

Spring Woods
United Methodist Church



Advent Devotional Book 2009
Gifts for you and your family.

1711 FM 1960 West, Houston, TX 77090
(281) 444-6468 office (281) 444-5825 fax
www.sw-umc.org

CELEBRATING OUR GIFTS FROM GOD

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24TH

5 PM - FAMILY WORSHIP &
CHILDREN'S MUSICAL

"THE BEST CHRISTMAS PRESENT EVER"

8 PM - CAROLS & CANDLELIGHT
SERVICE

10 PM - STARGAZING & COCOA
COURTYARD

11 PM - CANDLES & COMMUNION
SERVICE

*The Christmas
Gifts That Always Fit*

Advent Season 2009

This devotional booklet was written by members of the congregation of Spring Woods United Methodist Church, Houston, Texas. We sincerely thank all those who contributed their time, efforts, and most of all their inspiration, to its publication. We hope you will use this devotional as a personal guide for reflection and prayer over the Advent season. You are encouraged to read the designated scripture for the day in your Bible; then read the accompanying daily devotional and reflect upon the meaning it holds for you in your life. Finally pray that the Holy Spirit will move through you in new and exciting ways as you find inspiration in the words herein and “The Christmas Gifts That Always Fit”.

NOVEMBER 29, 2009

The Power of Prayer and Love

On that day in May of 2006 when my husband came home and to find me unconscious; and during the surgeries, rehab and recovery at home, the prayers of my church family, friends and family were overwhelming! Even though my memory of those times is sketchy, I felt those prayers and the love. DO to that and God's Grace I am totally healed!

When I was on the road to recovery, Norm became ill, had cardiac bypass surgery and again the prayers and love of all, got us through that anxious time. Then he had a set back with repeated hospital admissions and over the summer of 2008 he continued to decline and went to be with the Lord on January 2, 2009. Without the prayers, love and support of my church family, friends and our families, I don't know if I could have made it—for I miss him so much.

I believe in Prayer and Love with all my heart and soul! Norm was not healed like I was, but the Lord gave me such Peace and Acceptance, and a feeling that He had plans for me? My walk with Him is so much stronger and deeper than I could have ever imagined! As in a song from my youth -"Love lifted me, love lift, when nothing else could help, love lifted me"

My prayer is one of Praise and Thanksgiving to our Lord for placing me among such loving and caring people of my church family and dear friends.

God is good all the time, All the time God is Good.

Psalms 86:6

Hear my prayer O'Lord, listen to my cry for mercy and healing.

1 Corinthians 13:13

And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But, the greatest of these is love.

Betty Jones

Breakfast with Santa

Pancakes & Carranza Puppet Show

Saturday, December 12th

9:00 am - 11:00 am

Children \$3.00 - Adults free

Love offering for pancake breakfast

Mom's Shopping Day

Kid's Stay n' Play

11:00 am - 3:00 pm

(Reservations required)

1 child \$15, 2 children \$25, 3 children & up \$30

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

NAVIDAD, NATALE, NOËL!

A Celebration of Christmas Around the
World

Join the Choirs and Orchestra of Spring Woods
as we present your favorite Carols and
Christmas songs from Mexico, France, England,
Germany, Africa, the Islands and more!

*Don't Miss this Highlight Event to kickoff your
Holiday Season!*

Sunday, December 6th

**5:30 pm Potluck Supper in the Great
Hall**

(bring something to share)

6:30 pm Concert in the Sanctuary

NOVEMBER 30, 2009

My husband and I had been dodging our son's pleas for a dog, but the time had finally come to face the inevitable. After some research and a lot of window shopping, we settled on a four month old Coton de Tulear. Our son quickly christened him with the name "Tevo."

Tevo was a crazy little white ball of fur, who yapped endlessly, running around in circles, skidding across the kitchen floor and chewing on anything that fit in his mouth. There were other unpleasant surprises on the kitchen floor as well. It didn't take long to bring in a certified dog trainer.

The trainer taught us to correct bad behavior by picking him up and cradling him in our arms like a baby and quietly commanding, "No". One way to make him calm down was to command him to "Sit" and then say, "Look at me". He wasn't allowed to leave that position until he sat quietly, and waited for his master to release him. Tevo was always rewarded with treats afterward and he quickly learned to enjoy being obedient to his new family.

Thru this experience, I am reminded that I too must keep my eyes on my Master. There are great rewards in being obedient to my Master. Rewards such as a calmness in my heart and peace that passes all understanding. When I am disobedient and distracted, He holds me in His arms and quietly says "No".

What an amazing God that everything in his creation points to Him!

II Chronicles 20:12 - We do not know what to do but our eyes on you.

2 Corinthians 4:18 - So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that when our eyes are truly fixed on You, our lives are whole and we live in peace with You.

Cindy Waller

DECEMBER 1, 2009

Do you believe in angels? I do. I have to believe that God has some help keeping the world and its dilemmas in control. At this time of year it is easy to feel an angel's presence, more so than at any other time. Angels are visible to us with our eyes, and our hearts. Christmas has a tendency to bring out the Angel in all of us. We are more inclined to give, help and serve others during the Christmas holidays. But there are some that serve at all times. I consider them God's earthly angels. They understand the duties of a heavenly angel, to serve, watch over, and guide those that are in need. They are there for us in all our glory and all our despair. They can help us find our way when we are lost and rejoice with us when we are found. I feel the need to reach out to these earthly and heavenly angels. I need for them to know how they have delivered me from despair and guided me to persevere through my trials and tribulations. These angels have held me up and given me the strength to stand on my own. I want us all to look around and within ourselves for those angels who have served and delivered you and those you love. Show our earthly angels the joy they have bestowed upon you. Share that grace with others and become an angel yourself. I have tried my best.

Hebrews 13:2

"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

Gail Wescott

allowed to munch on chicken nuggets. By this time my mom was frantic and had mall security and anyone else she could think of looking for me. She knew I'd been abducted. In a flash of motherly insight she went to check Chik-fil-a. She doubted I'd be there because I was terrified of the escalator, but she was desperate. She walked in and asked for our friend, the manager. When she heard he wasn't there, she turned to leave, that's when the girl at the counter said "wait, are you looking for a little blonde boy?" My mom had never been more relieved, it overrode her anger entirely. She was finally able to ask me what had possessed me to wander off on my own and how I'd gotten up the escalator by myself. I explained that those 2 girls had helped me. She looked at the assistant manager and other employees who were gathered there - they all shrugged and shook their heads and said "he came in alone, there was no one with him."

I haven't seen an angel since that day, though I can sometimes sense them, like a twinkle in the corner of my eye. That feeling is strongest at Christmas services, when the music, the lights and the mood are just right...

Dear Lord, thank you for taking care of us. We know that we sometimes wander away and need to be found again. Thank you for never losing us even when we lose sight of you. Please help us to refocus on you in this Advent season and praise you as naturally as your Angels do. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Steve Driver

JANUARY 3, 2010

Matthew 18:10 "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

Luke 2:10 "But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

I believe in Angels. Not in the sense of "Thank you so much, you're an angel!" I mean I believe in those celestial beings that first heralded the news of Jesus birth to the Shepherds. I also firmly believe in guardian angels.

It was 1981 and my mom and brothers and I were at the mall shopping. My mom was on her guard because Adam Walsh had been abducted from a mall earlier that same year. I was 4 years old and was, of course, getting into mischief. I crawled into the racks of clothes and pretended to be in a fort, or a pirate ship. My mom sternly warned me to stay close and not to hide, but the draw of the clothing racks was too much for a boy my age. I had soon disappeared again. I giggled to myself, waiting to hear my mom coming, so that I could jump out and surprise her. She didn't come. After a while, I became a little concerned. I poked my head out and looked around, I didn't see my mom. I called out and she didn't answer. I walked around and looked but I still didn't see her. Now any rational adult knows that I should have probably gone to the nearest check-out and asked them to page her, but I knew better. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that she'd left me in the store and had walked to Chik-fil-a (my favorite restaurant). I knew where Chik-fil-a was and what's more, I knew the manager. He was a close family friend, fellow church member and brought lunch to my school twice per week. I just knew that I could get there on my own and so I set out. (My mom tells me that she was only a few steps away looking at socks when I started out on my adventure and is still flummoxed at how I managed to slip past her unnoticed). So off I went into the mall and toward Chik-fil-a. I walked to the other end of the mall and stalled at the escalator. I needed to go up, but I was terrified of going up on my own. That's when 2 blond teenage girls came over to me and asked if I needed help. I forthrightly told them of my plight and my need to get to Chik-fil-a. They smiled, took my hand and rode up with me and walked with me the rest of the way to Chik-fil-a. Once there I asked for my friend, the manager. He was not there! Fortunately the assistant manager recognized me, and I knew him. I was taken in the back and

DECEMBER 2, 2009

God's Timing

My friend Cathy, what can I say; if you are lucky, you will have a friendship like ours that has lasted 25 plus years. Friends like her do not ask for much and are always there for you...well when they ask, you just cannot say no. She is asking for such a little thing....right. All you have to do is write a devotional to share with the church.

I think why me Lord. I have hidden for so long, not sharing with anyone the darkness I felt. Lord, I pray...what can I tell people in the church that are so much more knowledgeable than I am? I have let you carry me so many years with only your footprints in the sand. I argued with myself, I just do not have the right to tell anyone anything about prayer and devotion. I would say, "Lord I have failed so many times. Why must I bear it all?" I remember all He has done, so I begin.

Many seasons have come and gone since I first made Springwoods my home church. I came in with a dream, a hope for a better tomorrow for my family. I taught Sunday School for the first few years. I cherished the little ones with their wide-eyed excitement. Then all of a sudden life just happened. I lost my way in the day-to-day struggle. Sometimes I did not want to come to church for fear people would see all the sadness, the bitterness, the hope lost and all the hurt that lay in my heart and eyes. I do not feel I have been spiritual enough in the past few years. I had so many unanswered dreams, so many wrong deeds, and missed opportunities; I hid behind a mask when I came to church. I smiled all the while hurting inside; no one knowing how lost I was.

God waited for the fog in my eyes to lift and brought into the seasons of my life, joy and thanksgiving. With prayer and forgiveness in my heart, I now see God gives us many chances in this life, what we do with those chances are up to us. Free-will...life would be easier without it. I used to wonder why things happen the way they do. We are terrified to trust in God's love and promise of tomorrow. With God's help, I finally let go of the bitterness and hurt. The sadness in my heart lifted once I gave everything over to Him and with God's unending grace and peace, a new season came upon me. Now, I look forward to each new season; I have found peace and with God help so can you.

God blessed me in January with a wonderful husband. We are both amazed in this season the Lord has brought and look forward to each new season in the coming years. Remember to live in God; there is a purpose with his help you will find true peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven"

Marilyn Brando

DECEMBER 3, 2009

PEACE ON EARTH

Peace can be talked about in many ways. You can have peace when you find a rare moment to yourself. You can have peace when you spend time with family. I have peace when my friends support me through a difficult time in my life. And I know I feel at peace each time D.J. comes home from college. But do we have peace on earth? Think about this how can we begin to have peace on earth unless we have peace within ourselves, peace within our communities, and peace within our church? I struggle everyday with peace within my life, I worry about work, my health, my family, my friends, my finances, and it is exhausting. But in *Philippians 4:6-7* it tells us *"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* So I ask you, where is your peace? Take time to experience peace during your busy lives and this busy season. A peaceful moment can lead to a peaceful hour, which can lead to a peaceful day, which can lead to a peaceful life. So as the song goes "Let peace begin with me. Let this be my moment now. With every step I take let this be my solemn vow. To take each moment and live each moment with peace eternally. Let there be peace on Earth and let it begin with me."

Cynthia Skilton

Philippians 4:6-7

JANUARY 2, 2010

The Wilderness

The wilderness is a scary place. Facing the unfamiliar in an unfamiliar environment. It is a place where we feel all alone. When we live in this fleshly body here on this earth we can count on the wilderness. Jesus said in John 16:33b *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart I have overcome the world."*

And in James 1:2 - 4

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

And in 1 Peter 5: 8 & 9

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

So the thing is, we obviously are not going to live on easy street while we are here on this earth. Our life is going to be full of uncomfortable and painful experiences.

A major wilderness for me has been finding out my husband was gay, his moving out, me being alone at this point in my life and being solely responsible for raising our children. This is not what I signed up for when I joined the camp so to speak. Quite frankly it stinks. I remind God pretty regular that my wilderness is not what I wanted. Then He lovingly reminds me of His promises and He moves on my behalf taking care of things and giving me strength.

This past Sunday, in Sunday school, He blessed my heart and I knew I had to share the good news. We turned to 2 Corinthians to find a verse. I never found the verse we were looking for because my eyes were drawn to a verse that was marked with blue highlighter in my Bible. I knew instantly that I would be sharing it with you. The good news I am to share is found in

2 Corinthians 4:8 & 9

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

Remember when we are in the wilderness God does not allow us to be crushed, or to be in despair, abandoned or destroyed. That makes the wilderness not so scary or lonely. It makes me believe I can make it.

Marge McClendon

JANUARY 1, 2010

Matthew 19:14-15

¹⁴Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

On December 14th, 2001 our son Alex was born. I can't believe that 8 years have passed by already since that day. Looking back I can remember how exciting, painful and horrifying that day was. After 15 hours of labor my doctor decided to perform a C-section. I'll never forget the sounds I heard coming from my doctor while she struggled to get Alex out. You see, he was stuck! When she finally managed to get him out, he let out a short cry and stopped breathing. The look on both Peters' and the anesthesiologist face told me something was not right. Because I was being 'worked on' I was told that everything was 'fine'. By the grace of God and the skills of the doctors, Alex is fine and is now a healthy 8 year old. What a precious gift...that keeps on giving!

Carrie Schreiber

DECEMBER 4, 2009

A vital piece of information was required to complete a form and one of our employees came to us for assistance. Two of us had keys to different locked cabinets but didn't know what we were looking for; another employee knew what the binder should look like, but we just had to identify it. Mission accomplished; the file was found!

Granted, the scripture verse is not referring to missing files or even giving us carte blanche to ask God for any desire in our hearts – new car, new job, etc. What it does is inspire us to seek the word of God, ask of Him guidance and direction and to desire a relationship with Him. God is so delighted and honored when his children sincerely come to Him for advice, thereby getting to know Him better. Any father wants to be there for his children, to share their pain, shoulder their burdens and would do anything to make their lives better. So it is with our Father God – He truly is honored when we knock on His door to seek His counsel, study His words and allow Him to share the truths and answers he provides.

Ask in prayer; Seek answers in God's words, and Knock at His door to be invited in to the best relationship you will ever experience. Let our prayers and thoughts today be focused on coming closer to our wonderful, awesome, Heavenly Father.

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Matthew 7:7, NRSV

Pat Craven

DECEMBER 5, 2009

Luke 2:16- “So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph. And the baby, who was lying in the Manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told.”

Are you ready for the holidays? For some people, that question spurs exciting thoughts of beautifully decorated tables filled with scrumptious meals, festive shopping trips, extended family time, brightly wrapped gifts under a tree. For others, the holiday season is a very difficult time that is to be endured rather than enjoyed. According to the American Institute of Stress, more than 110 million Americans take medication for stress-related causes each week. During the holiday season, another one million people battle what experts refer to as the “holiday blues.”

In order to deal with “holiday blues” we must first come to a place of total and complete surrender to God and His plan of healing - even if we cannot see or do not understand that plan. The bottom line of God’s heart toward the children is always restoration and healing.

Thanksgiving can be a time of praise if we choose to focus on the victories and joys we have experienced during the year and then find ways to share that victory and joy with others. Christmas can be a true celebration of fresh starts and beginnings. If we choose to focus on a tiny baby born in a manger, come to save us and give us true life. And a new year? What a great opportunity to start over! The darkness can be destroyed if we choose to face and deal with whatever it holds. Right now, get ready for the holidays by choosing an attitude of joy, by focusing your mind on the things of heaven—not earth, and by fixing your heart on Jesus Christ.

Wilma Perez

DECEMBER 31, 2009

As we near the end of this year, I am nearing the 1 year anniversary of becoming the Youth Leader in our church. This time last year if anyone had asked me where I saw myself in ministry, working with the youth would not have come to mind. I am not cool enough, or smart enough, I do not know all the lingo, the youth give better sermons than I do. How could I ever, ever think to lead them? God is so funny! Here I am, actually leading the youth! God is so good, I look around and I am not alone, there are so many adults that have stepped forward to lead with me! God is so revealing, he continues to teach me through the youth day after day.

1 Timothy 4:12 is a youth favorite,

*Let no one look down on you because you are young,
but set an example for the believers in your speech,
conduct, love, faithfulness, and purity.*

I have heard this verse over and over through the year and I needed to, because I have continued to look down upon myself. Not because I am young, but because I am young in faith, in experience, and in education. Then finally it dawned on me one day, I AM NOT ALONE, I AM NOT IN CHARGE, I am a tool in the hand of our God. All I have to do is keep Him number one and blindly follow the path He is laying before me.

Each of us has a path of Blind Faith laid out for us, we just have to step out. We all have a place to serve in this church, this community, in our world. We do not have to be smart, experienced, or have grown up in church. We do not have to know the Bible cover to cover. We just have to commit to each day trying to grow closer to God, stronger in our faith, and firmer in our footsteps.

So next time you hear a call to serve, don’t think that it is not meant for me, just step out on the path. I am still not cool enough, or smart enough, but I have God to help me out.

Kelly Carlisle

DECEMBER 30, 2009

I Like Fruit!

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22 & 23)

As I was pondering this devotional, I was considering the theme of Advent, something about the gift that always fits, and I remembered the above scripture about the fruit of the Spirit. There is no law against the fruit of the Spirit because they are always fitting in any situation.

The fruits of the Spirit are not selfish nor ambitious, greedy nor stingy, overbearing nor controlling, rude nor mean. They are very subtle and selfless. These traits are exactly opposite of what this world teaches us on how to get ahead in life.

Yet, if we are able to accomplish bearing the fruit of the Spirit in any given situation, usually everything goes smoother, stress levels are at a minimum, and so much more can be accomplished for all involved. Only good can come from the use of such human emotions and actions.

Using the fruits of the Spirit is not a simple task for self centered creatures such as ourselves. If we focus on Jesus and change our thought process through reading God’s Word, then we can work at changing our actions to match what we learn. We can strive to be more like Jesus. When we do this, what others see in our lives are the fruits of the Spirit listed above. Then others will see Jesus and want what they see for themselves.

It’s the gift that is always fitting!

Lord I praise you that you are Holy. I thank you for your grace and for your new mercies everyday. I ask that you help me to love you and to bear the fruit of the Spirit in every situation so that others will accept your gift of Jesus. In Jesus name. Amen

Marge McClendon

DECEMBER 6, 2009

Proverb 17:22

A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

One Sunday morning a minister was accosted by one of his church members who chastised him for disturbing their meeting with his loud laughter. The minister was very hurt because he knew the woman’s words were true in spite of her mean spirit. He was very aware of his loud “belly” laughs that he really could not control. I guess if you can control laughter, then it’s not really laughter, it’s acting. To laugh is to let yourself go with on rushing of discomposure. Laughter is not always polite but it is never rude. Laughter is really unmanageable. It is spontaneous and manifests its greatest benefit from an authentic interaction of the person within his social environment.

Criticizing someone’s laugh is like criticizing a woman for being a woman, or a person for the color of his eyes, or his height, or the texture of his hair.

This woman’s mean spirit was more than temptation for her minister. It was a true test of his faith. Did he really believe God loved everyone? Could God really love a mean, old woman like this? What is the point of God giving up His son for a person like this?

A light bulb came on in the minister’s head. He realized the question was not whether God loved the woman or not. But the question was whether he loved God enough to love this less than perfect creature. He once again realized that none of us are perfect, but God loves perfectly. In the midst of all our imperfections is God’s perfect love.

He responded to the woman’s rudeness with kindness. And he vowed that day he would love her so that one day she would experience the thrilling effects of uncontrollable laughter and discomposure that she disdained. He hasn’t even gotten a smile yet. But he did see her share a tear, perhaps this is the beginning. As she works through her pain her spirit will rise in optimism and hope and she will celebrate her savior’s birth. And her personal hang-ups will no longer bring discomfort to those around her.

J.D. Phillips

DECEMBER 7, 2009

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”
(Luke 2:14)*

What a wonderful sentiment! Yet, it is difficult to reconcile the message of the Christ-child and peace on earth with the reality of hatred, violence and war that dominates the news of the world today. The quest for peace goes on with demonstrations, protests, peace summits, peace conferences, peace negotiations, peace prayer vigils and disarmament talks, but still lasting peace seems to be unattainable.

Could it be because we are not looking in the right place for peace? We are looking at the outside world - placing our hopes in political leaders or parties, for peace that can be negotiated between nations, peace that can be enforced through superior weaponry, some great philosophy or some other magic bullet.

Perhaps we should look closer at the message the angels brought to the shepherds that magical night in Bethlehem. Goodwill toward men infers that the goodwill is directed from God to men rather than between men. God's gift to mankind was the most precious gift of all, His infant son. One of the wonderful titles conferred on the baby was "Prince of Peace". Did He gain that title through any of the ways that we imagine might bring world peace? No, even though God is all powerful and could have chosen to set His child up to change the world by rule, He chose to have Him come to us as an extraordinary, ordinary human baby. As we celebrate this season let us consider the possibility that the way to truly know peace is simply to accept God's ultimate gift and to let God's love work through us. How eloquently this is expressed in this beautiful prayer by Francis of Assisi.

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen

ST. FRANCES OF ASSISI - 13TH CENTRY

Galynn Ferris

DECEMBER 29, 2009

The Gift That Fits: Family

[Hebrews 2:11](#)

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Church: A place for public (especially Christian) worship

Family: An association of people who share common beliefs or activities

I was thinking the other day about the phrase "church family". I started thinking about which word was the most important when it came to that phrase - church or family.

A church can be many things, a place of worship, a group of people who have a common worship or a religious building – a place. A family also has a number of definitions ranging from a group of people who are related, to people who have something in common. Family is people. To me, family is the more important word.

A family supports, encourages, loves, defends, educates, nourishes, cares, believes, and offers moral support. At Spring Woods we need to think of each other as family members as opposed to members of the same church. Do we accidentally bump into each other on Sundays as we come to a building to worship, or do we intertwine with each other, growing spiritually along the journey?

Next time you load your family into the car to go to Sunday services, instead of saying "get in the car everyone, we're going to church" – try saying "get in the car everyone, we're going to see the family"

Peter Schreiber

DECEMBER 28, 2009

Proverb 17:22

A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

Love begins with the grace of God and the effort of your will. This involves growing in the awareness of God's great love for us and struggling with us to love others the same way. It isn't sufficient to feel kindly toward all humanity. I'm reminded of the poem that was very popular years ago with the line: "I just want to sit by the side of the road and be a friend to man." That's a nice sentiment, but it's not Christian love. Christian love sends us out, leads us to exert ourselves for other people. It can be expensive even painful at times.

Christmas' deepest intent is that Jesus stands at the entrance of each life. No one is excluded. No matter what one may have done, whatever our sins, how loathsome one's history. At the moment of His arrival, the possibility of a totally new life is ours. We do not have to pay any price at all. That price has already been paid. We have only to open the door of life and welcome him.

J. D. Phillips

DECEMBER 8, 2009

This Fall our church held a "Trunk R Treat" evening as a Halloween alternative for the children of the community. I was commenting to some friends about how wonderful it was to see so many young families in our church and wondering where so many of them were on Sunday mornings. Although we didn't come up with a quick and easy solution for bringing more of those young people to Spring Woods, it did start me reminiscing about my own childhood growing up in a small-town Methodist church in Iowa.

Years ago there was published a very popular book called *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. I got to thinking that maybe all I ever need to know I learned in Sunday School. I have vivid memories of our little white wooden church with a big bell with a rope that hung down into the entryway, and of the nursery room in a corner of the basement.

Many of those memories were good, but not all. One of my little classmates was a biter. I may have been bitten only once, but the fear I had of returning to the nursery is still clear. One of our first Bible lessons was "Be kind to one another". As adults we have chances every day to choose to be nice or not. Sometimes we may feel justified in lashing out verbally or physically when we feel we've been wronged or think someone needs to be taught a lesson, but when we do, we risk causing the same kind of fear felt by a child who has been bitten. After I have said or done something hurtful to another, either out of anger or ignorance, I have a terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach. I believe that pang is God's way of reminding me to "Be kind".

One difficult lesson from the church nursery was cooperation. My favorite thing to play with was a set of big cardboard blocks, great for building bridges, houses and roads. Of course, one child was not allowed to hog all the blocks, so we learned to work together on our projects. As adults we would not get far without cooperation, whether sharing the roads by following the same traffic rules, or working together to complete projects at work, or making music together in a choir or orchestra.

Near the end of the Sunday School hour all the classes came together for a small worship service. As we gathered we sang "I was glad when they said unto me: 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'" I didn't fully appreciate what those words meant until I was grown and became aware that in so many parts of the world people do not have the freedom to worship when, where and how they choose.

My favorite Sunday School song was *Jesus Loves Me*. Maybe it still is. And it may be the most important lesson I learned in Sunday School.

Luke 18:17

"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it."

Jane Moss

DECEMBER 9, 2009

Psalm 100: Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the Lord Himself is God; it is He who has made us and not we ourselves. We are his people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name, for the Lord is good; his loving-kindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.

A very dear friend of mine is going through some very tough times with a reoccurrence of cancer. Her testimony of faith is absolutely beautiful. She tells of her pastor saying, “We are just pilgrims passing through. This world is not our home.” Then she tells the story of a time when she was sitting on the porch with her grandmother and a thunderstorm passed through their area. She was frightened, but her grandmother hugged her and said, “Don’t be afraid. That is just God working.” She believes that the cancer has allowed her to become much closer to God as she faces the coming trials of her illness, and she’s thankful for the cancer because of that. I don’t know of anyone who has thanked God for any disease, let alone cancer.

In this season, we have so much to be thankful for—God sent His only son into the world to show us the way we should live, treat others, and worship our heavenly Father. The ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made for us shows us that even He was “just passing through” and what a difference **that** has made in our lives today.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember the sacrifice you made for us by sending your only Son, Jesus, to earth to live among mortals. We are thankful for our time on earth with those we love and pray that we use our time here to magnify your glory. May we be worthy, when this life is over, to meet You face to face and praise your holy name forever.

Kathy Maurer

DECEMBER 27, 2009

“A Reason for Hope”

A few years ago, a small Alaskan town called Hope was destroyed by a flood. No lives were lost, but there was tremendous property damage. One of the Bishops of the church went there to see how he might help. When he arrived, he found the devastated town completely deserted. However, someone had placed a sign of what had once been main street of the small town. The sign read, “The Community of Hope Has Moved to Higher Ground.”

This is what the miracle of Christmas does for us. It moves our hope to higher ground. It reminds us of the power and love of God. It reminds us that God is with us and that God cannot be defeated. Even though evil sometimes seems to prevail, we can be confident and filled with hope because we know that ultimately God and His righteousness will win. And just think of it, God wants to share the victory with us!

George Cathcart

DECEMBER 26, 2009

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:17 - NIV

So, what did you get for Christmas? Did you get what you wanted?

Several years ago my wife asked me what I wanted for Christmas and I replied, "I can't think of anything you can buy me that I want to pay for." Such is the cynicism of adulthood. Perhaps that is why Christmas is for children. It keeps us young as we watch the excitement in their eyes when they open up one surprise gift after another. For a few hours we are able to forget the reality that someone will have to pay for this.

If you didn't get what you wanted, did you get what you deserve? Everyone knows and freely quotes John 3:16; but many people haven't heard that Jesus said, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world." Why is that?

Why didn't God send his son to condemn the world? Could it be that we condemn ourselves? God created the world and everything in it. How could He not love it? It must break His heart to see how we ignore Him, abuse each other, and trash His creation. Yet, He does not condemn us; but wants to save us from ourselves. A couple of years ago my wife gave me a small stocking with a lump of coal inside. I think it was a joke, but I keep it around as a reminder of what I deserve.

As the days get longer and the cold gets stronger, we all gather with friends and family to celebrate the Christ Mass. This is the time we remember that God stepped out of heaven and walked with us to show us the way. We are reminded that

EVERYONE NEEDS COMPASSION

Love that's never failing
Let mercy fall on me
Everyone needs forgiveness
The kindness of a Saviour
The Hope of nations

God has freely given us everything we need and we pray that you will gratefully share what has been freely given; compassion, never failing love, mercy, forgiveness and kindness.

Galynn

DECEMBER 10, 2009

Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16 NIV

As Christians, there is a joy about Christmastime that is indescribable; words do not come close to what you feel within your heart. During the season of giving His spirit whirls around us in everything that we do. He is in the music that we sing, the food we prepare for our loved ones, the decorations that we put up to make our home festive, so many traditions that we express as we get ready to celebrate our Savior's birth. There is something in the air, you can't help but smile at the people around you, it's the spirit of our Savior is all around us. Take notice of the pure joy of celebrating our Lord and Savior's birth – it's catching! Let your light shine this Christmas Season and show someone how true JOY can be!

Much Love,
Katherin Dickerson

DECEMBER 11, 2009

This summer I participated in a music program called SALTeens. Through this program, we learned music, and then traveled all around Texas singing at different churches. At every church we went to, we tried to do a mission project. One of the churches we went to was down in Brownsville and at this church we were cleaning the inside of the building and watering the grass surrounding the property with 4 water hoses. In the middle of the property was a large lake with a dock and old paddleboats. As we went about our task of watering the lawn, the dry heat that encompasses Brownsville in the middle of June began to mess with our minds a little and the thought of stepping into the inviting waters of the lake began to over power us. Finally, when all the grass had been sufficiently watered twice and our task was completed, I decided I would give into the temptation. I quickly removed my shoes, all the while imagining how good it was going to feel when my feet were submerged into the cool inviting waters of the lake. However, to my disappointment, as I placed my feet into the lake, my feet were greeted by hard rocky clay and covered with warm, almost sticky water. While it had looked cool and inviting, it instead served as nothing but an utter disappointment.

I think sometimes as we as Christians find ourselves to be a little bit like the lake in Brownsville. In a world that is looking for something refreshing to take refuge in from the hot bitterness of the world, we worry so much about our outward appearance that we forget to tend to what is on the inside of our hearts. We focus on things like reading scripture and helping out in the church, volunteering in the community being good examples, giving ourselves the “good Christian” appearance. These are all important because these are the things that the world sees and I am in no way claiming them to be unimportant. At the same time, if we focus so much on just what the world sees from us, and neglect our own faith, relationship with Christ and love for ourselves and one another, how much good can we actually do? It is just as important to focus on what is on the inside or we, like the lake will give off a wonderful appearance, but will be able to give little to those seeking refreshment.

“Daddy God,

Please help me to be a well rounded Christian, focusing not just on my actions, but also on my heart, love, and relationship with you so that we can better shine your light.” In your name I pray, amen.

Ashley Sivley

DECEMBER 25, 2009

“The Parable of Christmas”

The Olympic Games always produce a number of dramatic and memorable moments. One of the most touching and memorable Olympic moments of all time took place during the 1992 Summer games in Barcelona, Spain. Perhaps you remember seeing it on television or reading about it. It occurred during the semifinals of the Men’s 400-meter track race.

When Redmond reached the stretch, a large man in a t-shirt emerged out of the stands. He pushed his way through the security guards, and ran to Derek Redmond, and hugged him. It was Derek’s father. “You don’t have to do this” he told his weeping son. “Yes I do,” whispered Derek to his father, “then we’re going to finish this together his father said. And they did! When they crossed the finish line the crowd rose to there feet, cheered and wept.... This is a great parable for Christmas.... Realizing that we cannot make it on our own, that we are down and out, that we need help, that we need a Savior, God comes into our world, into our arena, to pick us up, to hold us up, to see us through, and to bring us home. This is the Good News of Christmas!

George Cathcart

DECEMBER 24, 2009

“Going to Bethlehem”

Some years ago, I was privileged to go with a tour group to the Holy Land. I will never forget that evening we arrived in Bethlehem. It was such a thrill for me to come to that sacred place where Jesus was born. An older man who was a native of Bethlehem was standing in front of the church of the Nativity that marks the birth place of Jesus. As I walked toward the church, he watched us. Suddenly, the older man waved to me to get My attention; and he said, “Are you an American?” “Yes”, I answered. Are you a Christian?” I replied “Yes”. He reached over to shake my hand. He smiled warmly and said, “Welcome! Welcome home!”

On this Christmas Eve that is what God wants to do.... To welcome us home! Not to a certain address or place of our memories or childhood. God wants us to come to him! How do we do that? ... by simply saying/ praying Lord today I accept your forgiveness, your Mercy and your Love into my heart”. And when we do, God reaches out to take our hand ... He smiles warmly and says, “Welcome! Welcome home!

.... Merry Christmas

George Cathcart

DECEMBER 12, 2009

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Luke 2:8 - NIV

It is exhilarating to live in rural Nebraska in the winter. The stars are brilliant in the crisp winter sky. Even the moon seems to be larger and shine brighter. It is so peaceful to be seated under this awesome display of God's power and grace.

The apostle Paul wrote "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise". Consider the nativity story. God decided to send His Son into the world to show us Himself. The only questions are when and how.

God chose a laborer from a no-name town in a sleepy backwater district and his fiance. In the fullness of time, she gave birth in a stable carved into the side of a rock.

Now, how would He announce His arrival to the world? God first announced this great news to a bunch of smelly shepherds sleeping under the stars.

It has been my life experience that it is easier to experience God when I take the time to associate with the foolish things of the world. Your challenge in this advent season is to spend some time with a child, learn the name of the security guard at work, and ask the janitor about her family.

God is everywhere from the soaring majesty of the universe to the simple comforts of a clean room. We are inspired by beautiful decorations, festive gatherings, and powerful music. We also find His presence in simple acts of kindness, thoughtful gifts shared, and the mundane routine of our daily lives.

We pray that you will take the time to look for the presence of God every day.

Galynn

DECEMBER 13, 2009

As Christians, we often ask God for His “helping hand” as we journey through the problems and trials of life. We seek God’s help through His healing hand, His guiding hand, His comforting hand, and His powerful hand. We often forget, however, that although God invites us to call on Him for help and guidance, He also advises us to seek His face.

2 Chronicles, 7:14 If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

This cultural mandate from God illustrates that as we seek God’s helping hand, we also should seek His face which refers to adoration toward God. Don’t forget to give God the glory as you seek his help.

Thomas Patton

DECEMBER 14, 2009

Harsh Times

My Grandmother passed away recently. I went to her house to tell her one last goodbye right before she died. My brothers, Clayton and Zachary and my three cousins Steven, Mikey, and Brian were there too. I remember the night I found out my Nana died.

My family and I were crushed. Everyone told me it would be okay. I was happy for her because I knew she wasn’t sick anymore, she reunited with her parents, and because she now gets to be with God.

Thinking about Nana being in heaven with God is how I get through it. I am still sad that Nana is gone, I am still crushed, but talking with God each night makes it better.

Parker Carlisle

DECEMBER 23, 2009

“The 10 Commandments Of Christmas”

Recently, I ran across a fascinating list called the “Ten Commandments of Christmas”. I would like to share them with you as we approach Christmas Eve. I hope they will help you focus on what Christmas is all about.

Ten Commandments of Christmas:

Thou shall be prepared

Thou shall keep Christ at the center of Christmas.

Thou make Christmas a family time

Thou shall remember those who are less fortunate.

Thou shall give thy self with every gift.

Thou shall learn to be a good receiver.

Thou shall put music into Christmas.

Thou shall slow down.

Thou shall remember to worship.

Thou shall receive Christ into your life.

George Cathcart

DECEMBER 22, 2009

"I am bringing you good news that will be a great joy to ALL the people. Today your Savior was born in the town of David. He is Christ, the Lord." Luke 2:10 – 11

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life." John 3:16

The Gift That Always Fits

A newborn babe, the perfect gift...or so they say. Did Mary think the news of a baby was the perfect gift when the angel Gabriel told her she was going to have a baby? Did a newborn baby fit that time in her life when she was engaged but not married? What about Joseph? Was this gift the right fit for him? Was it worth the judgment and embarrassment he would go through when people found out that his fiancé was pregnant?

The beautiful Christmas story of a young engaged couple, who loved God, is repeated and re-enacted each year in celebration of the greatest gift ever. As Christians, many of us receive comfort in reliving the story of this wonderful gift. But, I wonder...does this gift ALWAYS fit? And does it fit EVERYONE? Maybe it's too big for some of us. Could God love and care about ME so much as to have His only begotten son be born of a human in the lowliest of places and then suffer and die the way He did? The great gift that it is, I'm not sure it's one size fits all. I have often found myself trying to return it with the excuse that it's a little big for me. Definitely a better fit for someone else out there.

What is the gift that always fits? It is God himself. His unconditional love for us; the way he knows just what we need at every moment and chooses the perfect way to demonstrate His love to us. Through the gift of His love, He continues to grow us to the point where we can accept his gift of Christ, knowing then that He IS the perfect fit. We no longer try to return it for someone else to have.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for knowing where we are each moment of our lives and for allowing us the space to grow when we feel your gift is too big for us. Your gift of Christ is the gift that always fits. Please help me to know that in my heart. Forgive me for the times I tried to return your gift because I thought it was too big for me. Help me to accept your gift and your unconditional love. Help me to reflect your love so that others may come to know your love and know that your gift fits them too! Amen.*

Ana Mancillas

DECEMBER 15, 2009

"...Testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived, so dedicated, can long endure. We are met here on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate- we cannot consecrate-we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract..."

This was a part of President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address. This speech stands as a symbol; that in some of the darkest days of American history in the midst of all the killing and shooting of the American Civil War, the President of the United States was able to see what others had not. President Lincoln saw past the mindless hate and thoughtless rage. He realized that winning the war and preserving the Union meant nothing if the purpose of the Union was buried along with the soldiers who gave all they had fighting for it.

In his speech of a mere 3 minutes, President Lincoln brought to the attention of America, that if this nation is to succeed, the people who fight for it must not be forgotten or left behind. Their purpose must live on and America must still continue to honor and thank all those who gave their lives to allow that nation to grow and be whole.

The same holds true for Christianity. Those who give all they have to God should not be cast aside or forgotten. To preserve Christianity, we must hold those people in the highest honor and we must follow their examples and give all we have to God. It is only when we accept Christ and live by God's rule, that we will truly be saved.

"...The world will little, note, nor long remember what we say here, but can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated to the great task remaining before us-that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion..."

Abraham Lincoln

Morgan Evans

DECEMBER 16, 2009

I LOVE MY CHURCH"

I love my church. How many times have I said this? Many times. I truly mean it...or do I? The word "love" is tossed around so much these days. We talk about how much we "love" this movie or that food and on and on. What we are really saying is that we love this or that because it makes us feel good.

Recently, I was asked to become involved in a church mission that is, well let's say, not in my comfort zone. My first thought was "I'm really busy and already involved in so many things in the church." I volunteer as much or more than some. God would understand if I said no. After rationalizing in my head that it was okay for me to decline this request, Dr. Phillips gave a Sunday morning sermon that made me think about how I should respond to opportunities for service to Spring Woods.

I started thinking about how much God has given me through the Spring Woods family and how much I **love** this family. And I remembered God's ultimate sacrifice for me. Am I willing to stand behind the words I so often speak. I realized the things I am involved in are fun and easy for me. God is asking me to step out of my comfort zone. Do I really love my church.? The answer...yes! He gave me a sense of excitement and motivation for this new challenge.

Summary: The Bible teaches that love is a commitment. As a commitment, love is not dependent on good feelings, but rather on a consistent and courageous decision to extend oneself for the well-being of another. That commitment then produces good feelings, not the other way around. Jesus became the perfect demonstration of God's unconditional love for us by laying down his life for our benefit.

---Of all things on earth, love may well be the most excellent. A life of love for God and one another is a life of excellence that is truly majestic and awesome. 1 Corinthians 13

Dear God, thank you for the ultimate sacrifice and showing us how to truly love. We are grateful for opportunities to love and serve others. Help us to always consider ways to express our love by serving you in our lives today.

Jean Tomlin

DECEMBER 21, 2009

Proverb 17:22

A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

God has given us no greater gift than The Gift of Laughter. The sharing of humorous secrets and private jokes breathes energy into life.

Even when we forget the punch line, telling a joke can render a merry heart. During Thanksgiving dinner, Dr. Hayes, Sr. volunteered to share a joke with his family. This is a very rare thing so he got everybody's attention. The joke was about these Aggies who were locked out of their car and were worried that it would rain before they could unlock the car and let the top down. Get it? The Aggies didn't realize they could get in a convertible without unlocking the door. The joke is to be told in such a way that the convertible part comes at the very end. This is the punch line. But when Dr. Hayes told the joke he said the car was a convertible in the very beginning. No punch line - not funny. Right? No - wrong. Somehow all of us gathered at the table knew we'd better laugh. And in doing so the laughter became real producing the characteristic, explosive and in articulate sounds, uncontrollable facial expressions and discomposure that accompanies laughter.

The Bible teaches us "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones (Proverbs 17:22)." James Moffatt translates it to say, "A glad heart helps and heals." A number of the Proverbs exalt the value of cheerfulness for the person who cultivates a cheerful outlook upon life. Good health is one of the dividends paid.

When a person is ill, God's healing power is at work in his body, but this power is often hindered when the patient becomes deeply anxious, or lonely, or bitter. A gloomy spirit can make it very difficult for healing power to work. But a good and hopeful attitude is like good medicine that helps healing. For many generations healers could do very little to help persons' bodies by way of medicine. Before the age of scientific medicine the chief task of the Medicine Man was to do something for the spirits of persons. For the most part these Medicine Men used various devices to give people new assurance and to build a basis of confidence and joy. Many healers were helpful by dealing with person's hearts.

Good news restores the energies of people. Laughter is good for your very soul. Cheerfulness transforms life.

For some it seems foolish to try to be cheerful when there is every reason for gloom and sadness. They feel there is a lack of realism in trying to smile when facts seem to call only for despair. A cheerful spirit is not something that is automatic or an inevitable result of particular events. The same circumstances may cause one person to be glum and yet not prevent another person from being cheerful. Cultivating a cheerful outlook on life is a deliberate act and determination to prepare our hearts again and again for the Christ who stands at the door of our hearts and knocks and yearns to be let in.

J.D. Phillips

DECEMBER 20, 2009

John 14:18

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

You are not facing life all alone -- no matter how you feel.

Jesus is with you. He promised to never forsake you.

Our enemy loves to make us think we have no help, that God does not care, and we have no hope. But the devil is a liar.

"But why does God allow things to look so bleak? Why doesn't He help me sooner?"

God desires faith and trust from us. Without testing times we would have no opportunity to show our faith. Without obstacles we would have nothing to overcome.

We must always remember that God is raising a family, preparing us for eternity with Him. It can be a great error to judge everything by "the bottom line" today.

We must trust our Father God, because only He really knows what the "true bottom line" is. And we can trust Him, because He is good and trustworthy.

SAY THIS: Thank you Father God that I am not facing life all alone -- as an orphan. You are my Father and are taking good care of me. I trust You -- for time and eternity.

Jeremy Kluesner

DECEMBER 17, 2009

The Gift Of Laughter

Proverb 17:22

A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

A plane experienced terrible turbulence in flight. The passengers were horrified, afraid for their lives. However, there was one man smiling and laughing during the panic. No one could understand this strange behavior. When things finally got back to normal, it was discovered that the cheerful passenger had on a headset and was caught up in a comedy routine being broadcast at the very time of the turbulence.

It would do us all good to stay tuned to God's broadcast during our life's journey. For in God is the promise that no matter what dangerous and damaging forces beset us, God will overcome them and into the darkness of one's life he will bring eternal light.

We must place our trust in God and do our very best to do His will.

This means that we can't take ourselves too seriously. The greatest barrier to personal joy and satisfaction is being too preoccupied with oneself. Sometimes people struggle with unhappiness because they do not know how to give love. One secret of a happy life is this: if you wish to be happy, it will result from loving, not just from being loved. Reuel Howe said, "When someone asks me how to find someone who will love me I tell them 'Go find someone you can love and then perhaps you will be loved.' "

J.D. Phillips

DECEMBER 18, 2009

Read: Isaiah 61:1-3, Luke 4:16-21, and Revelation 21:3,4

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those Who are crushed on spirit. Psalm 34:18

This time of year is meant to be an exciting one, joyful and full of fun. For many though, it is also a season that can bring pain. We remember loved ones who are gone or regrets we might have. Tears mover closer to the surface, and loneliness can be sharp. The laughter and happiness we see on TV commercials and in Christmas movies not always ring true. As Christians, sometimes we might feel a pang of guilt that we are not experiencing the joy and peace as fully as we should.

Yet we are able to find comfort that this God who came down to live among us understands our loneliness, sorrows and the pain of loss. He came so that He could be close enough to us to wipe away our tears and comfort us. Our Savior, the very baby we are celebrating, came to heal our broken hearts and dry our tears. And He is the very One who makes it possible for us to look forward to the time when there will be no tears.

Prayer: Father, help me to remember that You came down to earth so that You could meet me exactly where I am and bring hope for my future. Let me see that hope this Christmas season and find joy I You. Amen

Amy Bancroft

DECEMBER 19, 2009

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

Ever since I was a little this verse has always inspired me. It always amazed me at the level of loyalty that Ruth shows to Naomi, even though she no longer had any ties to Naomi she still stood by her in her darkest times. In this time period two women traveling alone would have been not only dangerous, but both of these women would have been looked down upon for not having husbands or children to take care of them. This makes Ruth choosing to go with Naomi even more incredible.

This is a little like the loyalty that God shows to us. No matter what is going on in our lives he is with us, and he will never turn away. Even when we tell him to turn back and leave us to our misery, he still stands by us and shows us just how much he cares about us. It is in the hard times that God really shows his unconditional love for us. Even if the odds are stacked against us we can still count on God to guide us, and never leave us even when it seems that everyone else has.

Lindsey Anderson