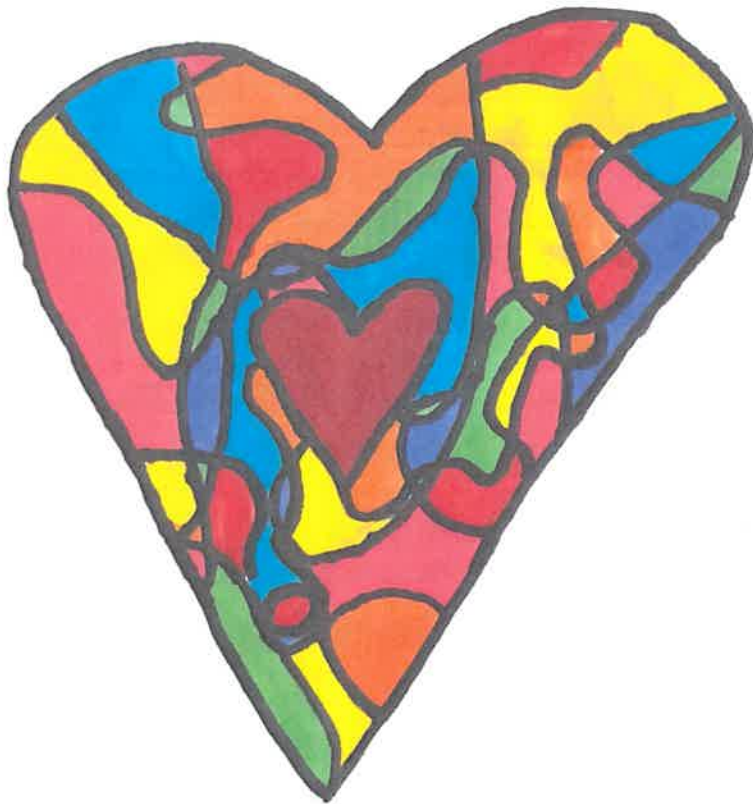


Our Savior's Lutheran Church
"Notes of Gratitude"
Lenten Devotional 2024



Artwork by Anna Hearne

Lent at Our Savior's

Ash Wednesday, February 14th

6:00am-8:00am Drive-Thru Ashes

11:00am Service with Ashes

3:30pm-5:30pm Drive-Thru Ashes

6:00pm Service with Ashes

Wednesdays During Lent

(locations subject to change)

Weekly Ecumenical Services @ 12:00pm

February 21st @ The Ridge

February 28th @ OSLC

March 6th @ Holy Angels Catholic Church

March 13th @ Trinity Lutheran

March 20th @ Fifth Avenue Methodist Church

Our Savior's Midweek Service @ 6:00pm

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday, March 24th

8:00am & 10:00am Worship

Holy Week

Maundy Thursday Worship March 28th @ 6:00pm

Good Friday Worship March 29th @ 6:00pm

Easter Sunday, March 31st

The Day of the Lord's Resurrection

8:00am & 10:00am Worship

Breakfast Served From @ 7:15am-9:45am

Dear OSLC Friend,

The late American author and Jewish Rabbi Harold Kushner once wrote: *“Can you see the holiness in those things you take for granted- a paved road or a washing machine? If you concentrate on finding what is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul.”* In other words, focus on the good and the good will get even better!

The guiding scripture for our 2nd Annual OSLC Lenten Devotional booklet is John 3:14-21. A curious Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night to talk. Jesus reminds him *“For God so loved the world that in the fullness of time, he sent his only Son so that those who believe would not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). With these words, Jesus is offering us an opportunity to place gratitude at the center of their life and practice it daily.

May these **“notes of gratitude”** be an opportunity for you to look for the good and *practice gratitude* over the 40 days of Lent. You will notice the reflections are anonymous. All of the writers reflect on gratitude in their lives. I am thankful for their willingness to write and share with us. You may want to journal each day as you read these reflections in the space provided on each page.

Our worship services in Lent will be centered around the theme of gratitude in our prayers, music and decoration. In gratitude for Deacon Sherie as she prepares to retire in May, our almsgiving project will be lifting up the good work of the *Washington County Humane Society*, an organization very near and dear to her heart.

I want to especially thank Amy Hearne and Kelly Strosin for their willingness to help put together this finished booklet you now see. Anna Hearne has provided the art on the front cover. I thank you, dear reader, for joining OSLC on this Lenten journey. *Take the opportunity each day to focus on the good and may the good get even better for you!*

Grateful for you,
Pastor Jim “PJ”

John 3:14-21 Our Guiding Scripture Text for “Notes of Gratitude”

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

For God so loved the world that in the fullness of time he sent his only Son so that those who believe would not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Your Daily Devotionals - Suggestions for Use

1. Read John 3:14-21 several times during the Season of Lent. Reading it slowly and aloud if possible.
2. Slowly read the devotional and pray the prayer.
3. Pray for the writer of the day's devotional, thanking God for opening their lives and for sharing their faith with you.
4. Use your Bible to look up any verse the writer may have referenced.
5. Let all that you have read be present with you throughout your day and activities.
6. Read the devotional as a family, at a meal, or with a prayer partner. Children can participate in reading aloud and discussing.
7. Give a copy of this devotional to a friend or relative.
8. Respond at the bottom of page in the "My Response" to each devotional.
9. Conclude each time of devotion by praying the 'Our Father.'
10. Discuss the day's devotional with others, asking these questions:

What am I grateful for?

What made me smile today?

What are you looking forward to?

Ash Wednesday, February 14th

Genesis 1:20-21 And God said "let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens. So God created the sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind."

I am grateful for nature's sounds as well as the music we can create because of talented musicians. To be able to sing and play any instrument is truly a gift from God. I pray that we continue to listen and find joy in the sounds of nature and share with one another the gifts of music.

Prayer: Dear God, I thank you each and every day for the sounds of nature I hear when I walk around my neighborhood. Your world is amazing; each creation, both large and small, having their own special sounds. Even the trees whisper and sway in their own unique ways. You created a world for us to enjoy and to care for so future generations will also know your love for us. God gave his "only Son so that those who believe would not perish but have eternal life." Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, February 15th

I saw a t-shirt the other day that read "Attitude of Gratitude" and I thought how fitting that really is in daily life. In my experiences, being thankful for the big things as well as the small things helps me to realize how blessed I am. I try to give thanks for the good and to rely on God through the bad. It's not always easy but that's where growth comes into play. I firmly believe that God can be seen in ALL circumstances. Being grateful pushes out the darkness and lets the light shine through just as it says in John 3:21.

I was fortunate to grow up with a strong foundation in Christ (thanks, mom & dad!). The experiences I've had, the places I've lived, the people I've met have all shaped me but having Christ at the core has kept me centered. I do thank God every day for all things. Do things always work out the way I want them to? Absolutely not. But focusing on the good helps lead me through the bad times.

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for overseeing all things in my life, for my family and friends and for the love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, February 16th

It is not easy choosing to write about one of the many reasons I am grateful to God. However, I have decided to explain why I am thankful for the parents God gave me.

Mom was left without parents around the age of seven or eight. Her father drowned while the family was at a family reunion, and her mother died a few years later because of a goiter that was not removed. Mom was raised by her older brothers and a sister who was thirteen when their mom passed away.

Dad, a middle child, was one of six being raised by a hardworking mother and a father who was an alcoholic. Fortunately, he became friends with a man who roomed in their home and gave him some direction and friendship.

Despite their hardships and problems, Mom and Dad married so that they could make their own home. To the best of their ability they provided my brother, my sister, and I with a very stable environment. They always put the family first, and they tried to get us involved in activities. Dad coached my brother's baseball team for a time. Mom listened to me practice my clarinet even though she really did not want to do that. She helped my sister and I to bake and prepare meals.

My parents also worked outside the home to provide for us. Mom worked as a salad girl in the hot lunch program at school, and Dad worked as a custodian in various schools. Dad even got some of the elementary children involved in square dancing by helping out after his work hours.

My parents were there for us when we graduated from high school and college. They were a part of our weddings, and they welcomed their grandchildren with open arms and happy hearts. I am sure God welcomed them home by saying well done my good and faithful servants.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for parents who love and guide their children especially to you our Heavenly Father. Please be with those who struggle in this role and lift their burdens. In your name we pray: Amen!

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday, February 17th

Wallace Henry Hartley was an English violinist and bandleader on the RMS Titanic on its maiden voyage. He became famous for leading the eight-member band as the ship sank on April 15, 1912. After the Titanic hit an iceberg and began to sink, Hartley and his fellow band members started playing music to help keep the passengers calm as the crew loaded the lifeboats. Many of the survivors said that Hartley and the band continued to play with the last song being "Nearer, My God, to Thee." The movie Titanic depicts him saying these final words to the stringed quartet: "*Gentlemen, it has been a privilege playing with you tonight.*"

For me, gratitude is an invitation or opportunity to ponder God's song in my life. Pastors can work the oddest hours, situations and venues. I have been honored to live out a calling that places me in times and spaces where I can remind others of God's reckless love and forgiveness for them. In the midst of the chaos so many of us encounter, I get to stand on the "deck of other's ships" and remind them through song, word and deed that God is nearer to them than they would ever realize.

As I close my eyes and take a trip down memory lane, I can see all the baptisms, masses and worship services, funerals, weddings, confirmation classes, hospital visits, anointings and healing services, bible studies, meetings, pet blessings, prayers, homilies, confessions, countless conversations about Jesus, faith and the church. *It's all been a gift, miraculous in its own way despite hardships and challenges along the way.* No statistic will ever hold the incredible wonder of God. I have had the privilege of being included in people's lives that no other profession can claim. From birth to death, I have been invited into the most intimate times and challenging moments from the lives of the people I have been called to serve. Wallace Hartley's words sum up my experience: "*It has been a privilege serving you during my life.*"

Prayer: O God, you so loved the world that in the fullness of time you called us to share your good news! Thank you for the opportunity to be part of other's lives in so many different ways reflecting your spirit of grace, hope and forgiveness. Amen!

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, February 18th – First Sunday of Lent

Your whole world changes when you become a parent. Life suddenly looks completely different in all ways possible. Whether it is the lack of sleep or privacy or never-ending sibling arguments, there are many moments in parenting when it is difficult to have a grateful heart.

However, one of the things I am most grateful for as a parent is experiencing the simple joys of everyday life with our kids. Here are just a few that I am especially grateful for lately:

- Playing in the sand
- Giving a push on a swing
- Petting a neighbor's dog
- Playing hide and seek
- Watching fireworks
- Eating an ice cream cone
- Running in the sprinkler
- Playing the game "spud" with the neighbor kids
- Riding bikes
- Going down a slide
- Enjoying a popsicle on a hot day
- Watering and caring for a garden
- Snuggling on the couch with a book
- Greeting me with joy as I walk in the door
- Smiles and laughter as they experience taking a boat ride for the first time
- Chasing fireflies and collecting bugs
- Shooting hoops in the driveway

Prayer: Lord, help us to see the simplicity of life through the eyes of children. Remind us to have a child-like faith. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, February 19th

Fall can be full of phrases like “I’m so blessed” and “Give thanks.” For some those statements help us remember what is important in their lives. But for many others, the idea of giving thanks and remembering to count their blessings is difficult in their current season of life.

They may be struggling with hard and difficult things. Maybe someone is struggling because their life hasn’t gone the way they thought. Perhaps they are grieving the loss of a spouse, child, or parent. A child may have been given an unexpected diagnosis. Others may desperately want a spouse, or a child and it hasn’t happened like they had imagined. A divorce or physical pain may have altered their life unexpectedly.

Despite what the many signs of gratitude say, I think it is okay to not be grateful in certain seasons of our life. I know this is a book about gratitude, yet I think it is important to give yourself the grace to know that this season may be difficult. It won’t always be this way. Remember God is here for you on the days you are struggling or grieving or both. You are not alone. You are never alone in what you are going through. God is here. Your church family is here. Reach out to a friend, family member, deacon, or pastor. Look for those who are around you and ask for company or help.

For those that are not in a season of struggle or grief keep an eye out and look for those who might need your help. God will place someone in your life at just the right moment who will need you. It might be a note, text, phone call, or a homemade loaf of bread (or even store-bought!), or an invitation for coffee or a meal. Be on the lookout.

Prayer: Dear Lord, for those that are struggling this day give them comfort. Let them know you are near and that they are never alone. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, February 20th

I confess that I have fallen into the trap-the trap of material stuff. I often find that I am convincing myself life would be better if only I had that one (or two or five!) item from Amazon. I sometimes follow too closely to social media influencers or sponsored ads that tend to know just what I “need.” The “stuff” arrives on my doorstep and most of the time they end up on a shelf or shoved in a drawer.

Lately, I find myself desperately searching for less. Less stuff, less toys to pick up, less papers on my counter, less clothes in my closet. Less means simpler and less overwhelming. Less stuff gives me more time to pay attention to the people around me.

Because at the end of the day, the stuff isn’t what makes me happy. Being grateful for the people in my life and the moments where I see God present is what is important.

I have gotten into the habit of listing the gifts I am grateful for when my head hits the pillow each night. The gifts of a sunset or a rainbow but most importantly for the people in my life who fill my days with laughter, joy and so much love. It is in doing this that I remember I am grateful for less stuff and more time with those I love.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gift of people in my life. Thank you for the simple joys you bring. Help me to remember moments are more important than “stuff.” Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, February 21st

If I listed everything in my life for which I'm grateful, I would fill many pages. As I pray to God, I always express thanks and praise along with whatever else is on my heart.

Whatever gifts I have, I should use in a responsible, loving manner. No matter what's happening in this world, I have faith and thanks to God for always being with me. This helps me deal with the good times and the difficult times.

I have gratitude for God's Grace. As the hymn says, "Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far, and Grace will lead me home."

Prayer: Thank you, God. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, February 22nd

NOT JUST A NOTE, BUT A LIFE OF GRATITUDE!

Gracious God, I begin each day deeply aware of your presence. And I wonder, why me? Why me – just as I am with my weaknesses, particular traits, and sins too. Why me?

I ask if you are present – and the answer is always the same. Yes, my son, I am right here!

I ponder the eons of time, the vastness of the universe, the billions who have lived and are yet to come. And yet from this vastness you called me forth into being! I never had to be. I had nothing to do with it. Why now? Why here? Why me?

I am but an insignificant speck in the midst of time and space. Yet you loved me enough to bring me into existence so that I could find my way back to you. You even sent your Son to be like me, to live like me, to show me how to live and how to find and follow the way to the eternal life you long to share with me. How do I ever fully grasp that?

All I can do is bow my head, and open my heart, and give thanks – again and again – every single day. And as if that was not enough – you have given me faith and love, friends and a life of meaning, years in which to serve you and your children. And always forgiveness since I know I seldom use what you have given me as well as you have wished.

So what is there NOT to be thankful for? With a very humble heart, each day I pray: “How can I make a return to the Lord for all He has given me?”

Prayer: Lord, help me this day to share the love and joy and goodness you have given to me with each person I meet. May I somehow help them to grasp the majesty of your love for them. How You have drawn them from the depths of time and space to be who they are, just because You love them. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, February 23rd

Words seem to be inadequate in trying to explain everything I am grateful for, all of which flow from the Holy Trinity.

First and foremost, I am grateful for the love of our Creator, Savior and the Holy Spirit. I recognize that it is this Holy Trinity that provides me with all of my blessings, even those that on first glance, didn't seem to be a blessing, but later proved to be.

And then there will be the magnificent splendor of eternal life that we will share with others that we love.

Beyond that, there are too many blessings that I am grateful for to list in here, so in no particular order, I'll list a few:

the love of my family and friends as well as opportunities provided by my parents, teachers and employers. Enjoying a cup of coffee on a sunny winter day with deep blue skies and a fresh snowy mantel. Music and art. Squeaky cheese curds. The laughter, giggles and hugs of little kids. People who value compassion and forgiveness. Flowers and gardeners who tend to them. Church members who do the work. Medical care and advancements. What little healthcare that is affordable. Human innovation and inventiveness. Second chances. To have soloed in an airplane. Peace and equity. Defenders and promoters of justice. Care givers. Philanthropists. Environmentalists. Dark Chocolate. Our home. Vacations. To have lived in another country. People who help me with computer problems. Diversity in all of nature. Wonders of God's universe being discovered. Rest and Meditation. Omelets. My ancestors who provided for future generations. Officials who compromise to get things done. People who add action to their thoughts and prayers. Carrot cake. To have had a lifetime of work that I thoroughly enjoyed and some great coworkers. Turquoise waters and sand beaches of the Caribbean. Costco. All non-profit workers. This opportunity to reflect on gratitude.

Prayer: Thank you God for it all. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday, February 24th

I am thankful for my parents and the fact that I had them until I was in my mid-sixties.

We were poor money wise, but not love wise. They showed me their love in so many different ways.

My mom was a stay at home mom, but when I was in my teens I wanted to take accordion lessons. My parents could not afford them, so my mom went to work to pay for my lessons, and save enough to buy me (a powder blue) accordion and future lessons. Then she quit working and became a stay at home mom again.

After I married and had kids, my mom took care of them while I worked. She also had us for supper at least 3 or 4 times week. She was now showing her love for my husband, kids, and myself.

My dad taught me how to handle money, explaining knowing the difference between necessity and a want. He said I should never charge a want item and make payments on it. You save until you can pay cash. The hardest part of this was learning the difference between a necessity and a want. This kept me out of trouble financially, especially when my husband got laid off from work several times through the years.

My parents did not tell me but showed me what a happy marriage should be like. My mom would be walking by my dad, and he would just grab her, give her a kiss, and tell her he loved her and send her on her way. He also always asked my mom if she needed any help with anything. They always worked together! My parents were always there for me whenever I needed them for any reason.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for giving me such loving parents who taught me to love You. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, February 25th – Second Sunday of Lent

Every grown woman needed their mother's comfort. But I didn't get it from mine-not as child, not as a teenager, and certainly not as a grown woman. Her coldness to me shaped my whole life. I never stopped looking for comfort in jobs, men, houses, and friends. Until now.

I am grateful for the love and comfort I receive from my second husband. Our current home, filled with love and laughter and a deep, deep sense of safety fills and comforts me. I wonder how this feeling would have shaped my life 20 or 30 years ago? But I won't know. I only know my gratitude for having it now. Walking through the desert makes the oasis more refreshing, stimulating and cooling. God has a plan.

Prayer: Thank you, Heavenly Father, for bringing me comfort, no matter when it arrives and who brings it. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, February 26th

John 3:16 tells us "For God so loved the world that in the fullness of time, he sent his only Son so that those who believe would not perish but have eternal life."

I love to walk daily as a part of my morning routine.

"The Sacred Trail" (The Military Ridge State Trail) fills me up with a cup of gratitude!

It is my daily sanctuary, and I am very thankful that it is walking distance of my house.

I walk and I talk, and sometimes even sing!

A conversation with God. The talks that I have with God are prayers, discussions, and questions of hope, joy, sorrow, anger...laughter and tears.

Are there answers to the questions? ...Yes.

God's timing, the divine order of things, often conflicts with My way of wanting things.

It is amazing and mysterious to me how often I see, hear, and feel the answers...especially on "The Sacred Trail."

A song may develop in my head, a coin appears in a random spot, a person may say or text exactly what I needed to hear.

Sticks appear as crosses very often... Do they and the other "signs" signal a reminder that I don't walk alone? The answer I know is a resounding yes!

Like the seasons, "The Sacred Trail" blooms, flourishes and fades.

Mother Nature gives birth in the spring and then the cycle of growth begins.

I see, smell, and feel the changing seasons on my morning walks...still talking with God no matter what time of the year it may be.

Fireworks of flowers in the springtime and summer...blaze orange leaves and peaceful snowfall in the fall and winter.

It is beautiful to know...and an important reminder...especially when days feel dreary...that the Father, Son, and Spirit remain constant. Peace, Love and on Fire!

Prayer: For the gift of walking, O God, I say thanks. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, February 27th

I am grateful for many things in my life as the Lord has blessed me in many ways. I am most grateful for my parents who gave me a loving home and a strong foundation based on Faith.

Growing up, I was raised in a Pentecostal church. As a young child/teen, I was ridiculed by my peers because of my religion, our Faith beliefs, and the number of days per week we attended services. I learned what others don't understand they often make fun of instead. I was grateful that my parents encouraged me to surround myself with kind, understanding people who didn't judge based on religion. After all, we were just like everyone else.

Fast forward a number of years, I met a young man, who had been raised at Our Savior's Lutheran Church. We got engaged and were married at OSLC by Pastor Anderson. I was grateful that my parents were understanding of this decision to be married at a Lutheran church. I was not surprised that they 'practiced what they preached' and had an open mind to their daughter being married in a church that was not their own.

Being a young couple and starting a family of our own, we attended service at OSLC on a regular basis. I was pleasantly surprised at the many similarities between my childhood and adulthood faiths! There were very few differences, in my eyes, and felt like OSLC was home for me. When the decision came to become members of OSLC, I was hesitant to tell my parents. Once I finally did tell them, they were happy for us. They simply stated that it didn't matter where we went to church, just as long as we kept Jesus in our hearts, followed the Bible, and went to church – that's all that mattered. I am so grateful to my parents in that moment and for giving me the foundation, from the time I was born, to love Jesus and all that he has to offer.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank You for gifting me with my parents, for allowing me to be your servant, for always being with me and beside me, and for blessing me with my husband and children to accompany me on this journey of life. I am so grateful for all that you have done and continue to do in our lives. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, February 28th

When you begin to be grateful for the ability to feel gratitude, the spiral grows.

Once upon a time there was a man who was marooned on an island. Each day he prayed for rescue but none came. With much weary effort he built a hut to live in and to store provisions. Then one day the hut burned down. He cried out, "*All is gone- God, how could you do this to me!*" The next day a ship came to rescue him. He said, "How did you know I was here?" The reply was, "*We saw your smoke signal.*" Remember the next time your little hut is burning to the ground, it may be a signal that summons the grace of God.

Maybe take some time today to be reminded of how many times we've been rescued when we thought all was lost. When we intentionally name our gifts, we no longer take them *for granted*. We take them *as granted*, as they were intended to be.

Prayer: O God, how often have we blamed instead of praised you in our life? Help us to remember, celebrate and believe the goodness of your grace each day. Help us to have hearts full of gratitude. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, February 29th

Gratitude means being thankful for things that have been given to us. My Lord has given me many blessings. A loving and caring family is at the top of the list. Second, are friends that are there to share in the highs and lows of life.

I hold high my gratitude for what God has given us with the four seasons.

SPRING – God awakens the earth with new life after a long cold winter. The joy I experience when the early flowers peek through the ground. All my senses come alive with the thawing of the earth and the birds arriving back singing their lovely spring songs. I look forward to the blossoms of tulips, daffodils, lilacs and peonies. Seeing and hearing that first robin of the season never gets old.

SUMMER – Flowers are blooming with all the colors of a rainbow. The parable of the Sower (Matthew 13) comes to mind when sunflowers open their bright yellow faces. I praise the Lord for how many seeds fell on fertile ground from my bird feeder. As the flowers mature, the gold finches appreciate the food source as we enjoy their special song.

AUTUMN - My favorite season of the year. God changes the palette of the trees and bushes to the warm vibrant colors of yellow, orange, and red. As I wake to the quiet of the morning, the sunrise greets me through our bedroom window with breathtaking purple, orange, and blue tones. I thank God for His creation that we often take for granted.

WINTER – And then there is winter. I do dread the cold weather and the season that seems to drag on forever but there is beauty. A snowshoe hike in the woods after freshly fallen snow makes me appreciate this season. The pine trees are frosted with the purity of the new snow. The red cardinals sing a different song in the winter. The woodpecker's sound pecking on the tree trunks vibrate through the cold crisp winter air. As I shelter from the cold I begin to think about the next cycle of seasons.

Prayer: My prayer is a song. "When I, in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy hands have made. I see the stars; I hear the rolling thunder. Thy power throughout the universe displayed. Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee how great Thou art, how great Thou art." Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, March 1st

It is a Sunday morning in July, and I am here in Grand Beach, Michigan with some of my brothers. I have so much to be thankful for family, friends, faith all closely connected.

In less than 3 months I will be celebrating my 80th birthday and how grateful to God I am for that major milestone in my life. Reasons for being grateful: Being alive and able to see and experience the wonders of all creation. Being aware that Christ is present not only in me but in all those around me. Being part of a community of believers that share the same values that too often seem challenged in the world we live in today. Faith is the first gift I am most thankful for and pray daily for those who are trying to find it. It is the pearl of great price and I have come to treasure it more and more as I get closer to God's eternal kingdom. I believe that the more gratitude I hold in my heart also strengthens the faith that sustains me. Gratitude is the foundation of the spiritual life.

Several years ago, while shopping at Target I came across a card that had three words boldly printed on it; BLESSED-GRATEFUL-THANKFUL. The card really gave me a chance to ponder that simple message. It has become a favorite mantra of mine ever since.

Have you ever noticed that one of the standard greetings of our day is the casual "Hi, how are you?" Knowing full well that most people really don't care how you feel. But I love responding to them that "Oh, I am blessed!" or sometimes "grateful" or "thankful." Watch their reaction when you say it, many times folks will stop and realize that they too are blessed, grateful, or thankful. This response has become a favorite habit of mine for the last few years and is a great way of promoting gratitude in our grace filled world. Try it and I am sure you will like it.

Prayer: Good and gracious God help me always to be grateful for all you have gifted me with these days. And let me show that gratitude to all my sisters and brothers in any and every way I can. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday, March 2nd

GRATITUDE

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

The past has come and gone
It's in the rear view mirror
Eight decades of living
With some happiness and fears.

I would worry too much at times
My son's death, military moves
My health and family too.
But God's plan saw me through.

Now I am living for today
The present is here and large
I'm trusting with less worry.
Because God's very much in charge.

I am stronger for what happened
Death and life are part of living
My God has the answer
Prayer, trust and thanksgiving.

Tomorrow is my future
What has God in store?
Who knows, but I am grateful
If he decides to give me more!

What a blessing is my faith
The gratitude I feel
The assurance that I have
What Jesus provides is real.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for protecting me in my past, for keeping me today and for whatever you want me to have for the future. I am grateful and blessed. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, March 3rd - Third Sunday of Lent

Let all the earth rejoice in gratitude for all the Lord has created and provided for us.

I have been a Midwesterner all of my life and intend to stay one for all my days. I was raised on a farm. We grew corn and beans and raised some cattle. Our livelihood depended on Mother Nature. There were years with too much rain. There were years where we did not receive enough rain. There were times of early frosts and other times where the frosts were late. Tornadoes threatened and bugs munched. Our lives depended on the generosity of Mother Nature. She is an exceptional teacher and for generations my family has been exceptional students.

I no longer live on that farm, but am in constant awe of the goodness and benevolence of Mother Nature. Whether I travel to the lakeshore, read a book in my backyard, walk through the woods, dance in the rain, or shiver in the cold, I marvel at the wonder that God has created for us. Sometimes we need to look around and embrace all the beauty God has given us. "What a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong is a great song to help you step back and appreciate all this beautiful world holds for us.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for creating this beautiful world for us which provides wonder and awe when we least expect it. Help us to appreciate its goodness and to recognize your generosity. We ask this in your name. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, March 4th

There are times in our life that we reflect on all the things we are grateful for: our life, health, family, friends, job, a beautiful sunny day, and most importantly, Our Savior. I try to focus on being grateful but know there are times that daily routines or troubles may cause me to lose focus on what is important, especially in showing my gratitude for all that I have been given.

Things happen in life. There is sickness, disability, death, loss of a job, relationship breakdowns. There are things that happen where we are tested in our faith.

Like others, my family has been tested. Our young son was in a terrible accident. We were confronted with a very frightening situation. We were not sure of the prognosis. We were told it would be a long journey back to health and he may never be the same again. This was something that forced us to dig deep. We were frightened and anxious. Was I grateful? I was certainly grateful my son was alive. I was grateful that I was able to pray to Our Father and ask that He give me the strength to handle whatever was to come.

We were extremely lucky. I believe in the power of prayer and there were many being said for our son.

This event in our lives made me realize what a gift we had been given - what a gift my son had been given. He had been given a second chance. Our family and friends rallied around us saying prayers, sending messages and bringing over meals. How lucky we were to have people in our life who let us know they were there for us.

We need to live each day being grateful for the life we have been given, for the faith we have and for the light God brings into our life. We can spread this joy with others.

Prayer: Oh Lord, thank you for the gift of life and the gift of light. You are my Light; the One who provides fulfillment and joy. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, March 5th

Having been given many years of life, there are not enough words to express my gratitude for an ever present God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - through all times. I'm thankful for loving parents, family, friends, and church. To start with, my mother took me to a Sunday school in a large brick church. Those big doors intimidated me (and I didn't get to put in my offering). I did not want to go back there.

I ran across the fields from my house to a little white wooden church, Florist Avenue Lutheran Church, aptly named for the street with greenhouses along way. It was traditional, warm and welcoming. It became our church for the next fifty years. How much to be grateful for! Across from the church a housing project for returning World War 2 veterans was built. The Sunday School and vacation Bible School overflowed and new families joined. I was confirmed, did Luther League, taught Sunday School and was married there. My husband was in the Army and went off to Japan and Korea. When he returned, he joined right in. Our children were baptized, confirmed and married there. The family found many ways to take part from teaching, ushering, administration, music, camp counseling to roofing the church.

Many thanks to pastors and parishioners who strengthened our faith. With much gratitude our grown children have church homes and have been blessed with God's guidance and grace.

Prayer: God, grant me a grateful heart and help me not to overlook all the blessings you have given me. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, March 6th

I am forever grateful for my "sister." I met her at the age of 12. She helped me cope with abuse, neglect and thoughts of suicide. She always encouraged me to stay strong, and believe things happen for a reason.

Heavenly Father, Thank you for giving me such a wonderful person.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for helping me stay strong, during the difficult times and blessing me with the people who help to keep me and my faith strong. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, March 7th

Can be sung to the tune of 'Go to Dark Gethsemane'

Grateful

I am grateful for God's love...

I am grateful for my faith.

In the darkness God's above

He takes all my fear away.

So I rest in blissfulness...

Knowing God won't love me less.

Prayer: God, Please help me to always see the blessings you give me every day-even in the midst of sorrow. Continue to bestow me with a grateful attitude. I ask this in your precious name.

Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, March 8th

Gratitude. It's not a big word. Just nine letters, but it packs a real punch for those who use it, to those who display it and those whose life is better for being grateful.

As a kid life was simple and I was happy and secure. I took everything for granted but didn't know it.

It wasn't until I was well into adulthood (maybe a little more) that I realized that God had given me the physical strength and ability to take care of my husband for many years as he suffered from Alzheimer's Disease. I am so very grateful that I was able to do this for him. God blessed my husband with a very, very good nature. And he was a "gentle" man. God made it easy for me to be a caregiver and my gratitude for the privilege is something I cherish in my daily prayers.

I know without a doubt that my children are grateful. They show me in so many ways; driving me to doctors' appointments, doing chores around my house, and showing me that they want me with them for just about every occasion of celebration. Sometimes, just to talk and share a meal. They tell me they love me all the time. I am so incredibly grateful for that. I hope their children are grateful to them because as Cicero reminds us "gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others." (Cicero)

Prayer: Dear God, may we all be mindful of showing others how precious life is. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday, March 9th

In a world that teaches us gratitude through the focus of success, accomplishment and things it often takes a life changing experience in which to fully embrace God's gift of being thankful in all circumstances; even the ones that don't seem worthy of being thankful. And yet it was exactly the moment my eyes and my heart were opened to the continuous gift of gratitude.

I'm a person who likes to be in control but when I found myself at death's door all my ability to control the circumstances surrounding me was gone. My husband, my doctors were managing my cares – for three days I really don't remember much. I was a wife, a mom of young children and dying was not an option, though it was a possibility. I vividly recall the long nights – laying in the hospital bed crying in pain and in fear as I lamented to God. I ask for His presence to watch over my children and husband and to guide the doctors in their care of me.

As I started to improve what I remember intensely is feeling the presence of God in the darkness giving me hope and strength. But now God and I spend lots of time talking and listening to each other in the light. God's healing presence filled my very being through all the professionals caring for me. I began to get better. My heart overflowed with gratitude for prayers answered – for the gift to eat food even if it was only orange Jello. I hadn't been able to eat for a week so to me it tasted like dining at a five-star restaurant. Praise God for gifts no matter how small.

My prayers of lament, grief, fear and sadness became prayers of thankfulness and gratitude for new life as well as the gift of new opportunities to live, to love and to lend a hand. In all of life's experiences God walks with us. He is the life of hope in the darkness. Our spirits are refreshed and renewed through the gift of Jesus' death on the cross and the joy of the resurrection. God loves to give good gifts to His children. He delights in our thankfulness and pours out His Spirit and favor over those who give honor and gratitude to Him.

Prayer: Good and gracious God enable us in all circumstances to set our eyes and our hearts on you. Renew our spirits and fill us with your peace and joy in all of life's experiences. We give you praise and thanks for you alone are worthy of our gratitude. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, March 10th– Fourth Sunday of Lent

Writing about what I'm thankful for should be easy. I am extremely thankful for the loved ones in my life ... my wife, children, grandchildren and dear friends mean the world to me. I thank God every day for their parts in my life! Love is an amazing gift! People tell me I am friendly, helpful, caring and talented. I just try to do what is right and be kind. I'm thankful for the gifts I haven given and try to make good use of them.

The difficulty in writing about thankfulness lies in the feelings of gratefulness even with regard to the awful times. I'm thankful and feel blessed to have been able to care for loved ones in dire circumstances even though the journey weighed so heavily upon me. I'm thankful for the disappointments that taught me to overcome and make adjustments in life. I'm grateful to have been taught early in life to help others with no expectations of gratitude or return even though it is easier to walk away.

I don't believe God is continually testing us. Life is hard and has strong challenges. Bad things happen to good people, too. I'm thankful to have Him with me, especially in those trying times! I'm grateful that even in the dark valleys of our lives, His light can reach me. The Spirit can comfort me and help me to know how I can find peace and rest even there.

I try to live my life with a sense of gratefulness. I think it is a way to connect with God and a path to living a life of fulfillment. I am happy I have a nice home, food to eat, and freedom to pursue my dreams. I have the ability to help others and with God's guidance I try to do so.

Prayer: Blessed are we who ask, for hearts that are soft, for eyes that are awake, for ears that are open, for hands to hold the wonder that is here now. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, March 11th

Being grateful is about appreciating what one has, as opposed to what one wants. Being thankful or thanking someone often implies you are acknowledging your thanks for something that someone has given you. With this in mind, I'd like to submit the following:

- ◆ I am grateful for my wonderful parents and thankful that they gave me a tremendous amount of love and support while growing up.
- ◆ I am grateful for the wonderful relationship I have with my sisters, and am thankful we were given the environment in which to thrive.
- ◆ I am grateful for my husband's love and support and I am thankful that he asked me to marry him.
- ◆ I am grateful for my daughter and am thankful for the ways science helped bring her into being.
- ◆ I am grateful for my girlfriends, and knowing that they always have my back.
- ◆ I am grateful for the location of my home and I am thankful for the inheritance I received to make it possible.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind us to always be both grateful and thankful for the blessings we have and have been given, and that we may continue to see the beauty around us in the ways we are treated and how we treat others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, March 12th

“O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms.” (Psalm 95:1-2)

I am most grateful to God for bestowing upon me the gift of music – vocally & instrumentally. The church where I was baptized, confirmed and married really allows musicians to grow and develop! At its peak we had literally 1/3 of a Sunday’s attendance up in the balcony – counting the 16 choir members and 10 instrumentalists! Summer was primarily just four brass members as the rest took the summer off.

Back around 1980/81 was the first time I ever played and sang “Lift High the Cross” a gorgeous setting by Carl Schalk for organ, brass quartet (2 trumpets, 2 trombones), choir, congregation & timpani (aka kettle drums). It had just come into print, but the brass parts had not been engraved by the printer yet, so we had handwritten copies to play from!

I have played this arrangement countless times – 75th Anniversary of two churches, the ELCA merger back in 1987, to list a few. We have even sung this arrangement here, although it has been a while. Almost every time this hymn is sung where I grew up, that is the arrangement played – presently, I still use this descant on occasion.

“Let every race and every language tell of Him who saves our lives from death and hell.”

The words above are the newest verse to the hymn copyrighted around 2012, making 6 verses total.

Prayer: “So shall our song of triumph ever be: Praise to the Crucified for victory! Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim til all the world adore His sacred name.” Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, March 13th

When I was asked to share a “note of gratitude,” it didn’t take long to focus my words, including when I was asked to connect it to the words of John 3:16. In recent years, the words of John 3:16 that especially stand out to me are the two words, “the world.” I have a new appreciation for the truth from Scripture that those two words include “all people.”

In December of 2016, my 20 year old son came out as gay. At the time, I was a life-long member and pastor in the LCMS, a denomination that does not include the LGBTQ+ community. My wife and I prayed and studied and discussed this for a while, and soon realized that one’s sexual identity and orientation does not conflict with being a follower of Jesus.

We soon realized that the ELCA is where we belong: a community of people who see God as Savior of ALL the world, and He receives ALL people into His eternal kingdom. And so my family and I have now become active members of God’s family in the ELCA community.

My gratitude is focused now on three things: First, that God’s grace and love includes ALL of my family. Second, that the ELCA recognizes this truth and includes ALL people in the Church. And third, that my son, and ALL of the LGBTQ+ community have a place to be included in the community of people whom God so dearly loves and welcomes into His Kingdom.

Thank you God that you so love all the world that you sent your Son to be Savior of ALL.

Prayer: Help us to share this Good News with all people, and to join in the worship and service that we can offer to you, the Savior and Lord of ALL. In Jesus’ name we pray: Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, March 14

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful. Okay, so what am I thankful for? Let me think...Being married, the fantastic person I'm married to, family both immediate and extended, friends and me. By that I mean the person that I turned out to be. My gratitudes also include: having an income, the many forms of freedoms that I enjoy; speech, religion and travel. For being let go from a job I no longer enjoyed, finding a new job with a supervisor that let me be me, allowing me to flourish and grow in the company. Everyday things like seeing, hearing, the ability to think and reason, the sense of touch. So much to show gratitude for.

So many things to be thankful for, yet most of the time I tend to look at the glass as half empty without considering what the glass may already hold for me. In this consumer driven world I am constantly led to believe that more is better. But is it? I contend that at this very moment my glass holds the one gift that I should really be filled with gratitude for. No need for E-Bay or Amazon. I am given this every time I'm in church or if I simply stop what I am doing and ask God for forgiveness. Forgiveness allows me to really enjoy the rest of the blessings that God gives me. It is given freely with no need for Amazon plus or USPS overnight. I just need to ask.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for all the gifts you have and continue to bless my life with. May I live in a feeling of gratitude for them everyday, especially your gift of forgiveness. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, March 15th

This has been difficult to put into words, because I am grateful for so much in life. My parents raised me in a Christian home, took me to church most Sundays and taught me to be church after church, even though we didn't call it that. This was the foundation that built my life, so I am forever grateful to my parents.

They also developed a strong work ethic within me, which I have passed on to our kids. It carried me through school and work since I was 14. Along with work comes earnings and I was encouraged to spend some, save some, and give some. Just as Jesus encouraged us to build a strong foundation, I was blessed from the beginning with a strong base of love and direction.

Resigning from a Lutheran church at age 15, my family and I searched for another Lutheran church. It led us to a church where I met my wife now of 49 years. I am forever grateful for our love and raising of our two children. They have developed into respectable people and have raised our grandchildren in the same manner. We are eternally grateful for the gift of our children and grandchildren.

We have enjoyed so many things together over the years: camping, reading, gardening, traveling, enjoying food and wine and hospitality with friends. We have been blessed with many friends that give us immeasurable joy and friendship.

So as you can see, this has turned into what I was trying to avoid, a brag show! However, having God on your walk through life can make it a brag show because all of our blessings and material things are his gift to us. In Luke: 6: 49 we are reminded "A man building a house, who dug and laid a foundation upon a rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been built well."

Prayer: I pray Lord that all people can be blessed with the firm foundation I was blessed with. If that isn't possible for all, open the eyes of the blessed to help others when the need arises. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday, March 16th

There have been experiences in my life for which I am grateful. Past experiences have taught me a very difficult fact. Sometimes love is not enough. Learning this lesson has been a long journey for me. There have been difficult tests in my life and I have drawn on this fact: Love is not always enough. When I think I can wave a magic wand and everything will be better I remind myself

1. Self care comes first. If I am not caring for myself, how can I care for another person.
2. The best thing to do is to keep on loving and praying.
3. Accept the fact: "What will be will be. The future's not mine to see." A wonderful message sung by Doris Day years ago in an Alfred Hitchcock production. This lyric runs through my head often as a reminder.
4. Seek professional help if needed and actively participate in order to serenely accept the fact that not all things can and will be changed.
5. Pray for self and those I love.
6. Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God." Listen quietly and closely to God and also to what my loved ones are saying to me. I suffer from the need to fill every silence with prattle when it's best left unsaid!
7. God is doing for my loved ones better things than I can know or desire or pray for.

For every thing there is a plan. Concentrate on past blessings and promises given to us. God will never leave me or forsake me.

Prayer: God, Please help me to worry about nothing and pray for everything. Help me be quiet and listen closely. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, March 17th– Fifth Sunday of Lent

I have gratitude for so many things in my life. Although things were not always easy and there were many tough times, I feel extremely blessed. I have always tried to look at the glass as half full. My first and most important gratitude is my mother. She was a person of strong faith and made sure her children had a good proper Catholic upbringing. Although in my younger years I am not sure I knew how special that would be and often just simply went through the motions of Mass weekly and raising my children in the Catholic Church and School. It gave me what I needed when I was mature enough to understand just how important that lesson was to me. She was a mother I could always talk to without judgment and simply provided support. She was the most positive person I have met on this earth. Even when she suffered a lengthy illness, she carried her cross with no mention of pain or feeling sorry for herself. I honestly do not know how she was able to live her life this way, except for the gift of her faith. She passed away many years ago and I talk with her every day. I thank her every day.

We were blessed with an incredibly special son who passed away from a horrible disease at age 17. He is another person I look to with gratitude. He was so extraordinarily strong in dealing with his illness and always hoped for a cure and prayed for a better world. Yet another person who carried his cross without complaint and an amazing soul. His death brought us close to an especially important person in my life, a priest at the time and now the Pastor of Our Saviors Lutheran Church.

PJ has helped me and my family through some challenging times and been there to offer advice and a listening ear. Looking back, God brought him into our lives. Our paths have crossed in so many ironic ways, you know it was meant to be. The gratitude I have for our relationship goes beyond any words I could write.

Prayer: God, allow me to feel your presence daily with an open mind and heart. Allow me to help others. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, March 18th

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight. O Lord, my Rock, and my Redeemer.”
(Psalm 19:14)

I often think of my teaching career. One of my favorite sessions was a lesson called “Writing To Show Rather Than Tell.” The lesson encouraged students to show in their writing what authors do to show us things instead of telling us. For example, instead of blurting out... “I was happy” write how “happy” looks like, sounds like and most of all what does it feel like. That’s exactly how I felt this past weekend when we visited Our Savior’s Lutheran Church. It had been a couple years since we had last visited so we were pretty much strangers to all. During the church service people from the congregation smiled at us, winked at embarrassing moments, and nodded their heads in our direction when Pastor Jim recalled a story, his version, of course. Afterwards total strangers extended their hands, tried to connect and every time laughter was filling our connect space. I was happy and so grateful to these strangers. What a feeling of love and respect. I felt grateful for all those kind gestures now knowing what to expect.

So, the next time you don’t know what to say, show it. Just smile. Give a wink or nod your head in their direction. That positive energy will travel, and I guarantee they will feel grateful.

Prayer: Dear Lord, may I always be grateful for the simplest of gestures. A smile. A wink. The nod of the head. And may I send those same gestures in return. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, March 19th

When I joined Our Savior's in 2002, I knew very few people. I made friends by teaching Sunday School for three years, joining quilting, taking my grandkids to Sunday School and later to what I still call Confirmation class. Bible Study was a wonderful place to meet people and learn. I enjoyed helping with the preparation and performance for the Sunday School Christmas Program.

I am now so very grateful for those I met and are still in my OSLC circle of friends. I learned I must reach out and actively participate in what OSLC does to reach out to members. I remember leading Breakfast Conversations and enjoying the energy of young teenagers. Some Sundays we ran out of chairs for young people to sit in during our time together. I then taught 5th grade Sunday School with Arline. Most Sundays there were twenty 5th graders attending! A challenge is my summary of that experience. I returned to Our Savior's on a Monday morning to search for my grandson's Bible that had been left behind. I walked through the church basement and passed a table of women enjoying a wonderful offering of treats. I was asked to join them that morning and became a regular "Knot Tier!" Creating a quilt and the lunch time together helped me meet and keep many friends. The group is much smaller now, but we get the quilts put together and have a delicious lunch. Quilting, Bible Study and church attendance are important in my life. Wonderful people all around and I wonder if the day will come some time soon when Pastor Jim will have problems getting the membership into the sanctuary as we are so busy visiting with one another. The wonderful music of Tim and the CSS draw members into the sanctuary. I learned that when joining a church it is important to reach out, introduce yourself, participate in activities and become a part of the message. I will be forever grateful for those who reached out to me and brought me into the fold!

Prayer: As the end of my day approaches, and I am falling into the river of worries, may I celebrate talking with You, God. I am thankful for the power of prayer and being a member of OSLC for over 20 years. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, March 20th

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”
(John 3:16)

This was the very first bible verse my oldest son memorized in his kindergarten Sunday school. As it turned out, his grandmother, my mom, passed away just months later and this verse is inscribed on her gravestone. At first, it was hard to see what that verse really meant to our family. As the years have gone by, it has become more evident just how grateful we all were and how grateful we all are now for our faith.

There are many things I am grateful for: for my mom who showed me how important faith is in your life; for my friend in high school who invited me to attend a Christian youth group; to the youth group leaders who supported and taught us what faith is; for my husband who is always by my side to share life with; for my children and grandchildren who are always there to help in any way they can; my family is close-knit and able to share life experiences together; for my career and that I am able to help my patients and families in many ways; for being able to belong to a wonderful church with great leadership which continues to help me on my faith journey; and for the sense of peace that I have knowing that God is always with me to help me through life!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for always being with my family, helping us through happy and sad times of our life. Be with us to keep us healthy, happy, safe, and to be church after church. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, March 21st

Father, thank you for your endless mercy and patience with me. Thank you that I can trust in your everlasting love.

The person I am very grateful for is my husband. My entire life would have been so different if he didn't ask me to marry him. As I look back on the many years of marriage and how he helped me grow as a person I am truly blessed. He taught me to challenge myself, to be organized, and to be more caring of others. He was at my side when I wanted to go back to school and make a career change. This certainly was a new, but scary, opportunity for me. Yet he never questioned that I could do it. He helped me prepare for my entrance exam and was so proud when I was accepted.

He is level-headed, and always thinks things through before making rash decisions. He was so incredible with our finances during our working years and always had a plan for our retirement years. We were frugal with our money yet able to take nice yearly vacations. His ability with kids makes me believe our children's positive upbringing was due to him. He showed a real interest in them and was a great influence in their daily lives.

My husband is truly my BEST FRIEND AND I LOVE HIM ALWAYS.

Prayer: Father, thank you for your constant presence in my life and guiding me. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, March 22nd

I've often thought the most perfect prayer is simply, "Thank you."

Thank you, Lord, for all the ways I have been blessed.

Thank you, Lord, for how you have walked with me through times of tragedy and great difficulty.

Thank you, Lord, for knowing much more than me and saying "No" to me when I ask for something foolish.

Simply put, Thank you, Lord!

This simple prayer speaks about my appreciation for all the ways I am blessed in my life. I look at my life, and every day, I feel grateful for my family, experiences, friends and my acquaintances. For the days that are yet to come - even with their hardship and challenges, they teach me lessons on how to live life better with a fuller appreciation.

This gentle prayer proclaims who God is as our loving and benevolent creator. As a photographer, I see the world around me with its beauty, splendor, vibrant and diverse colors, and I am amazed at how incredible life is. Even the simplest flower or blade of grass can proclaim the creator's goodness.

This two-word prayer is enough in the hardest times when life is not going as we hope or expect and when fear and difficulty visit us as they do and will. Thank you is a statement of remembering God is good. God is eternally loving. God is with us every moment of our lives, even in sheer silence, not with a word of judgment or "I told you so," but with forgiveness, grace, unending love, and a gentle guiding hand leading us toward something better.

Thank you, Lord for all the blessings of this life, with its learnings, difficulties, joys, and sorrows. We are grateful to experience all that you allow us to feel, see, and do. Help us remember that you are at the center of it all, blessing, forgiving, encouraging, and loving us every step of the way, and may we share your goodness with others as well.

Prayer: Dear Lord - Thank you for how you touch my life daily in every way. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday, March 23rd

Lord, thank you for loving me and sending your Son to show what love is. I feel so fortunate to have had parents that were willing to share their Christian faith with my brother and I. Although, my mother was Lutheran and my father was Episcopalian they showed complete respect for the traditions of both expressions of Christianity. My mother read her Bible every day and taught me the need for prayer in our lives. My father talked about how his faith affected his life in the work world. With their encouragement and example I have developed a deep faith that has helped and lead me through many difficult times in my life. I can honestly say that without their example I would most likely not be an active Christian servant. I am very grateful for their example that has brought me to believe in our salvation by grace alone. The journey continues.

Prayer: Lord, I am so grateful for the examples in my life that have lead me to you. Help me to believe in my unbelief. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, March 24th – Palm Sunday

“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.”

When it comes to gratitude and being thankful, I usually have to make a concerted and intentional effort to count the many blessings which God has bestowed on me. Most days I am concerned about life, politics and the world, the stresses of family, the concerns of my children’s lives, and the fears and anxieties that the world stage brings to our daily lives.

I hope that all my children and grandchildren will come to have a relationship with God. My hope is that this relationship will lead them to accept the crosses in their lives and embrace an abiding hope in the love that God has for them. My hope is that all my family will walk and live in the “Light” and not in the “Darkness.”

It is because of God’s blessings to me that I have a gracious family. The gift of my wife, children, and grandchildren give me a greater opportunity to stretch my own faith in God, expand my trust and hope in God, and summon me to a deeper selfless love, because God first loved me!

That God loves each and every one of us can be difficult to grasp, especially when we are in the middle of life’s burdens and challenges, but it is especially important to embrace that love during the most difficult times of our lives. That God chose to become like us so that we might become more like Him is the gift and blessing which gives us the strength to be grateful.

I know you have come across parking signs that read, “Only 15 Minutes of Parking.” When we think of all the billions of people who have walked this world before us and how quickly life goes by, that’s when we must realize we are here for just 15 minutes of parking. God loves us, Jesus died for us, and eternal life is promised to all of us. For that, I am truly grateful!

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for all the good things you have given to us. We thank you for the challenges you put in our path. Please continue to be with us and inspire us “to become like you, so that those who meet us will want to know you.” Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, March 25th

We are deeply thankful for our wonderful family that my spouse and I have, along with our church family wherever we have resided.

Growing up our parents demonstrated a strong loving faith in service to God through our church and communities in which we have lived. Having such role models we then passed on that faith to our children. Our families remain close to this day and always are there for each other. The love of God has been our stronghold and guidance through good times and bad.

We have moved around some, living in different states, cities and towns. During each move we felt like a transplant but within a couple of years of adjustment we found our church families to be the rock that we needed. Keeping active in our church made us feel like we are home and not like an outsider since we did not grow up in those communities. Our church always made us feel welcome, like another family. We joined Bible studies, taught Sunday school, became a part of small groups and enjoyed the many social aspects of the church. We have made great friends that we can be with and know that they will always be there for us as we will be for them.

We are deeply grateful for our families. Our love and faith journey will continue to thrive for many more years to come.

Prayer: Thank you, dear God, for all our families. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, March 26th

Years ago I was on my way to work when my car broke down. I went to a nearby house for help. A kind lady came to the door and she let me use her phone. She said she wished her oldest grandson was home to help because he knew a lot about cars. Even though Lilian couldn't help she walked me back to my car. Days later on my day off I went to Shopko to get Lilian a plant as a thank you gift for her kindness. That day Shopko was giving out coupons one per customer. By mistake I was given two and both were 50% off. As I was leaving the store I saw a guy standing in line holding a big blanket. I gave him my extra coupon because he hadn't gotten one. I had many other places to stop before I stopped at Lilian's house 3 hours later. Lilian was not home but who opened the door was the guy from Shopko still wearing the same blue plaid shirt. He was Lilian's grandson. We were both shocked to meet again. This experience allowed me to witness God's awesome since God is the only one that made this happen.

Another time years ago I was leisurely shopping at Kohl's when a girl came up from behind me almost bumping into me as she passed by. I was so mad I tried to catch up to her to tell her what I thought of her. I caught up to her at the checkout standing behind her. I could see she had three gifts, a small photo album, a pin with mother on it, and a small coin purse. She was having a problem deciding which gifts to take because she didn't have enough money. In that moment my anger turned to compassion handing the clerk my Kohl's card telling her to put the three items on my card. The girl started crying, wishing me a Happy Mother's Day and giving me a big hug. I was grateful for God using me to make someone's life better and in turn making my life better realizing that we are all preachers. We preach to others how we live our life.

Prayer: God, thank you for always being present and guiding me in my daily life. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, March 27th

I am most grateful for my wife. I was lost in life when we met. She is the “candle in the wind” in my life. She helps guide me and centers my emotional life. She smooths my edges because a little of me goes a long way.

My life has been not very easy, but I have chosen this life willingly. I had some extreme medical emotional challenges. It makes me appreciate the love in my life. The challenges in my life make me a better man, friend, and husband.

To my friends I am grateful for your companionship, your advice, your guidance and loyalty is something which I cherish.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Maundy Thursday, March 28th

Dear Lord, Thank you for your presence and guidance in my life everyday. I know you have been with me all the days of my life and will continue to be my strength throughout my journey. In your name I pray, Amen.

I am grateful that you have seen me through the darkest days of my life, guiding and protecting me from harm and pain. In all my life I have seen firsthand how you have been there to guide and protect me. You have helped me to choose the best path to follow, whether it be through health issues, family issues or just everyday life. You have been beside me guiding me to make the best decisions for me.

Thank you for my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I cherish them more than anything! It is a privilege to live in this beautiful world and to experience the wonder and beauty all around us!

Prayer: Dear Lord! Please watch over my family, everyone in the world and let there be world peace! In your name I pray! Amen.



Maundy
Thursday

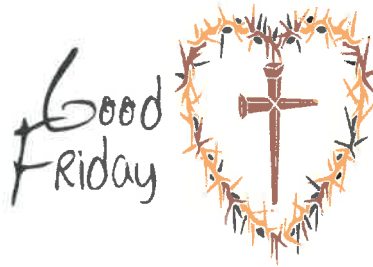
My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Good Friday, March 29th

(Winter 91-92) This is a prayer I wrote many years ago as I thought about my family and friends on a walk in my neighborhood.

In the tree and the sky, I find a prayer for you. The vivid colors remind me to thank God for you. The sun, the moon, the stars-let me know someone great watches over you. The rabbits hopping, the birds chirping, and the squirrels playing make me smile. I ask that you be light hearted, tender, and slow to anger. As I feel the warm breezes upon my cheeks, the snow on my lashes, the puddles I splash through, and the softness of the new grass, I pray you know God's in control, and it's Him you follow. He causes such beauty in nature, now won't He do the same for us? And since God's everywhere, I pray that he goes with you and that you know He's there.

Prayer: It's 2023 now! Thank you, God, for still walking beside me and holding my hand. Thank you always for your love and Your faithfulness. Amen.



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Holy Saturday, March 30th

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us: "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven."

Thanksgiving during Lent? Yes! That's why I wrote a Note of Gratitude from my Garden during the Summer of 2023. Since Ash Wednesday 2024 is February 14th, we are in the dead of winter in Wisconsin. It's time to dream of Spring when the miracle of green sprouts emerging from the desolate brown dirt occurs. It's new life just like the resurrection of Jesus at Easter! Praise and thanks to our Lord, the King of creation.

Spring gives me the gift of preparing for planting. What a joy for me and my spouse to clean out the gardens and plant flowers, herbs and vegetables. We watch perennials emerge and birds return from the South. How I rejoice when I see that first robin! Thank you, God, for the wrens that sing and all the other colorful birds that settle in our yard to find mates, make nests, and raise their young.

I am grateful for all of God's creatures that visit our yard even the squirrels with their antics as they try to eat our bird food and the baby bunnies that nibble my lilies. How amazing is our God, who created tiny hummingbirds, bright green frogs and gorgeous butterflies.

Let's not forget the fourth season of Autumn, when we reap the bounty of God's harvest. Isn't it wonderful that the delicious vegetables and fruit grow from tiny seeds? I can't help but think of Jesus comparing a mustard seed to the Kingdom of God: "it grows and becomes a tree and the birds make nests in its branches" (Luke 13:19) How great Thou art! I am forever grateful when I am in my garden.

Prayer: I thank you and praise you, Oh Lord, for creating the plants, trees and creatures of our world. Guide me to be a good steward of your gifts. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Easter Sunday, March 31st

I am blessed with the people that I have encountered in my life: family, friends who have become family, colleagues, and the people who have shaped who I am, without me even knowing it.

I have been blessed with parents who were positively involved in my life and kind to me. They were patient with me as I worried about my grade point average, what to wear, and who was smarter/prettier/wealthier/more athletic than me. My mom would say, "There will always be someone *smarter* (pick your favorite adjective) than you and someone not as *smart* (adjective) as you." (I still have to remind myself of this.) My mom, encouraged me to do my best and, more importantly, told me that my best was enough.

My husband has been my rock and believed in me, even when I have not believed in myself. He met me when I was an idealistic college student, ready to take on the world, and he has been with me when the weight of the world has just felt like too much. I have a tendency to focus on the negatives and get overwhelmed by the things I can not change and wish I could. When I get depressed and hopeless about myself and the world around me, my husband helps me focus on our small corner of the world and things feel more manageable.

My children have helped me experience joy, frustration, fear, and have most importantly, given me a sense of perspective on what matters most. I am continually impressed and surprised by their intelligence, compassion, perceptiveness, and confidence. I pray that they will continue on this path.

I have had a few different jobs, and in each one, I have met people who have positively impacted me. I have worked with colleagues who have listened to me vent, mentored me, challenged me, laughed with me, and encouraged me to grow. I have also been privileged enough to be the mentor and the one who listens, encourages, and inspires. In my careers, I have also met people who have helped me see how much I have that I take for granted.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the people you have put in my life. My relationships are gifts from you and for them I am grateful. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Easter Monday, April 1st

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I am grateful for my family, my bed, and fresh bed sheets!

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for these things. Amen.



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Easter Tuesday, April 2nd

I am so grateful for so much in my long life, especially now after making a draft of all that I am thankful for...

I am so thankful to have had the parents that taught me to be grateful for what I had instead of being resentful for what I did not have. This is truer today than ever as I grow wiser. They taught us to enjoy life through family gatherings, working hard, playing hard, love and religion.

I have fond memories from my youth of Pastor Phillip Paulson. He taught us that Church can be any place where people gather, even around a campfire; and on Sundays it was okay to come to church in your ski clothes as you are on your way to the ski area.

I am grateful for the neighbors I babysat for in my youth. The couple became my mentors and eventually life-long friends. One of the several things I am thankful for is when they sent me a 3-page letter after I went through a traumatic event. Their words of love, kindness, and encouragement to move forward meant so much to me and I thrived.

I have so much love and joy in my heart for my children and grandchildren. I am so grateful they are in my life.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the blessings you have given me my entire life. I have no regrets. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Easter Wednesday, April 3rd

Dear God,

I am grateful for my family who I love very much and who loves me back. I'm also thankful for my dog who is my everlasting companion, and for a sport that I can continue to play and improve on. Amen.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for all you give to me. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Easter Thursday, April 4th

Dear God, thank you for the gift of amazing people that I have met throughout this life.

Thank you for family, friends and family who love me and have always been there for me. Thank you that at just the right time you have allowed me to cross paths with people who would become my most prominent advocates and supporters. Thank you for special neighbors who have become family. Thank you for the long-time friends who I don't see or talk to often, but with whom I pick up right where I left off. Thank you for the wide circle of professional acquaintances that have become life-long friends. Thank you for the amazing medical professionals who unselfishly help me and have become my friends. Thank you for the newest workout and church friends who have come into my life at the perfect time.

Thank you for allowing me to be there for others that need someone to listen or need a helping hand. Thank you for providing me the opportunities to give back as well as pay it forward.

Prayer: Dear God, I thank you for the gift of the wonderful people I've met along my journey. Some of them inspire, challenge, love and encourage me. All of them helped me to realize how meaningful and beautiful my life is. Bless them, Lord, with good health, security, abundance and joy. I pray you grant their prayers, too. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Easter Friday, April 5th

Blessed are you Lord God! Through your goodness help us to recognize your handiwork in all of creation.

What about Bob?

One thing a lot of us carry on our life's journey is a backpack. A backpack is a must for school. They're good for hiking. A backpack is great for bringing food and essential every day items to those in need. In reflecting on backpacks...I think of an old friend...Bob. Everything Bob owned; he carried in his backpack. Bob lived much of his life on the trail of homelessness. Bob's earthly journey ended five (5) years ago. Bob didn't need his backpack as he approached judgment at the end of his life journey. However, Bob did carry a sturdy spiritual backpack. Bob's spiritual backpack included respect for people, evangelization of the faith, and a love of God and neighbor. At monthly prayer services, Bob could always be counted on to do the Second Reading. Bob taught us that pearls of wisdom are found in each of us...whether they be a saint or someone on the trail.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus walks with his disciples on the Road to Emmaus following his Resurrection. I pray each day that Jesus walked with Bob on his path from humanity to divinity.

What's in your spiritual backpack?

Prayer: O God, Help fill our backpacks with your grace, love and kindness. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Easter Saturday, April 6th

As a Christian any thoughts of gratitude have to start first and foremost with God because all of what we have is from him. Thank you Lord! The purpose of this devotional booklet is for us to share specifics of our life with others. Like most people I have numerous and obvious blessings in my life: such a great family, many dear and close friends, two successful careers, athletics, a nice house and yard, etc. With that being said, I will reflect on those 2 categories.

The first is two women. As a baby I grew up in a poor and at times dysfunctional/abusive family. We were indeed fortunate because my maternal grandmother lived with us. She was a wonderful woman who modeled what it meant to love unconditionally such as being generous, sharing kindness and taking care of others. She was the definition of altruism. She taught us the right way.

The second woman I will be eternally grateful for is my wife of many years. She has all the characteristics of my grandmother plus modeled what a Christian should be. As a man, I reached much of my potential and achieved happiness and well-being. She taught me truly what love is. God must have assigned me three guardian angels because he knew I needed extra help!

I could never express my gratitude in full for both of these ladies! I will always feel it!

Prayer: Heavenly God, watch over those people who have played important roles in our lives. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, April 7th—Second Sunday of Easter

It's important to thank others for things they do for us just like when Mr. Doug and Miss Patti came to our house and helped put together our slide and swingset! We brought them ice cream and special drawings we made. I am grateful for my cousins, good friends and my sister and brother.

Being thankful is really about being kind which is something we all can do everyday. I am grateful for friends, family and a house to sleep in.

Prayer: Dear God, when we are thankful we are being kind. Help us be kind and appreciate all that is given to us. Amen.



My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, April 8th

Dear God,

Even in the midst of so much change and uncertainty, I am grateful. Even as my body ages and my frustrations with the injustices of the world seem to grow deeper and stronger with each passing year, I am grateful. Even as I don't always know what to say or do to help my children and my family live full, rich, and meaningful lives, I am, grateful. Even as I struggle with my own failings and seem to make the same mistakes over and over again, I am grateful.

I am grateful for the sun that begins each day and gives light to the possibilities that await us. I am grateful for the smell of coffee that gets me going. I am grateful for the questions and challenges of my life, and the way that your Spirit reminds me that life is not about finding the answers, but loving the questions. I am grateful for the rich complexity of the human community, and the way that your Spirit reminds me that people are not problems to be solved or understood, but partners in the dance of uncertainty. I am grateful for all those whom you have blessed me with to be companions on this journey.

I am grateful for the gift of music, and the hymns which say this perhaps better than I can myself, especially these words from the hymn, *For the Fruit of All Creation*, "for the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us, most of all that love has found us, thanks be to God."

Prayer: Thank you, thank you, thank you. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, April 9th

“There But For The Grace Of God Go I”

How often do we look at others less fortunate than ourselves and realize that we are so fortunate to live the life we do?

God always provides for us, maybe not in the manner we want or in the time frame we would like, but he always provides for us. No matter our trials, or suffering, God is always with us. He never abandons us. How often do we crave for better things in life? They can be material things or things we think God should provide to us. However, God has his plan for us. When our prayers go unanswered or we don't receive what we want, we can often get frustrated with God and wonder why He doesn't seem to answer our requests. We need to step back and realize why he doesn't want things to come easily to us. In these experiences we become stronger and closer to him.

So, the next time you question God, just remember how good your life already is because of Him. Be thankful for your family, friends, grandchildren and the roof over your head. Think of how life would be should you not have these things He has already given to you. REMEMBER.....when you see others less fortunate than you, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you give all so freely and lovingly. Help me be grateful this moment. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, April 10th

“Thank You” is such a simple phrase, yet so important when expressing our appreciation and gratitude. I, like others, have much to be grateful for: my family, friends, abilities and possessions (although I probably have too many of those so I am also thankful for Goodwill and St Vincent DePaul stores). I am thankful for sports, especially football and my favorite team- the Chiefs (oops- strike that) the Packers! I am thankful for a wonderful church family- yes, PJ too! I am also thankful for humor. The list could go on and on.

While it’s important to be thankful for all of those things, our ultimate thank you should be to our Savior Jesus Christ. We have life and eternal life because of his love for us and his sacrifice. So how do we thank God for all of our blessings? It’s not possible, but I think we can make an attempt by trying to follow the example of Jesus and live our lives doing things and just being there for others. This will result in more “thank you’s.” The Lord has blessed us and if we can be a blessing to others, then the spirit of thankfulness continues and has no end.

So again I think about how I can say Thank You to God....I can say prayers of thanksgiving, sing hymns and songs of praise and participate in worship on Sundays and/or Wednesdays.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for our many blessings. Help us to be a blessing to others so that the spirit of gratitude never ends. Help us to remember to give you thanks through prayer and praise each day. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, April 11th

Sometimes I have to think a lot before I write about something. This was one of those times not only because of the powerful message of John 3:16 but also because God has blessed me with so much to be grateful for. As I was thinking, I started to reflect on how God has worked in my life via small moments that have had a significant impact. I am grateful for not only what these moments made me realize but also for the loving people in my life. I thought of the time as a child that I had worked very hard on a project for school. I came home crushed because I hadn't gotten the "A" I thought that I deserved. My dad had only one question for me, "Did you try your hardest?" I told him that I had to which he responded then it is an "A" in my eyes.

Fast forward many years to another moment in my life. I had just begun dating my husband and it had become clear to me that he was very knowledgeable and had a keen interest in politics. Other than researching the candidates that I planned to vote for, I considered myself to be politically ignorant and felt that I needed to make him aware of this. Upon hearing my declaration, without missing a beat, he responded by letting me know that was okay because he didn't know very much when it came to the field of nursing.

Two small moments with big messages: God rewards our efforts not perfection and although we can't be good at everything, we all are good at something. I am so grateful that God loves us even though we are not perfect and that he has blessed each of us with unique gifts to share.

Prayer: Dear God, I am so grateful for Jesus Christ whose great sacrifice is an example for all of us. I am grateful for all of the ways, including the small moments in my life, in which you have helped me to see what is important. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, April 12th

One day Piglet noticed Eeyore looking very gloomy and depressed. So, in his cheeriest voice Piglet said, "Good morning, Eeyore!" Eeyore replied, "Well, I suppose it is ...for some."

Lately, I have been feeling very much like Eeyore. The aches and pains of the "golden years" are getting me down. I am saddened and overwhelmed as I watch my kids and grandkids struggle with their hardships and problems. And the violence and evil in the world makes me worry about the safety and protection of my family

When these feelings overtake me, I usually have a good cry. And then, I try to open my eyes and my heart to the goodness in my life. And I pray. I pray to: "God who so loved the world, that He sent His only Son so that those who believe would not perish, but have eternal life." I rely on God's love and compassion to replace my doubts and fears.

Looking back on my 71 years, I truly have much to be grateful for. After much reflection, these are a few of the things that I am most grateful for.

My mother was the most humble and selfless woman that I have ever known. I never heard her complain or utter a harsh word about anyone. She gave to everyone without counting the cost. She is the one I pray to when my heart is heavy with the worries of my children. I am very grateful that each of my four children was able to love and be loved by her. I know that she has left her footprints on their hearts.

My husband and I have been married for nearly 48 years. He might not have showered me with roses and diamonds, but he gave me an even better gift on his constant love and support. He has been a major influence in my faith life. I think seeing him live his faith in word and deed has inspired me to grow in my faith. He sees me for who I am and loves me anyway.

I think the one thing that would be at the top of my gratitude list would be my grandkids. Just thinking about them brings tears of joy to my eyes. I never knew that I could be so deeply in love with someone until I had grandchildren. Their joys are my joys and their struggles are my struggles. They are my hope, my joy and my future. I pray for them constantly: Cate, Jack, Libby, Molly, Timmy, Erin, and Mack- you have my heart forever.

Prayer: Dear God, with a grateful and humble heart, I thank you. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday, April 13th

At times I was unable to see the beauty of your plan for me but now I celebrate the moments. Amen.

When I reflect on my life and what I am most grateful for it has to be my family and the times in which I was raised. My parents and Grandmother taught me how to raise and prepare food. My mother taught me the importance of sharing our time and talents with others. She was known in our little community for her kindness, sense of humor and willingness to help when asked.

My father taught me to hunt, fish and repair rather than purchasing something new. Grandma taught me to knit, crochet and play dominos. My siblings taught me that even if you have a fight with one of them they will always have your back if anyone else tries to pick on you.

I couldn't see all of this as I was growing up, but now I'm thankful for the family that God blessed me with.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for all the wonderful gifts and opportunities you have blessed me with during my life. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, April 14th

“Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances: for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” | Thesalonians 5:16-18

G is for God’s grace and mercy. I am so grateful for his never-ending love for me despite my failures. Knowing a loving God who forgives my mistakes is a true gift for which I am grateful.

R is for remembering those who have gone before us. Their smiles, their wisdom, their love, and the impact they made on my life.

A is for animals, especially our pets. These faithful furry companions become part of our family and accompany us on the journey. They bring us love and comfort.

T is for trials. Trials are part of this life. Trials have made me stronger and helped me to grow and change for the better. Jesus never promised that this life would be easy, but he promised to be with us. I have felt his presence through it all.

I is for inspiration. I am grateful for the inspiration I have received from others. For the examples they set by the way they lived their lives, their encouragement to follow my dreams, and the wisdom they shared along the way.

T is for travel. Travel to see and connect with family and friends. The opportunity to take adventures and visit the various parts of this beautiful country God has created is a gift for which I am thankful.

U is for undying love. This is the love I feel for my husband, my children, my grandchildren, my family, and my friends.

D is for dreams. Dreams that bring comfort and peace. Dreams that relive moments of joy and love. Dreams of things that are yet to come.

E is for the Eucharist. Jesus’ body and blood nourish me for this journey. I am forever grateful for his sacrifice and the promise of eternal life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the many blessings you have bestowed on me. Help me to acknowledge you daily and use the gifts I have received for your glory. Help me to live by your teachings and share your message with the world through my words and actions. For they will know we are Christians by our love for one another. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, April 15th

Like most of us, I'm so thankful for my parents and family. But there's one family member who has a very special place in my heart, and who had a major impact on my faith journey: my Grandpa Pergande. Grandpa was Mom's dad, and he was a widower by the time my parents got married. Mom and Dad bought Grandpa's house with the stipulation that he could live with them. And so, he did. There were many years that my dad worked 7 days a week, and Grandpa was able to pick up the slack and be a 2nd Father to us 6 kids. From toddlerhood through my early 20's, my brother and I shared a bedroom with Grandpa. Every morning before going downstairs, and every evening before getting into bed, he would stand by the bedroom window and read his devotion and prayer booklet out loud to himself and us. I can see it like it was just yesterday. He modeled for us daily what a man of faith looked like. He was loving, gentle and kind. I don't recall him ever raising his voice, which is remarkable, considering there were 9 people in a very small house. He taught me how to garden and play various games like cards, dart ball, and pool. I also remember that he never missed a Sunday service, and was involved with various Church activities. After his death, we heard that many years prior he had paid for the burial of a little boy who had died because the parents didn't have enough money. This family wasn't related or close friends. We didn't know about it because he didn't talk about it: He did it for God's glory, not his own. Thank you, Grandpa, for your legacy of showing what God's love looks like here on earth. Your life is a reminder for me to impart the same loving examples to my own children and grandchildren.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for our Parents, our Grandparents, and all those who went before us, who showed us what your love looks like. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, April 16th

G – Thank You God for your GRACE: We treasure Your free GIFT of love and forgiveness,

R – Thank You God for sending us a REDEEMER: Without Your Son Jesus, we are lost.

A – Thank You God that we may start each day ANEW: Every morning is a fresh start.

T – Thank You God for meeting us in Your unique TRINITY: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

E – Thank You God that Your love and reign are ETERNAL: Our hope is in a life with You in heaven.

F – Thank You God for FAMILY and FRIENDS: They walk with us through both our sadness and our joys.

U – Thank You God that Your love is UNIVERSAL: All are welcomed into your arms.

L – Thank You God for LEADING us towards the LIGHT: You LIBERATE us to LIVE a LIFE of LOVE.

Prayer: Dear God, there are not enough words to thank You properly. Accept the humble words that come from our heart. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, April 17th

Gratitude. I have so many things to be grateful for, it's hard to pick just one.

I am, of course, grateful for my spouse. He is supportive, loving, and always looking out for me and putting me first, even when I am short-tempered, impatient, or just in a bad mood. I am grateful for my children and extended family. Most live in the area and are always there to help no matter what.

I am grateful for the thousand shades of green in the summer and the shades of white in the winter. The sound of the wind in all seasons, especially the wind in the leaves. The glitter of the snow, and the smell of mowed grass. The rhythm of the rain and the echo of thunder, and flashes of lightning. The crashing of the waterfalls. And the ripple of streams flowing. The fall colors of red, yellow, and orange that seem more vibrant than anything else. Sunsets and full moons, and sunrises all have different shades. The color spectrum amazes me.

I am also grateful for the challenges I have faced: unemployment seasons, changes at work and changes with family, disagreements with family, co-workers, and friends as well as disappointments when things don't go as we planned and we have to readjust or give up on that particular topic or event.

I am grateful for healthcare. Not only has it supported my family, but when I started my specific career in healthcare more than 40 years ago, treatments were non-existent or horrific, especially for cancer. Cancer treatments still are. I think back and realize 40 years ago, cancer was a diagnosis with little hope. Now there is much more hope. I have seen more and more people survive. I am grateful for all the advances in medicine.

So, I am grateful that God is with me, through all good times, the challenging times, and the difficult, seemingly impossible times. I just wish I would remember God is with me all the time.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your love. Help me remember You are with me all the time. Every day, in every circumstance. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, April 18th

My Great-grandmother was a prostitute in the northern lumber camps of Wisconsin, in the early 1900's. I can only imagine why she and my great-grandfather turned to that and running moonshine to sustain themselves. They had six children to take care of. These children were unfortunately taken away, including my grandmother, who was ten years old. She lived in foster care for awhile, went to school and was hired as a house girl in Milwaukee, before she married my grandfather. They lived in the family homestead and raised five daughters. One of those daughters is my mother.

Now you might ask, why am I grateful for that? My grandmother's mother-in-law was a church-going faithful person. She showed my grandmother how to forgive her parents, on some level. As anything it was a process and she was always a damaged person. But she and her siblings helped take care of their abusive mother. My grandparents also took care of her youngest sibling, a wild child, frequently in legal trouble. My grandmother never forgot her past, and it colored her entire life. I think it colored her daughter's lives as well. But they all showed love, even if they didn't feel it.

I have gratitude for the other side of family too. My grandfather was an alcoholic and died leaving a 16, 14 and 4-year-old, as well as their mother. My grandmother became a single parent in 1948. The 14-year-old was my father. My father told me his parents fought a lot in front of the children. He helped raise his youngest sibling. They were getting by. This too colored his life. So why am I grateful for these situations?

My parents have overcome these difficulties, either consciously or unconsciously. They have been married for 66 years and I think are an example of this love. Because of this, we are a close family. My aunts, uncles, cousins are all there for each other including weddings, funerals, or just getting together. We are not perfect. We disagree and have "words" when we get angry. But the legacy of the past is negated by the love shown through us.

In my family whether you are "right" or "wrong," love wins. This is a lesson I most grateful for.

Prayer: O Father God, continue to remind me that love wins. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, April 19th

Blessed with seventy years of a good marriage, I have a heart full of gratitude. We each attended church regularly before marriage and after marriage continued with God's grace and guidance until we were 90 years old.

Grateful living means trusting each other respectfully and in all actions and words, be kind, caring, and encouraging to each other and those around you.

Have regard for other's families as wonderful friendships and times together can come about from these relationships.

Be faithful, true, and supportive of your family in all that you do.

Find a healthy outdoor activity in which to enjoy God's world and those around you.

Participate in charitable causes. Treasure good friends.

There will be difficult times and times you will fall short of your intentions. Be there for others. Help as best you are able. God is with you always. Pray, knowing that God is merciful, loving, and caring.

Prayer: My heart is full of gratitude. Thank you, God, for all your love. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Saturday, April 20th

When I was young I took my health for granted like most of us do. Except for two serious incidents as a boy, I have had relatively smooth sailing for the most part. The last decade plus or so things changed seriously with two conditions. It is only by the Grace of God providing doctors/surgeons and other health care professionals that I am still here in one piece. I owe my physical presence to them. I hope this will continue so I can care for others like I have been cared for. I have been truly blessed!

Prayer: May the Lord bless us all and keep us all forever!
Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Sunday, April 21st

It wasn't all that long ago I was going through something terrible in my personal life. I had to start again, I had to work on me and had a long journey to go. I wasn't sure I was strong enough. Long story short...here I am today!

I am reminded of the song "Day by Day."

I'm grateful for my wife, for so many reasons and too many to list.

I'm grateful for my kid because they are the driving force to be a better me.

And yes, I am grateful for PJ. He came to OSLC when I personally needed someone like that in my life,

I try to be positive and grateful. It's not always easy, but I keep trying.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please keep me mindful. Keep me directed positively. Keep me in your way to remember all that I am grateful for. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Monday, April 22nd

When my third (and last) child was born, my pediatrician said, "The third comes with wings." It was a reference to how good natured and seemingly easy my daughter was, dubbing her an angel. She was a decent sleeper, a great eater, and happily tagged along to her sibling's activities, pick ups and drop offs, and countless grocery store trips. Her sense of humor was beyond her years and she loved to laugh and she truly enjoyed being with people. I always described her as pure joy, adding laughter and lightness to almost any situation.

When the pandemic started, she was a Kindergartener who loved school. She was a leader in her class and enjoyed seeing her friends and teacher each day. School closing was hard for her and even her teacher noticed a change in her on the daily zooms. Her joy was seemingly fading and anxiety and fear were creeping in. It was uncharted territory for everyone and life was far from normal. We did our best to see family and friends from a distance or via zoom, played games, watched movies, gave each other "appreciation days," and our family grew closer because of it. In one of the modern world's darkest times, we tried to find joy anywhere we could so that her light wouldn't continue to dim. We were lucky that our kids returned to school in masks and socially distanced in the Fall of 2020. Things were still very different but we grew accustomed to this new normal. Her anxiety continued but I knew her joy would shine again.

This summer, we were lucky enough to go see Taylor Swift. I will never forget the magic of being there with my daughters. I have dozens of videos, but not of Taylor. Instead I have videos of my girls and me singing, dancing and having fun. Jesus grabbed my heart when I was least expecting it that night. After one of the songs my youngest tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Mom, I just sang my heart out!" And in that moment I thought to myself... 'She's back!...And my cup runneth over.'

Prayer: Generous God, thank you for the gift of your love and for the gift of your Son who teaches us how to share our love with others. It feels so good to be loved! Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Tuesday, April 23rd

You can't put a limit on gratitude. When times get tough, focus on gratitude!

Surprisingly during the last few years when I look back, I would have to say I've been the most grateful for the Pandemic. At first the Pandemic had me frozen, scared, nervous, asking why, and searching for little things to be grateful for every day. I would look at people and was amazed at how some carried on and functioned despite the fact that our world was experiencing so many deaths. I remembered Pastor Jim quoting from Mr. Rogers - "Look for the helpers!" This advice got me through the worse of the Pandemic! I saw many dedicated nurses, doctors, EMT's! I prayed like I had never prayed before.

The plan was to work from home for a couple of weeks. (Gratefully, those two weeks turned into 3-4 years.) Three months into the pandemic, my dad had a stroke. Dad was given two days to live and despite COVID, our family had permission to see him during his last final days. We sang to him. Soon he started singing with us! It was a miracle! I am grateful to say he survived and just celebrated his 94th birthday. Because of the Pandemic and the change to work from home, I get to spend my lunch hour daily with Dad.

Mom also experienced many health problems during COVID. Working from home gave me the ability and quick access to drive the five minutes to provide pain pills and needed help to Mom 2-3 times a day. (Before COVID this would not have been possible since my work commute was over a 40-minute drive.) The Pandemic provided me extra precious time to spend with Mom up until her passing Christmas, 2022. I am grateful!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Help me to feel gratitude in the midst of my troubles. I know that you are with me and you are holding me when I need you. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Wednesday, April 24th

Gratitude works! What would happen if we actually devoted ourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful? *Practicing gratitude is like opening the door to abundance in our lives!* Gratitude can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. It makes sense of our past, peace for today and helps create a vision for tomorrow.

As I look back on my life, I am thankful to many people who exhibited practicing gratitude. One person, though, particularly has showed me how gratitude can take something very small and simple and turn it into something exuberant. My next-door neighbor Bob and I had a special friendship growing up. He was the grandfather I never got to know. I was a grandson before he had ones of his own. Every Friday Bob would bring me a chocolate milkshake. Some weeks it was a Frosty and other times it was a mint flavored shake. Every Friday Bob would bring me this delicious treat. I began to crave those moments, anticipating the doorbell ringing and Bob standing there with this incredible feast. *It was all for me.* He expected nothing in return except a word of thanks. My smiling facial expression usually was good enough!

I wasn't only opening the door to Bob and a milkshake. I was opening the door to abundance and a feast. I am grateful for this incredible act of friendship, kindness and love. May I now help bring abundance to others in my words and actions.

Prayer: "I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart, and I will tell of all your wonderful deeds." Amen. (Psalm 9:1)

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Thursday, April 25th

I'm sure other gratitude notes will express what most are thankful for: God's many blessings, family, friends, health, and the usual iterations. Well, I too am grateful for these things as well, but I'd also like to reflect on the gift of commitment. In a world where so much emphasis can be placed on accountability, it may be essential for us to remember how important the virtue of commitment is in our walk as disciples of Jesus.

I am so thankful to those who make a commitment – to anything! It seems all too easy today for people to just walk away from commitments- marriage, work, responsible decision-making, etc. Many seem to have a laissez-faire attitude: *"No big deal, if I don't like it, I'll walk."*

We all have experienced letdown when others we depend upon gave up and found other interests for their time. This lack of commitment may have caused harm or embarrassing situations.

There are many contributing factors to this crisis of a lack of commitment: failed government programs, poor television, questionable entertainment as well as free money promised in the next get rich fast schemes constantly offered.

I am grateful for and admire those that make and keep a commitment. I encourage you to make and keep your commitments. We are drowning in many false gods like sports and simply looking to be entertained. People make more than enough time for professional sports watching. Family time and other commitments seems all too easily sacrificed.

In trying to practice gratitude, I would encourage you to make a commitment to be present and active in church one hour a week. The benefits of this commitment will bear fruit in your life, marriage, relationships, kids and perspective on life. Gratitude helps us reexamine our priorities. Commit to be an active member of God's team. Be present on Sundays. Grateful living will help grow your commitment. See you in the pews. I'm grateful you will join me in this commitment.

Prayer: Lord, help me be committed to you in grateful living. Beyond all praising, help me commit to worshiping you today. Amen.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, April 26th

Gratefulness comes into our lives on many levels, but gratefulness doesn't guarantee contentment.

I'm grateful that we can travel on private jets which allows us to avoid the long TSA lines, cramped seats, flight delays and cancellations. And we get to our destination in half the time of a commercial flight.

I'm grateful that we can afford to periodically fly to our vacation destination and to the homes of our family and friends. We can get almost anywhere in the States in just one day.

We are grateful that we can get away on weekend camping trips. We enjoy our time away together. Sometimes we even get to camp in surrounding states.

I'm grateful that I now have a steady job that allows me to pay my rent, keep our apartment heated most of the winter and put food on the table for my family and my extended family who live with us.

I'm grateful that I was able to walk with my family all of the way from Central America to the land of immigrants and opportunity. Here in the United States I might have to live on the streets for a while, but we won't have to worry about our children being safe. Here I hope to get a job picking vegetables, milking cows or caring for the elderly. I hope that someday I will get additional benefits that will allow me to buy a car and see more of my new homeland.

Prayer: Mathew 25:40 Truly I say to you, whatever you did for the least of these... you did for me.

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

Friday, April 27th

As I think about my life, I am grateful for:

My wife for putting up with me and loving me.
My kids for working hard and just bring really good individuals. I love them so much.
My parents for teaching me right from wrong and always being there for me and supporting me.
My grandparents who were terrific! I really miss them.
My dog who makes me smile EVERY DAY.
My friends.
My coworkers.
My customers on my mail route. They're the reason I love my job. Especially the ones in the OSLC church office, including Kelly!
My good health.
Lastly, I am thankful to God for listening to my prayers and guiding me on the route of life.

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for this opportunity to pause, reflect and give thanks for all the blessings in my life. I am full of gratitude. Amen!

My Response: (question, challenge, affirmation)

How to PRACTICE gratitude

BY SALLY CHUNG

Start a GRATITUDE Journal



- 1. my bed
- 2. today's breakfast
- 3. the sunshine

- jot 3 things you're thankful for before sleeping.

Make a FAMILY (OR) PERSONAL gratitude JAR



- decorate any sized jar
- place jar in a noticeable/common area w/papers, pen
- read notes on hard days

Say "thank you" more!

- it can STRENGTHEN relationships
- it can make someone's DAY!
- it reminds people they are → IMPORTANT ←

SMILE 😊

- proven to strengthen immune system
- makes you more confident!
- doesn't cost \$\$\$

thank u for being there ❤️

thank u for listening ❤️

Spend TIME with LOVED ones



- make intentional time
- be thankful for the opportunities you have to grow closer
- remind them you care about them

volunteer



- provides a bigger perspective on life
- studies show → boost well-being, greater functionality
- helping others can help you!
- make impact in local community



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