God, search my heart and show me what my fears are. Help me lay them at the cross, where you died for them, and replace them with full trust in you. Help me to live fully believing in your care, unhindered by worry. You deserve all glory and honor and praise! In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

He Has Scars Like Us

It's not until we're in trouble that we see the heroes.

Batman is concealed as Bruce Wayne, but when an evil villain strikes Gotham City, the superhero emerges from his Bat Cave and saves the night.

Healthcare heroes do much of their valuable work during long hours behind closed curtains. Often we don't appreciate their dedication—until a pandemic strikes and they risk their lives to save us.

But sometimes, it's not until we've seen a wounded hero that we fully understand the sacrifice.

Shortly after Jesus has risen from the dead, he appears to some of his disciples. Thomas was not with them, and when he hears about Jesus' resurrection, he doubts.

“Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:27-29).

Through Thomas, Jesus' first lesson is that it's a blessing to have faith without sight. That's us today—we believe even though we were not eyewitnesses to Jesus when he was on earth. But there's another truth that sometimes gets missed in this story: Thomas finally believes not after he sees Jesus, but *after he feels the scars*. Why?

Jesus' scars prove he can relate to our suffering. Thomas saw Jesus crucified in an agonizing death on the cross. And yet here is the dead man, alive, bearing the proof

that it wasn't Thomas' crazy imagination. This must mean Jesus really was the man on the cross. And if he is a risen man, he must also be God. A God that understands suffering completely upends everything we would expect about God, and yet is everything we would want in a God.

A suffering God knows what we're going through. He knows what it feels like to look in the mirror and see the result of a sickness, injury or emotional trauma that maybe no one else but you sees. *He gets you.*

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus' scars are the proof of his love. Just like Thomas, every one of us will have doubts sometimes. We'll doubt God's power over crises. We'll doubt he can forgive us. We'll doubt faith. But Jesus invites us to feel his wounds because they are the proof of his love for us. *He not only gets you, but he gave his life out of unconditional love for you.*

“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

PRAYER: What about you? Do you have scars you've prayed God would take away? Maybe God has chosen to answer your prayer. But if not, ask him: what story do my scars tell? Who can I share it with? How can they display your glory?

Then you can pray with gratitude the lyrics written by the band I Am They:

[\(View song online\)](#)

Scars

**“So I’m thankful for the scars
‘Cause without them I wouldn’t know Your heart
And I know they’ll always tell of who You are
So forever I am thankful for the scars”**

Whatever your plans for your day, Jesus invites you to pause for a moment, close your eyes, and put your hands in the wounds of your Hero’s hands and his side. Take comfort in the truth that he walks with you through your pain, that he has purposefully kept his scars as a gift to you, and that your own scars tell a beautiful story of his rescue.

How to Trust God in Anxiety

The title of this article is not, “How to Avoid Anxiety,” because that’s impossible this side of heaven. Anxiety disorders affect one in four youth over their lifetime, and it’s the most common disorder for youth to face in childhood and adolescence. While some of us will never have a diagnosed anxiety disorder, we all face anxious, fearful, worrying feelings at different points.

Life can feel like a juggling act – we try our best to keep relationships, school, work, health, and money in the air, but circumstances can cause them to fall out of sync or to drop, or maybe even cause us to fall with them.

But the truth is that it’s not a tricky juggling act. Someone much more capable is holding your life in His hands. Here are three short prayers that can help you trust God in your anxieties.

God, I confess you designed me to be dependent, not in control.

Shortly before he is arrested, Jesus delivers the scary news to his disciples that he will be going away with His Father, and the disciples will be persecuted badly. I can imagine the looks of fear and confusion on the disciples’ faces. Talk about anxiety about the future! Their looks must have been what inspired Jesus’ next words, and I imagine he put his hands comfortingly on their shoulders as he said, “I’ve told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Jesus confirms that troubles are a certainty, but then he gives us the best news possible: he has conquered those troubles. He has conquered the whole world! He is greater than any fear, anxiety, or circumstance we could face.

Not only that, but Jesus is promising us that if we believe that we are dependent—that we need God’s love, Jesus’ salvation, and the Holy Spirit’s power in us to get through this life and into eternity—then we too can be “unshakable and assured, deeply at peace” (John 16:33 The Message).

And that’s because the one who is in control is a loving God who wants the best for us.

God, keep me in your perfect peace.

It is possible to be deeply at peace. The key is that we can’t find it in ourselves – we can only find peace *in Jesus*. “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you” (Isaiah 26:3).

When you are struggling with anxiety, you are vulnerable, and the enemy knows this. He will send shooting arrows of doubts and accusations at you. He will make you restless. He will tempt you to find ‘peace’ in food, drugs or alcohol, achievements, relationships, TV, etc.

To guard yourself against the enemy, the Psalmist says to keep a steadfast mind. When you are anxious, remind yourself of these Biblical promises:

- God alone knows and loves every detail about you.
- God alone knows your past, present and future.
- God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He’s walking right next to you now and he’s also at the end of this difficult road.

You can rest when you are grounded and centered in Jesus. He may not choose to quiet the waves around you, but he can calm the waves of anxiety within you with his peace.

God, in this anxiety I am thankful for...

As difficult as it may seem, trusting God with your life begins with giving thanks. More than anyone, Paul knew this truth personally. He was beaten, bruised, and imprisoned for his faith, yet he praised in prison. And this is what he wrote to the church:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, *with thanksgiving*, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Instead of asking, “why?” (Why is Jesus allowing me to suffer? Why am I being targeted? Why am I so scared?) a thankful spirit asks, “how?” *How* does Jesus want to teach me through this? *How* can I grow? *How* can I reflect the light of Christ through my circumstances?

Consider keeping a gratitude journal. Take a few moments each night before bed to reflect on the blessings of the day. You can even train your thoughts toward gratitude for the things that didn’t go so well—what did you learn?—or thank God for the sacred unseen.

In praise, we see God’s blessings, God’s hand, and God’s promises.

As you pray these three prayers in the darkest hours of your anxiety, may they help you to know your Creator more deeply, and trust your Creator more firmly. He has only the best plans for his cherished child. **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6).**

Lumps of Clay

One of these days you should wander into an art classroom at LuHi and watch our talented ceramics students. You'll see that a beautiful piece of pottery is not created by chance, but is dependent on many fine details: the malleability and composition of the clay, the deftness of the artist's hands, the humidity and temperature of the kiln, and of course, the skill of the master's hands.

Have you ever felt like a piece of clay? High school can be rough. It's easy to feel lumpy, unfinished and plain. It's a lot of pressure to choose friends, classes, activities and life paths. It's difficult to imagine the unique piece of pottery you can be before you even know your identity. That must have been how the nation of Israel was feeling when God told the prophet Jeremiah to speak to them.

Israel had an interesting story with God. God specially chose them as his nation, rescuing them from slavery, miraculously providing food and water for them in the desert, leading them to the Promised Land, giving them a place to live, and unconditionally loving them. Yet they were constantly complaining, worshiping other idols, ignoring his laws, and the list goes on. But after yet another talk with Jeremiah about Israel's sin problem, God didn't give up on them. Instead, he gave the prophet this beautiful picture:

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.” Then the word of the Lord came to me. He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel” (Jeremiah 18:1-6).

God gives us the whole truth: we are marred. We are flawed, useless lumps of clay outside the hands of a Master Potter. But the good news is that we've been in his skilled, loving hands this whole time. Just as God chose Israel, he chose us. Just as he didn't give up on Israel, he doesn't give up on us. He sent his Son Jesus to the cross to redeem us from being hard rocky soil into soft, workable lumps of clay, each with a unique beauty and purpose.

Now our challenge is to surrender to the Holy Spirit. He is the Living Water running deeply through us, and if we surrender, we can be fluidly shaped and molded into pieces of pottery for his glory. "He will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; he will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

Questions for reflection:

1. Are there areas in your life that feel tough and un-malleable? What keeps you from trusting God with them?
2. What needs to be re-shaped, re-formed, or maybe even cut off?
3. Is there a part of your character that God seems to be working on? (Hint: it most likely will not feel easy and comfortable.)
4. How have you seen God's artistry in you as you've been shaped?

A final step

God desires an honest relationship with you. Spend time in prayer and be vulnerable with him. Tell him your needs. Ask for forgiveness. And trust that even when you feel incomplete, you are becoming a beautiful work of art!

Mud Pies Or Holidays?

“It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak... like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” —C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

Many of you are probably familiar with the church season of Lent. It’s a season of reflection for Christians, spending the forty day period before Easter remembering Jesus’ sacrifice for us that resulted in his resurrection from the dead and in our salvation, which we celebrate on Easter.

But what many people don’t know is that it can be a season to reflect on comforts.

That seems like a strange word during Lent, doesn’t it? After all, many Christians are in the practice of giving up comforts like chocolate or soda or Snapchat or Netflix to remember that Jesus gave up so much for us. But the benefit of giving up these guilty pleasures is that it can shine an unflattering spotlight on the things we turn to for comfort, satisfaction, worth and happiness. Sometimes it’s only until you give something up that you realize how much you depend on it.

For a long time, the Apostle Paul depended on his good works and reputation. Writing to the Philippians, he seems to be bragging that of anyone, he would deserve salvation if it were based on works. **“If anyone thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more...” He goes on to list his merits: circumcised, from the tribe of Benjamin of Israel, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, and obedience to the Old Testament law without fault (Philippians 3:4-6).**

But he reminds us that none of that matters in the end. **“But whatever was to my**

profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:7-11).

Nothing else matters, Paul says. Everything else is rubbish.

Giving up comforts at Lent can be a helpful practice if it reminds us to stop spending our time making mud pies in the slum, and instead embrace the holiday at the sea that Jesus offers us. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,” Jesus promises us in John 10:10. That holiday is a promise for now, not just for eternity. The Spirit of the resurrected Jesus lives inside us, and God has ordained every day of our lives!

So this Lent, whether you have given something up or not, remember to rely on the lasting comfort of a relationship with your Creator, the God of the universe, who gave up everything to rescue you so you could live in paradise with him forever. That is the “surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus” that Paul is talking about!

PRAYER: *Jesus, this Lenten season is all about you. It’s about your unconditional, unwavering, unstoppable love that rescued me from my sins. Help me to desire you over the things of this world, and to remember that You are the only one who can satisfy my deepest needs. Thank you for paying the ultimate sacrifice for my salvation! Amen.*

The Gift of Rest

You may not believe it after all the May snow, but summer is finally here! After a long year of studying, training, teaching and working, you've earned a new swimming suit and some relaxation in the sun.

Some of us look forward to slowing down in the summer—spending time with family and friends at barbeques, lounging by the pool, taking a trip or two, and sleeping in. For other people it actually means cramming as much as possible into the short season: a summer job, classes, athletic training, trips, Pinterest, movies, an impossible bucket list, and all the ice cream.

As you plan your summer days, consider treating them as a gift of rest from God for hardworking students and teachers. If the school year is the six days of creation, the summer is the seventh day of stillness.

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Genesis 2:2-3).

If the God of the universe who holds galaxies and spins planets and breathes life takes a rest, how much more should we! Genesis shows us that it is sacred to form a rhythm of work and rest. In fact, God made it one of the Ten Commandments. He said to remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy *because it is a Sabbath to the Lord*. (Exodus 20:8). Rest keeps our bodies and minds healthy, but it also reminds us that our days belong to God, and he alone gives us the ability to live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

Of course, this is easier said than done. Suddenly pausing after such a busy school year can feel strange and uncomfortable. It feels a lot like putting aside your phone for a few hours, which can initially cause anxiety or restlessness. But as author Bob Goff says, “God isn’t going to try to shout over all of the noise in our lives.” Filling our days with meaningful activity is good, but if we don’t purposefully create moments to slow down, we may miss God’s voice.

“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him...” (Psalm 37:7a).

“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength” (Isaiah 30:15).

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

“Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place” (Mark 6:31-32).

This summer, accept God’s gifts for you and listen for his voice. Try to be intentional about creating a daily and weekly rhythm for yourself that mirrors God’s rhythm. Work hard and play hard, but then allow yourself time to be still. Don’t overcommit yourself. Pray and spend time in God’s Word. Be silent with Him for five minutes and increase that time a little bit each day. Be fully present in a face to face conversation with friends and family. Above all, allow him to bless and rejuvenate you!

PRAYER: *Heavenly Father, thank you for the season of summer. Help me to fully receive the Word you speak to me, the grace you breathe in me, and the power you give me through Your living Spirit. Help me to be still and know that you are God.*

Suggested Listening:

“Here,” performed by Kari Jobe, written by David Leonard, Kari Jobe and Leslie Jordan. [Watch Online.](#)

The Orphan Monkey

My kids and I recently watched a powerful story about baby animals in a Disney Nature film called “Growing Up Wild.” One of the babies, a monkey, lived within a troop of fifty monkeys that, by nature, heavily depend on a social class system. If a monkey is born into a good family, it gets the best food and the best chance at survival. If a monkey is in the lowest of classes, it sadly doesn’t fare well.

We watched the dramatic footage of one poor orphan trying and failing to fend for himself multiple times. He scrounged for any meager scraps of food he could get, and my daughter gasped when he was hit and shoved away by older monkeys as they guarded their food for their royal babies.

As time passed, the monkey gradually lost strength. He grew fragile and tired, and the narrator explained he would not make it much longer. But just as all hope seemed to be lost, the camera eye turned to the alpha monkey, the male leader of the monkey troop. The leader saw the little one and unexpectedly took pity on him, acting totally out of the social precedent of his troop. In the most tender of scenes, we watched in awe as he picked up the orphaned monkey to himself. The little one immediately clung to his chest, wrapping his arms around him.

We are that little monkey. We are the undeserving, broken, needy runts of the litter, yet God sent his son Jesus to destroy all physical and spiritual barriers—royalty becoming peasantry—to wrap his arms fully and completely around us and become our adopted Father. He rescued us from death and he didn’t stop there! He gave us His name, calling us his chosen people, His royal priesthood, a people belonging to Him (1 Peter 2:9).

After discussing this scene, my kids and I also talked about the sad reality that some people are pushed around just like these little monkeys, for no good reason except that

someone has decided they aren't worthy of being called human. We talked about how it's good to feel sad because it's not God's best plan for the world. Being sad is indication that the Holy Spirit lives in us and is speaking truth to us about our broken world.

Then we discussed ways we can be like that adoptive father monkey, looking out for the needy ones in his troop. What can we do for people when we see them being mistreated? How can we partner with God to bring His Kingdom on this earth and join His redemption plan?

Jesus said that when we are loving people in need, we are actually loving him.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me...And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’ (Matthew 25:35-40).

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling” (Psalm 68:5).

Not only do we have the privilege of serving our King alongside Him in his Kingdom, but we also have the greatest privilege of all: we get to cling to his chest and call him Daddy. So we can pray Abba, Daddy.

PRAYER: *Daddy, thank you for loving us when we were still sinners. We've never deserved your love*

and yet you give it unfailingly, always welcoming us back when we turn away. Help us to offer that same love to the helpless, the needy, the hurting and the sinners, remembering that you did it for us and we do it for you. Thy Kingdom come. You are making all things new! Amen.

The Parable of Risk

I'm going to ask a question. Instead of responding immediately, be still for a few moments and reflect on the feelings it stirs up.

Have you ever felt inadequate?

(pause for reflection)

What do you feel?

What memories have been dredged up?

What kind of conversation are you having with yourself or God in this moment?

This is a question that strikes a deep chord in most people because it gets at the heart of who we are. It reminds us we are imperfect humans and that we've made mistakes; we've messed up on tests, missed that field goal, failed a friend, the list goes on.

But the worst part is that when we make mistakes, the enemy tricks us into thinking they define us. We let our inadequacies scare us from taking important steps because we risk failing. We'd rather be safe than sorry.

But what if Jesus wanted us to take that risk anyway? What if safety isn't his goal?

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus tells a story about a man who goes on a trip and leaves money behind with his servants to invest wisely. When he returns, he discovers

that two of the servants doubled his investment, so the man invites them to be his partners. However, the servant who received the lesser amount of money tells him this:

“Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent” (Matthew 24-25 The Message).

Wow. Who wants to go see that story projected on the big screen? A movie about a guy who plays it safe? It’s not exactly Academy Award material.

Playing it safe doesn’t make an interesting movie and it doesn’t make an interesting life story for any of us to lead. Worse, it’s a harmful Kingdom story. When the man in the parable hears that his servant squirreled away his money and didn’t add to it, he is angry. “That’s a terrible way to live! It’s criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least?” (Matthew 25:26 The Message).

Do you think he would have been as angry with the servant if he had invested his money and lost it? I don’t.

When it comes to following Jesus, risky living is faith living.

More than anyone, Jesus is well acquainted with the risks of living on this earth. He took on human flesh, endured pain, and loved sacrificially, taking the ultimate risk when he gave up his life for us. But this is the good news of the Gospel: Jesus’ death abolished our absolute greatest risk: final death. His resurrection promises us life and everything we need to risk our lives loving this world.

Here's the surprising truth: our inadequacies don't surprise God. In fact, they're a blessing. He called us knowing we would need to rely on Him in our weaknesses, and that makes us stronger (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

So when God calls you from the sidelines into the game, giving him your best isn't by saying, "Coach, I can't play. I'm afraid I'll make a mistake," or, "I'm not ready," or, "I'd rather be safe than hurt."

In C.S. Lewis' beloved book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lucy is afraid of encountering Aslan, the Lion, and asks if he's safe. Mr. Beaver replies, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King."

Instead of sitting on the bench because it's safe, say "yes!" to using your God-given talents to grow the Kingdom. Say "yes!" to giving him your best. Say "yes!" to stepping out in risky faith in the middle of your inadequacies. You can do all things through Him who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13) and you will have an epic life-story to tell at the end of it.

PRAYER: *Heavenly Father, I admit I struggle with inadequacies, sins, and temptations. Please forgive me. Help me say "yes" to faith, and not to safety. Help me say "yes" to your calling, and not to fear. Fill me with strength and courage through your Holy Spirit to take risks and use my talents for your Kingdom. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



Devotional

2020

Learn more about Lutheran High School:

To learn more about the mission, vision, and core values of Lutheran High School in Parker, CO please visit www.lhsparker.org. To set up a personal tour of the school, please contact the Director of Admissions Hannah Buchholz at hannah.buchholz@lhsparker.org or 720-822-7981.