

West Chicago Church of Christ Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

When things get tough, and everyone has times when things aren't so easy, they might just need encouragement. Encourage actually means: giving someone support, confidence, or hope to help them to have strength and courage to keep moving forward. En-COURAGE. Here's a few ideas about how God builds us up through encouragement and uses us to encourage.

God encourages us by putting unlikely solutions in our path. Technology really became a common thing in the workplace after I had begun my design career and so some of the problems associated with computers and so forth like ethernet? and postscript? and whether or not the printer had enough random access memory caused me sometimes daily mental breakdown. I figured out that if I shared the problems with a younger, conscientious (digital native) member of the staff, that these problems suddenly seemed smaller, that someone was on the job that could solve a problem that seemed insurmountable alone.

However, I am convicted that when I am at my lowest emotionally, I tend to keep it quiet. Only my wife knows when I am suffering and even then she has to force me to share. It's human to want to keep our troubles private, but how else can we benefit from the prayer encouragement of the people we are closest to?

I...we...need to use the office technology (share the difficulty) model and allow others to help work the problem. They may have experience that can be helpful. Someone might offer us a technical fix through kind words or prayer support giving us hope to move forward.

God encourages us through answered prayers. "Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." (John 16:24) I tend to use the example of having the faith of a mustard seed when praying for specific things or concerns. A number

of years ago, someone, and I can't remember who, passed around these little necklaces that were made with a mustard seed charm. I think the idea was to illustrate just how small the seed was. That we only need to have faith and God will answer. I believe we all have examples of answered prayers.

Once we were miles from home and we had locked ourselves out of our car. It was January and there it was late in the evening. We could not find the keys in our coat, a purse or anywhere. Sounds desperate right? We even went

so far as to call a locksmith who of course was too busy to come immediately. We were cold and miserable and frustrated. Sally dug deep in her purse one last time and came up with the spare set. As we drove away, Charlie said, "I prayed that Mom would have her keys." A small thing but encouraging.

Identify your examples of answered prayer and use them as encouragement to petition Him for all concerns big and small.

God is good, kind, and faithful.

God encourages us through our close relationships. The Bible says. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity." (Proverbs 17:17) Losing a loved one is a pretty rough thing. When this happens, we often have to travel great distances to be with our family, and to share, in many cases with strangers to us, our grief and loss. We can draw some comfort from our immediate family but they also are experiencing the same sadness.

In recent years our family has been blessed by having members of our church miraculously appear at our side to hug and comfort us at a very low time. These are special people. God through them, eases some of the pain and encourages us through the church body that we are not alone.

Keep your radar up. God may want to use you to give someone support, confidence, and hope for strength and courage to keep moving forward.

Elder Jay



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Throughout Paul's ministry he was subjected to all kinds of persecution and trial for the sake of Christ. He experienced stoning, beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck and even betrayal. The Bible says he often went without food, rest, and shelter.

When he was in a Roman prison, he felt loneliness and had no other person to support or defend him. His fellow worker Demas left him because he loved the world. Paul received great opposition from Alexander also. Throughout all this difficulty however, God stood beside him. Paul was comforted and strengthened by God's powerful and continual presence.

The struggles that Paul suffered during his ministry for Christ may seem extreme by our standards today, but everyone at times has experienced or is experiencing times of difficulty that pose great challenge for each one personally.

I recently received an opportunity for an extended substitute teaching position in an elementary art classroom. The teacher whose class I am covering has an infant son who has been in the hospital getting treatment for leukemia since Thanksgiving. Having shadowed this teacher the past week, I've been inspired by seeing the energetic and upbeat manner by which she continues to teach her students. How she is able to explain her son's disease in a non-scary way (these are elementary students after all) and to answer their questions so that it seems to put them at ease, is a great example of peace. I haven't known this teacher very long, but my thought is that she may have a mechanism that allows her to find joy in this really terrible situation.

Is it a thing with most people, that you can be feeling really down, or overwhelmed one moment, and somehow

you think of something that sends you to your happy place? God has a way of covertly giving us a right turn just when we need it and so I believe that this term, that I actually found in the Cambridge Dictionary, is a concept provided to us by Him.

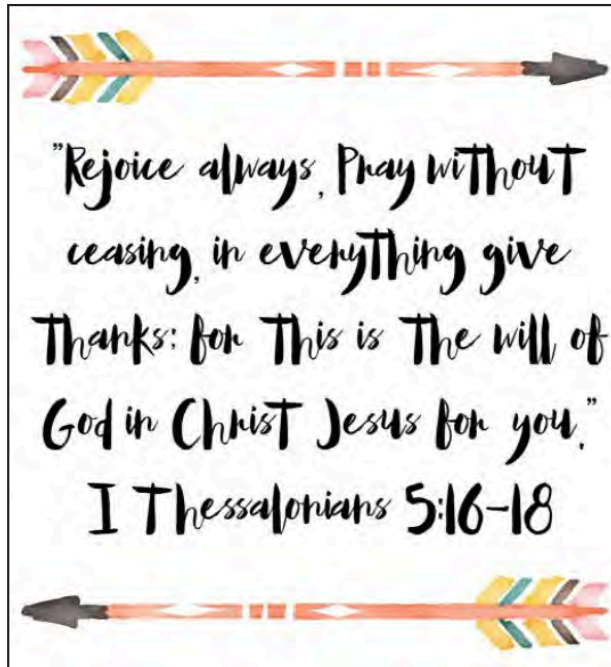
The happy place that God sends me to, I think, is the thought of playing music in my dark, dusty basement. I know this might not appeal to most people however. I think in the case of my teacher friend, it may be the time she spends teaching her students or, thinking about her son.

I'm not a big fan of the cold winter weather, but when the sun is out, somehow even the snow takes on a beautiful positive glow. I think this is just another take on the clouds' silver lining, and a message from the Father that good can come from bad.

How we are able to navigate the challenges we face make us the people He wants us to be. It adds empathy to our ability to help others and grows our faith when He sees us through our hard times. We are reminded that we're called to find joy in all situations.

Rejoice in the blessing He provides, praying for guidance every day, and showing our gratitude even when we struggle. This is what God wants for us.

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I enjoy talking about art. Music, movies, visual art, etc... People often say, "I don't know much about art, but I know what I like." I do know a little about art, but that statement can describe me at times. There is usually a discussion about when an artist created something. What were they thinking when they created the art? What is the special meaning the artist wanted to convey when he or she created the art?

I've had the benefit of talking with Bob Jett about visual art on several occasions. Firstly, I have the understanding that he has a great appreciation for those things creative. What I really love about these exchanges, is that there are artworks I have seen and admired in books, that Bob and Betsy have seen in person. A few examples he has shared are works by Michelangelo from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City. Another is *The Pietà "The Pity,"* (shown here) a marble sculpture also by Michelangelo found at St. Peter's Basilica. These works are revered for the timeliness of their meaning and for the beauty they hold. Surely there was something special about the artist. In the example of the Sistine Chapel which has nine panels depicting scenes from the book of Genesis, Michelangelo is giving us, albeit from his human perspective, a glimpse into God's creation. History, and a movie starring Charlton Heston, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, tells us that Michelangelo's creative process could be somewhat rocky at times. Through creative differences with the pope during this time and difficulty finding new inspiration he finally finished his work.

The true creation from God was not wracked with difficulty and indecision however. The colorful hues used in these fresco paintings and the marble *The Pietà* was chiseled from are just elements from God's greater creation. The true

Creator actually owns the art supplies used to "make" these beautiful works that humans equate as genius.

I wanted to try to show a contrast between two words found in the Old Testament. The Greek word Bara meaning "created/creating" and Assah, meaning "make." God can create, but we can only "make" from what has already originated from Him. My research however suggests that the Bible uses

these terms interchangeably.

What is interesting is that the verb Bara is used only to relate to God. I would suggest that is where the contrast comes. I am good with this.

I saw a documentary about the famous Beach Boys. Most of their music was composed by Brian Wilson. As productive as he was at that time, he had many odd irregularities to his creative process. They spoke of a time when Brian had tons of sand moved into his music room and placing his grand piano in the middle of the sand pile, began writing some of his biggest hits.

As inspiring as the sand may have

been, it is still a foundation created when God brought the universe into being.

In Deuteronomy 32 it says: *Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of?*

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What is branding? It's one of those advertising terms that effects us whether we know it or not. It is the ability to create an immediate recognition of a product or service using a repetitious element that works its way into our subconscious. Think, the Geico gecko, the Target logo, or the Apple apple.

This familiarity is called **"brand recognition."** Most anyone who watches television has seen these icons.

My personal favorite is Coca-Cola. There is something about the bright red can that gets my attention. And, it's not just that recognition, but rather it conjures a memory of that cold, sweet, fizzy burn you get from that first long sip. Branding is powerful. It appeals to both our visual and emotional senses.

The colors used in "branding" can be very important in establishing this recognition. I once had an advertising customer whose corporate color was Pantone 185.

For those familiar with offset printing, this number represents a bright, vibrant red. For some reason the client was interested in changing their brand color scheme to some kind of blue. This was a bad idea for several reasons. The greatest being that they had over many years established their brand using the color red and their name and logo were closely associated with this color.

Why is this red so important? It is the color of fire and blood, so it is associated with energy, war, danger, strength, power, determination as well as passion, desire, and love. Some positive and some not so positive associations. Red is a very emotionally intense color. It enhances human

metabolism, increases respiration rate, and raises blood pressure. So it quite literally gets your heart pumping.

I've done a pretty good job of accidentally cutting myself on quite a number of occasions. I am kind of intrigued by the rich red hue that our blood manifests when it leaks out and meets the oxygen. This, to such an extent, that I don't always feel expedient about getting it treated.

When God chose for his son to die on the cross, he meant the blood to impact us. Again, it can be characterized by things like power, passion, and love. If we obey and are washed in Jesus' blood, we are representative of the product he offers. This is eternal life. One of the great features of this product is fellowship with the saints.

Remember, in John it says, "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Our "branding" is Jesus

Christ. We wear on our hearts a label that says "child of God."

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

Let people see Christ in you. This is your **"brand recognition."**

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What do you see in this image? A bouquet of flowers? Two hands grasping? Or are they reaching? I see one grasping and one reaching? Or is one holding and one snatching? There are several scenarios possible. I believe the artist's intent can be found in the title of this 1958 color lithograph by Pablo Picasso, "Bouquet of Peace."

What this means to me is that someone has determined to "reach out." There is something about this idea that is very deliberate in nature. We have to have a plan to make a contact, whether for me it's to pet my neighbor's dog Phoebe or to shake the hand of a stranger. Effort is the most important thing. With so much we endeavor to do, the simple first step is just to act. The famous advertisement says, "Just Do It."

Paul said in *Ephesians 4:2-3*, *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

My action to build up the body should be intentional. I appreciate when Rick encourages us to greet each other before Sunday morning worship and to take part albeit, a brief fellowship in our church family gathering. Again, Paul says "greet one another with a holy kiss." What does this mean? I think in our day it may not be used quite as literally. I believe however, it is just what Rick is asking us to do. And, we are literally, reaching out to one another.

So often when I walk into the service and see so many laughing and interacting, even when children are running from here to there and there is a hum of activity I feel that all is right with the world. There are a number of individuals in our church that I draw encouragement from. Many of you (most of you) don't even know who you are. But I still get

the blessing from your presence. I would expect that many of us have this same feeling about someone or someone(s) in our body that adds value and blessing to your time here.

But, you know what? There are many in our church family who are not here. Family and friends, brothers and sisters in our fellowship who are not with us. Sometimes we know the reason, and sometimes not. We still miss our church family when they are not here. I would like to refer back to the idea at the beginning of the article and Picasso's playful image.

As a church family, we all know that we love and care for each other, but how do we act on this. Is there someone that sits next to you that you haven't seen in a week or two. Reach out. Is there someone in the body that doesn't seem quite themselves or appears to be having a difficult time in some way? We've all experienced struggle. Reach out. It's really not important why you haven't seen that person or family. *It is* important to reach out.

The true meaning of the image that God the Father paints is to remind us, we are a family of believers who share our thanksgivings and burdens. We come together in our ups and downs. We've been through much together as a family. When we are aware of someone's pain or their rejoicing we strive to reach out. Whether that person is sitting next to you or not, reach out.

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This past Monday evening we were **blessed** to have the Faulkner University Choir perform here at our church. Their concert encompassed an interesting variety of classical and contemporary sacred vocal music. We sat and listened for over an hour and I left feeling I wanted to hear much more.

By this I am reminded how awesome young people can be. Each one has a great talent, but when brought together singing in both unison and harmony, results in unity. By spending this valuable preparation time together, each one learns and grows in their ability. They become familiar with their unique part and how to blend with those around them. Some take the lead and some the supporting parts and neither has quite as much meaning without the other. In following their director and sharing every note from **the heart**, they create music that is both pleasing and inspiring.

Sally and I had a couple of favorites from the performance. *And Can It Be That I Should Gain* is a familiar and traditional hymn, but the young people from Faulkner sang it in a unique and fresh style. We also liked the *Indodana*, an African song using phrases from their language to express grief that Jesus who lived among us was taken and crucified. The overlapping parts sung with emotion conveyed the loss of the Savior on the cross.

The music and this wonderful group of young people reminds us of the power of Jesus the **Son** to bring us together, and to remember how much we **love one another**.

A bonus to the extraordinary performance was the added fellowship that came from housing the singers. There was some fun things that went along with our time together. I had to laugh a bit to discover that Pat and Marion Lake (twins), housed Asheton and Rebecca who are... twins.

We enjoyed very much the three young men who stayed at our home, one of which was Gabe. He is sixteen years old and taking college classes, singing in the college chorus and he is autistic. In addition to having a really great singing voice he is also a very talented multi-instrumentalist. He played for us the accordion, which he had never played before Monday evening. Additionally he shared on the piano his rendition of the *Theme from Pirates of the Caribbean*

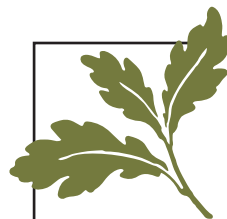
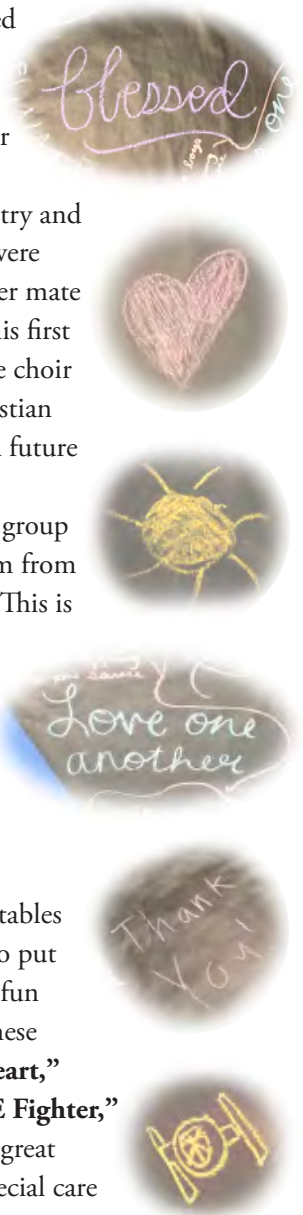
among others. He also sang and played some songs on the guitar.

The other two young men, Peyton and Scott shared many of their interests, goals and experiences with us and were not shy to reach out and try and make connection with us also. They were very sweet and helpful to their younger mate Gabe, patiently guiding him during his first real time away from family. The entire choir seem as solid examples of young Christian men and women who are current and future leaders in the church.

Brian shared that someone in his group at the meal Monday evening said, "I'm from New Orleans and I know good food. This is good food!" One of the girls said that singing for our church family was much different than the other congregations they had visited. We were so "warm and engaging," which speaks to how we included them into our church family.

Sally put chalk and paper on the tables in the fellowship room for everyone to put down whatever came to mind. It was fun to document and use here, some of these thoughts. Whether it's "**blessed**," "**heart**," "**Son**," "**Love one another**," or "**TIE Fighter**," I want to "**Thank You!**" Lord for the great time we had together and for your special care of these amazing young people.

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Most everyone has been faced with a sudden change in their familiar daily plan. The “snow day” is one that school children and parents have been faced with since the industrial revolution did away with walking to school uphill both ways in the snow as my parents had to do, bringing about the advent of the school bus. Certainly, this is a change that affects children and parents in a different way.

Waking up to a horizontal snowfall with the weatherman reporting more to come, can be a shock. You have to add up all the logistics quickly. It’s like computer programming, “If this then that.” There are other changes that happen over a longer period of time. Those things that we can see coming, hopefully allowing us to do gradual adjustments in our navigation to stay on track. Both however can result in the same dramatic shift in what we do and how we do it.

A changing of our focus, or a forced turn in the daily routine can bring about positive change to the way we do things. I have found that it’s much easier to wash a meal’s worth of dishes 2-3 times daily than to wash a week’s worth of dishes all at once. This change, however long it lasts, is an opportunity to share every meal of the day with my wife, Sally. What could be better for me than that?

Change however, can often bring about a certain fear of the unknown. Again referring back to the “If this then that” idea. How am I going to adjust? *Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.** “We could make a great camp song from this verse.” Nevertheless, when change comes, we can be comforted knowing that God is with us.

Tim made reference in his last Sunday online address to the origin of all scripture which for me is an absolute, a way of using God’s words as power to ride out any eventuality. *2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out*

by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. I sometimes think of these verses as analogous to a toolbox. The bible is my impact driver. The lithium-ion battery (what is that?), always holds a charge and I can build anything with it. Somehow it diminishes the stress of constructing things with just a

hammer and nails. That hammer and nails is me alone. I can achieve a finished product, but there are things I cannot create with quite as much certainty and structural integrity without the impact tool.

This is the God breathed scriptures, the tool we need to assure us during times of great change. Remember *Jeremiah 29:11* where it says *For I know the plans I have for you,* declares the LORD, *plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* We may not know exactly what is to come for us, or how things will “shake out” in the world, but if it is God’s plan for us, take comfort.

Don’t sweat the change. Find out what can be learned or gained during this temporary inconvenience. Is it about finding a more efficient way to keep your dishes washed? Is it to gain in closeness from the added email and text correspondence we are receiving from our church family during this extended separation from the body? Is it families blessed with time together, time that, in this crazy world of busy activity, they may never have gotten otherwise. Savor this opportunity!

*Ecclesiastes 3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*** “Again, a great verse to use for a song.” Anyway, whatever earthy challenge we face, the Father never changes. He’s not going anywhere, and if we remember and seek him out, he will in fact, be with us all the way.

I miss our assembly. I hope everyone is staying healthy and that we can be back together soon! :))

Elder Jay

* RCC 2019 Songbook - #70 Be Strong and Courageous

** Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There is a Season) The Byrds ca.1965



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Like so many others, I've had the benefit of time in the mornings these recent weeks and so have taken to watching the **Today** show. I've enjoyed the uplifting manner of the broadcast journalists on the show. Al, Savannah, Craig and Hoda seem to have a really comfortable rapport with each other and with us. Their focus seems to be on the positive and not so much the sensational which is more comfortable and beneficial viewing. This week on the show, they have been including a segment entitled, *Finding Faith*.

In the feature, they have been speaking with prominent clergy from different faith groups to get their thoughts and advice on how faith can play a role in the current pandemic situation. A particular theme from two different faith leaders comes from Psalm 22. This group of verses parallels the feelings that many people are having at this difficult time. God seems hidden from our view. This is the emotion David expresses in the first two verses of *Psalm 22:1-2 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.* There are people who have been infected with the virus or experienced the death of a friend or loved one. Many are emotionally moved with empathy for those who are suffering or putting themselves in a position of danger to help out. Unfortunately, because of all this, there are some who may be questioning their faith.

Relating to that thought, I was very interested in the discussion between Savannah Guthrie and Cardinal Timothy Dolan from New York City. This man was very down-to-earth and shared some really enlightening things that I can use to understand or at the least better react emotionally to the situation at hand.

We don't understand firstly, why God had a plan for his Son to die. This virus comes at a time when the world is thinking about the Passover and Easter. We are directed to stay inside as the people of Israel did, but without the detail of putting the blood of a Paschal Lamb on our doorposts. Like Jesus' sacrifice, we can't exactly understand the meaning for our current struggle. The Cardinal Dolan, in his explanation seems to be suggesting that this oddly placed event could be used as an opportunity to rediscover the mystery and message of what Passover and Easter are all about. What we are experiencing as the human race is very real and we need God to do for us what he did for his chosen people bringing them out of the wilderness into the promised land. And, what he did for Jesus by raising him up from death and out of the tomb.

Each of us in whatever way we've been affected can see the resurrection as a symbol that God will bring us out of the darkness like that experienced in the events of the Passover. Reading Psalm 22 David feels forsaken by God. He asks of

Him in several places saying, "*Lord, do not be far from me.*" His faith and perseverance however seem to win out by the end of the chapter. David recognizes God as his strength, the one who delivers him from the sword and from the mouth of the lions.

Psalm 22:23-24 You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

Lord, do not be far from me!

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Motivation is defined as *the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way*. On any given morning there are many who are up before dawn, exercising, preparing for work, preparing for school, preparing lunches or reading the Bible. Everyone has certain behaviors that may require a little push however. We can be driven by responsibility to others whether on the job or at home. This type of force, can be a very powerful motivator. What is it that will actually get me to do the behaviors that most benefit me in mind, body and spirit?

As a student teacher we were taught that there are two different kinds of motivation that might show up in the classroom. There is *extrinsic* motivation which is driven by external rewards. If you do “this” you will get money, fame, praise, a new bicycle or whatever moves you to do something you would not normally do on your own. Unfortunately, we all at times have probably fallen into the trap of wondering, “what might I get out of this?”

The other type of motivation is called *intrinsic* motivation. It refers to behavior that is driven by internal rewards. In other words, the motivation to engage in a behavior arises from within the individual because it is naturally satisfying to them. I had actually learned this concept many years before from my coaches. It was my high school track coach who said that everyone has to have their own idea about what is possible for them personally. That the only one who can achieve this specific focus is **yourself**. I remember hearing this speech as part of a group of eight or ten high school jumpers and pole vaulters, but it feels in hindsight like the words were directed at me personally.

I know these are pretty common concepts, but for us to achieve anything that results as having value to each one individually, the motivation to do it has to come from inside.

In 1 Corinthians 3:8 it says: *He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.*

This past week I was at the church building to do a little work around the yard and was blessed to be joined by my good friend Maxfield and the dynamic and conscientious Lydia Miller. As we were burning some old wood scraps in the fire pit, Lydia using great strength of mind and body continued her project while sharing her philosophy on work and the importance of diligence and motivation from

within. Because of her family’s commitment to God, Lydia is a purveyor of God’s love. She has a huge heart! Maxfield captured this pleasant reminder that you can view by following this [LINK](#).

Lydia’s video clip reminds me of one of my favorite verses from Colossians 3:23-24. *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.*

As much as I attempted to differentiate between the intrinsic and the extrinsic by sharing the definitions, the verse from Colossians seems to suggest an intrinsic motivation, resulting in an extrinsic outcome.

We ARE working for an outward goal, but because of faith, the motivation comes from within. Our reward in Heaven is great! Truly, beyond comprehension. But the struggle, though bearable, is difficult. Heed the words of Lydia Miller, inspired by God, “*Once you start the work, don’t do it halfway and quit. You finish it with your HEART... and with your SOUL... and with your MIND!*”

Figure out what’s inside you and go with it. That’s all I have to say about that.

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Since Mother's Day is soon to be here, I thought it might be a great opportunity to share some thoughts on this topic. I know that many will be able to connect to some extent with the comments I'm making. And, from your own experiences, to add so many more.

The memories I have of my youth are filled with images of my parents and our family. Though both were present as far as I can remember, at every event and activity, I want to focus for a few moments on my Mom.

Early recollections involve hearing my Mother's lone voice from the bleachers, at swim meets, football and baseball games, track meets, my college graduation, loudly shouting her support. I know she was with intensity and deliberate intent entering with her heart into whatever the thing was I was doing at the moment. She wanted me to succeed and always expressed to us how proud she was. I'll remember her as a lefty, squeezing her hand into a right-handed mitt so she could play catch with us in our side yard. She was/is what we called, a Tomboy. She threw the ball hard. She was preparing us.

Though I remember so much of my youth being devoted to athletics, my parents wouldn't let us get away without playing music and my Mom drove this effort. She played the clarinet, and wanted my brothers and I to be in the school band. At the holidays my Mom would sit at the piano and play accompaniment while my brothers and I played carols on the Saxophone, Baritone and Trombone. These are some of the earliest memories I have of making real music. I know, if it were appropriate, I would have heard my Mother shouting her support from the audience at my musical concerts as well.

My Mother offers emotional support. She told me at a very young age that I was adopted and that this allowed them to choose me, especially for them. Those are powerful thoughts she expressed and permanently meaningful. She offered kind words and helped smooth rough times and failures. She gave wise guidance, council and comfort when relationships were difficult. As a young adult, there were

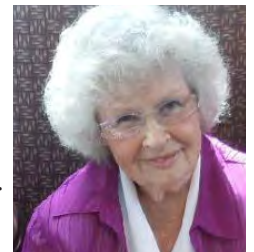
times when I just kind of wanted my Mom. I'll just bet I'm not alone in this. I've always felt a steadfast grace and quiet peace from her. Certainly parents worry for us, but my Mother never seems to wear this on the outside.



My Mother married into the church. Her hope I feel has always been for us, my brothers and I to find joy and trust in God. Certainly her example bears this out.

Proverbs 1:8-9 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction, and don't reject your mother's teaching, for they will be a garland of grace on your head and a gold chain around your neck.

I want to briefly remember Sally's Mother who passed in 2017. Many can identify and empathize. I gained an additional perspective on family, the church, and on hospitality from Freeda Witham. She loved to cook and take care of the family. We like to joke that she always wanted us to use "the new." No half-empty catsup bottle on the table while extended family or visitors were present. She always wanted to share her best when you were at her house. She once made me a special pancake. She wanted it to be as big as the plate. It was perfectly brown and beautiful on the outside. I put my butter and syrup on it, "Yum!" After my first bite, I realized it was all batter inside. Sally told me to give it back but I felt that her intention made it a perfect pancake regardless. I ate every bit.



There is something in the heart of a mother that loves us, that will build us up, that wants us to have only the best. I know the words are part of a greater context but in 1 Corinthians 13:7 the verse reads: *Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.* I have been fortunate and blessed that these have been my experiences. Remember those good things and honor your Mother on this special day.

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ

Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

When most people think of gardening, I'm certain any number of ideas come to mind. For some it's probably the idea of planting and cultivating vegetables and benefiting from the vast bounty that at least in our vision will be the result of this months long effort.

Some may experience gardening as an opportunity to beautify their homeplace, digging in the soil, with the challenge of planting varieties that bloom at different times during the season, and creating a more pleasant, colorful and lively space to live in during the summer months.

Others see it as the drudgery of keeping up with the weeds. Mowing the lawn, picking up sticks. Battling the dandelions and all the other stuff that chokes out the grass. Strangely, I understand that the lawn we work so hard to keep green and beautiful is actually a plant from Europe. No wonder it's so difficult to keep it beautiful here in Illinois.

Growing up I saw my Dad doing all kinds of gardening. He passed this on to me. I get down in the soil, plant, arrange stones, and at the end of a day, feel pretty worn. But, I always feel rewarded. I always get a feeling of satisfaction.

Gardening is not a spectator sport. You have to get hot, sweaty, a little dirty, and most definitely you need to be vigilant. When the rain comes, it waters the plants we are working to nurture.

The parable of the sower from Matthew points out the importance of planting on the good soil. To scatter where the seeds can take hold and not be choked, eaten or wither in the sun. Most everyone has a pretty good idea of the moral and meaning of this familiar story. But, for my purpose, I want

to suggest that making things grow, working on something with true purpose can be difficult.

Last Sunday during our service together online, Bob Jett mentioned that he had recently planted a Victory Garden.

I had heard of this concept and so was intrigued by what Bob was doing in his garden at home. I found by research that during the two world wars, citizens from our country and others planted gardens in support of the war effort by taking some pressure off of commercial farmers tasked with feeding the troops. They supplemented their rations and it acted as a great morale booster. This gave people pride in their accomplishment as well as a feeling of empowerment during those challenging times.

What do we want to grow from our garden? Is it bearing fruit for the Lord, is it service to others, is it just plain discovering what our talent is for the kingdom?

Deuteronomy 11:13-15 *So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the*

Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul — then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

Sometimes we get down when it seems like the garden isn't growing. I see God's promises as a "Victory Garden," supplementing what we have with greater joy, peace, assurance of a place in heaven. Obey the commands God gives us, love the Lord and serve him with all your heart and soul. He will take care of us!

Elder Jay



West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

What do you think of when you hear the term “perfection?” If you’ve got a very discerning eye, the term perfect may have an entirely different meaning and visual representation. When asked, “what is the perfect date,” beauty pageant contestant Miss Rhode Island replied, “April 25th — because it’s not too hot, not too cold. All you need is a light jacket!” Certainly, this is a quote from the movie *Miss Congeniality*. The character in this part (she was the baton twirler) had a mindset that was coming from a much more wholesome place, and this influenced her answer and perspective.

After I finish “any” project Sally always says, “That’s great, it looks really good.” I however have a bad habit of replying, “Yes...but it’s not perfect.” There is always something with everything we do that, if we look really close, prompts us to say, “yes...but it’s not perfect.”

We base our concept of perfection on many things. Our previous experiences, our tolerance, our patience, even our own abilities.

When I purchase something from the store, not only do I expect the product to be perfect, I pull the one off the shelf that has a perfect (looking) package. Obsessive right?! For me this preoccupation originated with a desire to choose and give the perfect gift, and the visual for me is a huge part of this. Of course, I can never match our Heavenly Father in this respect. In James 1:17 it says: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

We have enjoyed watching Haddie Miller change and grow so quickly in her short lifetime. She seems pretty much perfect as we see her over the computer screen in

Zoom. Being a dad, I certainly understand Jon and Jamie’s perspective. I’m sure they recognize, as I know they do with Esther, Josh, and Liza, her perfection also. She is a gift from God, delivered in a perfect package.

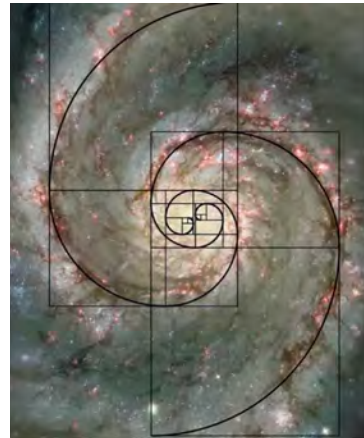
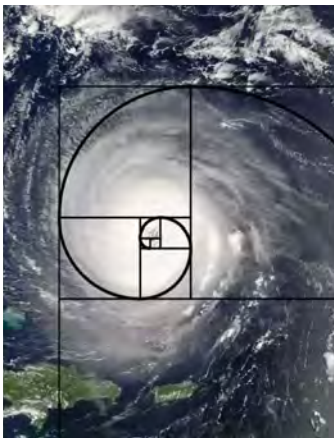
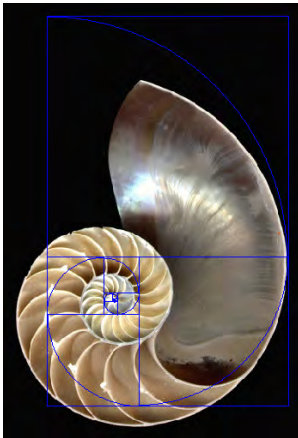
I’ve been doing a landscape project that requires pond stone. Due to a shortage at the store, only the bags of rock that have damaged packaging were left. I had to cringe... this goes against my grain. It never hurts to ask however, so I was able to get a 20% discount on eleven bags of landscape gravel. I saved ten dollars! The store associate even swept up

the spillage and funneled it into one of the bags for me. As it turns out, the stone from the damaged bags worked just as well as the stone from the “perfect” bags. Who could know?

Within the context of a point about endurance, Hebrews 12 says we should *look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith*. It’s kind of nice to know that God has established a pattern for us. Something that is the same with every season.

In my art classes I like to use the example of pattern in nature using the Fibonacci Spiral. This is a geometric pattern which includes a spiral made by linking the corners of neighboring squares such that the latest length of the geometric square is the sum of the previous two. What does this mean?! God has established something perfect and unchanging, not random chance, and it can be found in natural objects, in our weather, and in the galaxies. God’s perfect creation, I think. And so is God’s creation of us.

It doesn’t matter that I may “appear” to be a damaged bag of stone. God sees us as perfect. He gave us the gift of His Son, and threw in the assurance of a heavenly home. These are His perfect gifts to us. He’s our Father after all.



West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

I had the rare opportunity to spend a few days with my parents in Ottawa while I was doing some work in the area. While visiting, my Mom pulled out a stash of photographs I had never seen before. It was a mix of old black and white photos of my parents when they were first married on June 26, 1955. There were snap shots of aunts, uncles and cousins, my two brothers also. Photos of our family in front of the fireplace and some of my brothers and I together wearing clothes we wouldn't get caught dead in today.

Having seen the photos of myself and others prompts me to think about what type of person I was way back then and how it may contrast with me today. What has happened to me between the time I was 15 years old and age 55?

To answer this question I would like to share a few stories that are satisfying to recall, but at the time might have been slightly harrowing. When I was young, our family did lots of camping. My brothers and I had gone with our Dad to have some repairs done to our trailer. While we were waiting at the "camper place" my brothers and I did some exploring amongst the many campers on the display lot. As is normal, my younger brother Doug ran off to hide from us. Time passed and repairs were done and it was time to go home and we couldn't find Doug. It could have been 30 or 40 minutes before we found him in one of the campers, locked in a storage cabinet screaming at the top of his lungs.

Whenever we went someplace new, he was the one who always seemed to get separated and had to be found. Other examples of this are, Doug separated and wandering about at a campground in the Grand Teton Mountains of Wyoming. Also, Doug separated and wandering alone at an Outdoors Show at the Chicago International Amphitheatre. I wanted to share these few examples for those who know Doug in hope you might get a little bit of a laugh. At that time (late 1960's and early 1970's) it didn't seem quite so detrimental to let your three sons roam a little bit "together." Our Dad always gave us directions, a time and place to meet back together. It may have been that Doug trusted Jeff and I to keep a

close eye on him so that in his 6 year old mind, he could roam unincumbered without getting separated. Our Dad surely trusting us with an opportunity to be independent for a set amount of time, confident that we would experience a little freedom and then to be responsible to return at the agreed upon time and place.

Like the example above, our Dad gave us freedom, with a purpose. At our house growing up, we had four lawn mowers. (What? We only had one lawn.) Some were nicer than others, but they all ran. My brothers and I all had lawn mowing jobs and our Dad kept the mowers running so we could follow through on our work responsibilities without

the cost and hassle of fixing a lawn mower. I seem to remember he supplied the gas also. Certainly there were other lessons about money and budgeting the earnings, but the mowers were there to learn the value of working. There was no excuse if a new opportunity came along.

That thought, how do I differ from the person I was at 15 years comes back to mind. Certainly, I learned from my own mistakes, and those made

by my brothers. More importantly was to see how my Dad reacted to some of those experiences and how he dealt with us. Just this week when we were together my Dad recalled a story...you guessed it, about Doug. Doug being 15, he was the only student in his auto shop class at school without his own car to work on. So, he bought an old Plymouth Satellite from an elderly man in the neighborhood. Can you imagine that? I'm sure that initially there was a little bit of shared trauma to the situation at home, but in reiterating this story my Dad said, "sometimes you have to choose your battles. Be restrained enough to figure out if there is the possibility of a useful outcome." After locking the car up for several months, my Dad finally allowed him to transfer his car to school and use it in class.

At 15, I looked at things through inexperience. At 55, 45, even 35 I can react with wisdom and love, and not solely out of anger. I benefit from experience and example. I doubt

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if my Dad had this verse in mind during the “car” episode, but he certainly was in possession of this godly advice. Proverbs 19:1 says *“Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.”* For a short time that option may have been on the table.

On a more serious note, I want to pass on a few thoughts, also from Proverbs in chapter 4 — *Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching. Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.*

I want to acknowledge all the fathers who accept a colossal mission. Who show patience and restraint, love, understanding and peace. Who have over time, brushed away the folly of youth and seek to raise up a Christian family. Please accept our love and appreciation.

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

The “coronavirus.” How many times have we used this word in a sentence over the past five or so months? It controls so much of what we do right now. And, it can feel like we will never get things back to normal or, the new normal, whatever that will be. With as much as people are being affected, it is difficult to know how to help. Sometimes our opportunities come at a moments notice. Tim not too long ago used the word “mindful” in his message on a Sunday morning, and the sentiment (it can apply in so many ways) has kind of stuck with me. Mindful of those suffering without jobs, housing, health. Mindful of those who have lost loved ones to the virus or are physically fighting against it themselves. Mindful of those, who are most affected by the social unrest in our world. We’re being hit by a ton of stuff to be mindful of right now. How do we deal with it all?

Keep your radar tuned in.

I was surprised at work this week to get a call from my son Charlie. He sounded oddly taken aback but strangely satisfied as he conveyed the following story. While at his local Target store, he was in line behind a woman who was on the phone with her husband attempting to convey her debit card number to cover the cost of her items.

Charlie began making a mental judgment. The cashier was not allowed to enter the card number without the physical card present. Charlie shared that it’s not practical or smart to do this in every instance, but this just seemed right to do. He thought to himself, “I’m feeling pretty comfortable right now. If I paid her bill, I feel ok ‘not’ expecting pay-back.” He whipped out his card and in five seconds took care of bill. Making a long story short, she requested his phone number, contacted him within hours, and paid him back, even expressing her thanks in a sweet greeting card. Deuteronomy 15:10 says, *Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.*



In being a blessing to others, we sometimes forget how God can and will build us up in return. Giving to others without special motive, God says he will bless everything we put our hand to. That alone is a huge blessing from Him.

In our current world however, our comfort zone seems to be shrinking ever smaller. What to be mindful of and how to help. On Netflix there is a newer movie called *Wish Man*. It’s actually about the man, a highway motorcycle cop from Arizona, who originated the idea for the *Make a Wish Foundation*. The events of the movie and his experience spending the last days with a terminally ill little boy, took him out of his comfort zone and changed his life. His mantra, and a main point in the movie is “If someone needs help, give it to them.” He in turn inspired others to take up this cause worldwide.

The verse in Hebrews 13:2 says, *Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*

Every year in March, my cousin would have a showing of many of his sculptural pieces at a place in Chicago called The Vale Gallery. Sally and I would always go, and because it was my birthday, my cousin’s mom sent this huge sheet cake that doubled as a birthday cake and also refreshment for the patrons that came to see the artwork. Since it was my birthday, it fell on me to take the leftover home. As I walked alone to the car, I came across a man in a doorway who asked for money. I told him that all I had was a birthday cake, and so offered it to him. He having declined, I walked on. Ten steps later however, he yelled to me that he would take the cake. I don’t know if this man was an angel in disguise but why take a chance. Maybe God gave me the cake specifically for him.

I see mindfulness and inclusion of strangers as a form of hospitality. God commanded the Hebrews to remember their exile and oppression in Egypt and allow it to motivate

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hospitality to foreigners. *You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.* (Leviticus 19:34)

I believe our church is pretty good at this. Certainly we can always be better, but we don't know when this virus problem will truly subside. People are having difficulty. I think there is an opportunity for all of us. We can raise our radar, step from inside our comfort zone, and being mindful of those God puts in our path, figure out how to help.

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

What's your favorite song? Many who know me might be thinking, "Beatle song, Elvis song, or what?" Over the years I have become attached musically to this thing called "Classic Rock," and though I consider this my music of choice, this is not what I am talking about.

As a child I incorrectly heard the words to the familiar hymn as, "Low in the Gravy Lay, Jesus my Lord". It was reported by a mom at Naperville church where Sally and I attended during our dating years, that she heard her child singing, "He socked me, and bopped me, with his redeeming blood." In a way, those altered lyrics are kind of accurate. We, us all...have a musical tradition that kind of fills us from the inside. Words and notes sung in a four part structure that when we share it with friends and neighbors outside the church family, respond as if we've received a special talent from God. I would say, "we have." In Psalm 104 the Bible says: *"I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live."* I think most of us could say that we find ourselves doing just that.

We can use our hymn-tune familiarity for many different things. Sometimes when I first wake up in the morning, I hear in my head, *"I love you **Lord**, and I lift my **voice**, to **worship you**, oh my **soul rejoice**."* The bolded words are the ones that I stretch out in my thoughts. When I really need to pop out of bed and face some not so ordinary challenge, this kind of thing is inspirational to me, a way of connecting with God first thing, an empowerment to get the day rolling.

The hymns we sing connect us to each other as individuals and as a group. They help us to express things in our worship that we may not always have words for. I appreciate the times when Dewayne points out the value and meaning of the words we sing in our worship. It is important to add understanding to the hymns we offer in our devotional time. There are lines and phrases, (again,

reference all examples above) that stick in our conscious and subconscious, songs we find ourselves humming, or just outright singing as we do seemingly mundane jobs. Hymns sometimes interrupt my lawn mowing task. Strangely when this happens, the work seems to go a bit quicker. This combination of blessings is worship to God.

Singing is powerful and emotional. I can reference my experience at Rockford Camp, sitting in the midst of 60 teenagers under the shelter, or even more dramatic, inside

the mess hall in the dark with the fireplace burning. The notes, the words and the spirit filtering these songs through teenage hearts in the gathering and pouring out rich praise liked honey on a piece of toast (my words). I think, these devotional times may bring the campers closer to God by bringing them closer to each other. Harmony through music is a simple way of encouraging harmony of each soul one with another and sending the praise right back to God.

On the day that we were married Sally and I had our wedding reception at a place called Conner Prairie, an 1836 living history museum and park. The building we had our party in had these tall stairs and atrium style windows. At this point our two families were the only ones left and we were filing

toward the exit. In an attempt to get a few more photos of the wedding party, we milled around for a short time. My older brother Jeff and Sally's oldest sister Susie started singing one of our familiar worship songs. Almost immediately, the two families had gathered together in our shared tradition of singing. Certainly, it took a wedding to get us all there, but this instantaneous gathering with all the parts represented, confirmed that we were one family in the spirit.

We, us, our church family are one family in the spirit. The words filter through our hearts, bringing us closer to each other in turn, bringing us closer to God.

What's your favorite song?



Singing Hymns by HAROLD ANDERSON (American, 1894-1973)

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

I once knew a lady named Mrs. Pray. When I met her, she was already an elderly woman who lived in a little white house just across the road from the Fox River in Ottawa, Illinois. As an up-and-coming handyman in the early 1980s, I came to know her through her daughter who worked with my Dad at the high school I attended there. I did many tasks for Mrs. Pray. I painted and did yard work, trimmed and cleaned. I remember at one time kneeling at the edge of her roof coating the inside of her gutters with silver paint. Once, after wiping down the walls and ceiling in her (if I remember correctly) yellow kitchen, she said to me, "It looks much cleaner, but more importantly, it feels cleaner. She had a way of letting me know that the work was good.

I remember one spring, maybe it was after my first year of college, one of her daughters was encouraging her to have her grandsons take out the storm windows and install the screens before the weather got too hot. Mrs. Pray said she was waiting for Jay to get home so he could do it. Certainly, if she was willing to wait for me, there had to be some level of inconvenience. In hindsight, I feel that she was helping me learn to be trustworthy by putting her trust in me.

Mrs. Pray told stories. She talked with pride about her family. I wish that I could recall some of the remembrances she shared about her early life. As an adult, those details seem somehow very important. For some reason, going to her house never seemed like a work day. I feel that she is someone that God put in my path for a short few years to help send me on in the right direction. She was a short, thin lady with a great big smile. Mrs. Pray told me on several occasions that she always included me in her prayers. What better encouragement. In James 3:17 it says: But the wisdom

from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. This is my Mrs. Pray verse.

I look forward and contemplate. How do I share the lessons learned from being around Mrs. Pray? Certainly she had a strong faith component. Something we all need to lean on. I know I wasn't her entire caseload. I think she was a guiding light to many just by being herself.

Mrs. Pray gave me value. Why would she wait for some college kid to come and switch out her windows? I wondered, why would she want to make me a sandwich, sit

at the table and talk with me while I ate? I think she was looking for our commonality. A way to make me feel I was important to her in a subtle way. This is just one thing that made "her" valuable. God's instrument.

There are many we know and have known who I think, mirror in their own way Mrs. Pray's great example. People who build us up, have stories that give us perspective, give us their time and

trust, or unbeknownst to us, keep us in their prayers. The list below are many from our church family I can remember who have over the years, shared something special with me.

Elizabeth Griffin, Kay Schrader, Wendell and Margaret Mott, Al Dorsey, Chester and Phyllis Sitler, Josephine Haggerton, Don and Pat Brewster, Marie Hayes, Thelma Griffin, Bobbie Whitman, Joan Lockett, Nadine McCormick, Tom and Nancy Doggett, Tom and Shirley Rucker, Bonnie Bingham, Cindy Drumheller, Chuck and Bobbye Miller, Bob and Betsy Jett, and Mary Downs. Certainly this list is nowhere near complete. Everyone could add those who have been and are special to you...
Your Mrs. Pray.



Mae Pray Mansion

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

My son Charlie recently called me to ask about my technique for changing guitar strings. It seems like it would be a simple process for those who play the instrument, but there are multiple ways you can do this. You can wrap the string end around the pegs on top of the guitar, bend it under somehow and pull it tight to crimp it in place, then turn the tuner knobs until it's at the right pitch. If you get too much string, you have to nip a little off and start the wrapping process all over again. (He had forgotten because he hadn't done it in 6 years.) He called me back a day later and said that since changing the strings, he can't stop playing his guitar. There is something about swapping out the old for the new that changes our outlook.

*Psalm 51:10 –
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

This renewal might prompt a more active spirit, a great change in our spiritual outlook.

Before Paul became the writer of much of the New Testament, he was Saul of Tarsus. He was pretty rough on the early church.

Saul made it his business to destroy the church, going door to door in Jerusalem looking for people who followed Jesus so that he could throw them in prison. I'm guessing that Paul had regret for his behavior before meeting Jesus? In his letter to Timothy he said, *The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:15–16)*

Jesus knows that we're human. That we are going to trip and fall everyday. That we need to be reminded of his grace is just part of that human-ness. We forget. Each day we have to start over. We need to be renewed.

Years ago I learned this song from my cousin. It's kind of

folky and kind of "gospely." I think he told me he thought it might have been used in an insurance advertisement back in 1970s. The imagery creates an interesting parallel that I can apply directly when I'm feeling less than my best.

*There was an old gray Dodge, setting out beside our land -
It was rusty and it sounded like an old tomato can -
But with polish and repair, and some shampoo on the seats -
People smiled and waved their hands at me,
as I rolled down the street.*

(The chorus is the really important part)



*Oh Restoration, Jubilation, shout it all across the nation,
like a lighthouse on the shore, I've been restored.*

*Oh Hallelujah, Jubilation, shout it all across the mountains,
I'm no longer like before, I've been restored.*

Paul felt himself, that among sinners, he was the worst. Still, God elevated him and gave him a huge ministry. He made a pretty big turnaround. So can I!

I really like in Romans 5 where it says: *So now, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith in his promises, we can have real peace with him because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. For because of our faith, he has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to actually becoming all that God has had in mind for us to be.*

He's given me the technique for changing my strings. My spirit feels brighter, vibrant, more melodic. And I can't stop playing, *Hallelujah, jubilation, I've been restored!*

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ

Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

When you enter your home, what do you do with your car keys? Most of my adult life, I've thrown them on a chair, couch, kitchen counter, carried them to the basement and thrown them on a chair, couch, work bench, or if my hands are full when I arrive home, may actually leave them in the door lock.

This causes problems! Firstly, we may not realize our keys are hiding until we need to go somewhere. Hours may have passed making it all the more difficult to remember. Secondly, the keys are important for **access, transport, for security**. Without them, all our scenarios change instantly. "I'm going to be late for work if I don't find them in the next 5 minutes." We walk around the house from room to room, trying to recount our steps.



I have literally asked myself, where did I "throw" those keys.

I like the parable in Luke about the woman who lost one of her ten silver coins. The coin, to her held great value and importance, so she turned on all the lights, got out her broom and swept the entire house until she found what was lost.

Many people, most I hope, have a set place for the keys. A location they can count on finding them every time they need to go out. This doesn't happen by random chance however. There is a conscious effort to keep track of those things that are important.

Of course we know the story of the "lost son". This son in his endeavor to break free, requests his inheritance in advance of his father's death. The father agrees to divide his property between his sons and not long after, the younger son gathers all his belongings and moves to a far away country where he squanders away all his wealth under a wild lifestyle. Penniless he takes a job feeding pigs. Longing for

the scraps he had been hired to feed them, he came to his senses. Admitting his sin against Heaven and his father, he suggested he was not worthy to be his son. His request to his father was to be put in the role of a servant. I am most moved by the father's response to his son's return. *So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

This story is from Luke 15:11-32.

Sometimes when we have sinned, we believe that we are no longer worthy to be his child. This is wrong!

Like the father whose son was lost, the woman who found the missing coin also called together her friends and neighbors to

rejoice with her. Continuing in verse 10 of Luke 8 of this story it says, *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

We're the keys! Under our own power, we may be lost under a couch cushion, in a coat pocket, or left hanging in the front door overnight. When we were baptized in Jesus' blood, God consciously found a place for us. Somewhere he could always find us and to call us back.

Similarly, God gives us keys for **access, transport, and security**. **Access** to the kingdom, a mansion set aside for us. **Transport** to the heavenly realms. I love the imagery in 1 Thessalonians 4 talking about the dead in Christ who will rise. It continues: *17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.* And finally, **security** in his promise for salvation and a home with him.

God will always be our father, and we will always be his child.

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

No person likes a test. They can create anxiety, frustration, and even panic in some cases. Sally's brother Greg had a classmate in college who got up from his desk at the beginning of a test and uttered the words, "too hard" before putting down his pencil and walking out of the classroom.

That's not the only kind of test we face. Who can identify with the struggle to pretend the ice cream in the freezer isn't really there? As you walk through the kitchen in the late evening remember, God is faithful and will provide a way out.

Sometimes we are being tested and we don't even know it. Recently while driving together, Rachel and I were talking about relationships. About the difficulty to find the right person. I reminisced how when we were dating, Sally who at the time, didn't even own a pair of bluejeans, had never been, but agreed to go camping with my family. She experienced all kinds of humorous and though she never complained... possibly, challenging "firsts" that weekend. Sally did many unexpected things during our three years of dating. She even got under my car while I was doing repairs. She went places and did things with open minded objectivity. She never scoffed at anything or said "eew, that's gross". She was fully accepting of my musical tastes', even Neil Young. In actuality, this time was a big test for both of us.

When Moses sent from the Israelites, twelve spies to check out the land that God had promised them in Canaan, he was doing a test of sorts. Instead of walking in and taking the land God had set out for them, Moses seemed to want to make sure it was safe, second guessing God and actually bringing a new test upon the Israelites. Even against the recommendation of Joshua and Caleb. Regardless of the Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites who inhabited the land, these two leaned on their faith and trusted that

God would allow them to conquer the land. This failed test of their faith, their apprehension, had God send the children of Israel into the wilderness for 40 years as punishment.

Maybe in talking about the "tests we face", I'm actually getting around to discussing the "tests of our faith".

Sometimes God just wants us to sit quietly and listen. Surely this was difficult for the ten fearful spies after seeing all the giants running around the land of Canaan.

Every dad can identify with an instinct to want to fix



all the difficulties that happen with their children. We want to make everything right. We don't always know how to utter the comforting words perfectly, but when action is needed, we're ready to go. Rachel recently misplaced a special ring we gave her when she graduated

from college. She had looked everywhere and held back emotion in hope of finding it. I think she was holding out, trying to show a little faith. Of course, that's all it took for me to start pulling out all the furniture and scouring every surface in her apartment. I even looked behind the stove in the kitchen. No success. In the days following I told God I had no clue where the ring could be, but I was sure he did. I prayed it was close and that she would find it. Well, two days later she found the ring at the bottom of her backpack. It was with her all the time.

Faith is huge! We can throw troubles on God and let them go. (I don't have a solution, but I know you do.) Then sit and listen quietly. 1 Thessalonians 2:4 states, *But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.* God may be testing us without our awareness. Be secure that he will help us conquer giants.

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

How would you define the word **contented**? The word itself seems to have a positive ring to it. That's good. However, the word may have a variable meaning to each individual depending on who you are, your life experiences, even your expectations. For this reason I believe contented has as much to do with what we decide to feel as anything else. How does each individual deal with those good and bad things that come their way?

The kittie photo is "Scout." Her namesake is the little girl from the famous Harper Lee novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird." She appears in the picture to be contented. She has toys, a nice space to play in, a place to climb, sleep and scratch. She gets "Fancy Feast" on a regular basis and plenty of attention and affection from her person, "Rachel." But, when Rachel goes to work all day, how does Scout deal with this trauma. Well, she plays with her toys, runs around the apartment, climbs and scratches on her carpeted perch, sleeps and eats her Fancy Feast. And, when Rachel comes home, she cuddles. I would contend that Scout may be finding her joy in the things that she has, learning that certain inconveniences are only temporary. Certainly, she couldn't possibly play fetch and cuddle with Rachel all day long. I know, she's just a cat, but she's not letting the one thing, maybe the main thing, get her down.

My father-in-law, Arthur Rex Witham, may be the most contented person I know. When Sally speaks with him on the phone, he is very matter-fact about what he's doing, what's new, plans for the days ahead. He can be heard whistling and humming on the other end of the line after they have said goodbye. Sally always hesitates hanging up because she likes hearing him whistle as he walks away from the phone to do "whatever." He never seems to put too much, or too little importance on any one thing.

He rolls with the punches, ducking and side stepping the rough or unpleasant things that might come his way. Having experienced the loss of his wife and son in recent years, I think his faith tells him, this as an inconvenience rather than a trauma. Certainly, this is simply my observation, but it is a valuable example to me personally.

Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

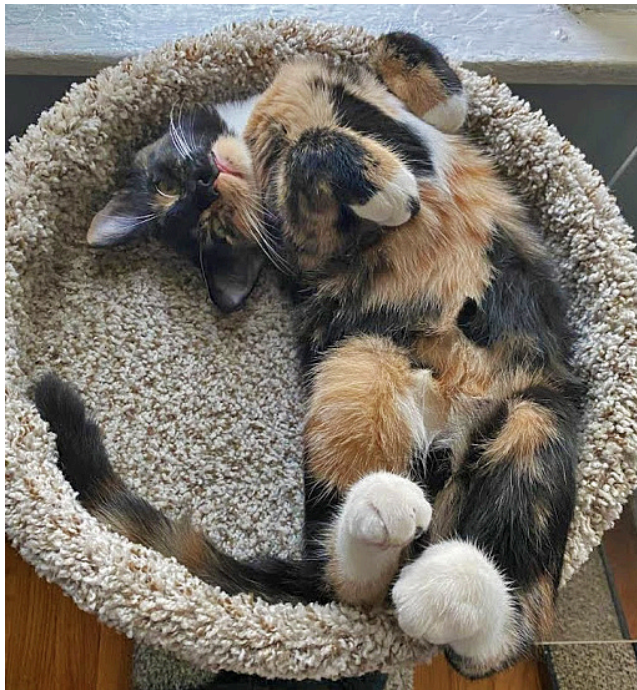


Photo by R. Hearn

I like that the verse puts great importance on experience. That contentedness doesn't come from having all that we want, but in knowing how to sustain in both difficulty and ease. My belief is that there is great power in being able to share with others true empathy and not just to express to them our sympathy.

I see that God gives us a way to run and jump and scratch, even when times are difficult. He provides our Fancy Feast, and if we are fortunate, an immediate family and/or a church community to provide our affection. Maybe even a few words of encouragement and a reminder that what we

experience in the world is temporary. That we can only make the best of our time here. And that at the end of the day, we can be in the arms of Jesus.

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Love + God = Contentedness)

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ



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I really like that DeWayne uses the words from the songs in our hymnal as examples for our faith. He shares with us the imagery he sees in the lyrics and illustrates his points with these beautiful songs. By this we are drawn to reflect, most often on the sacrifice we remember at the Lord's Table.

My aunt was very fond of the Hymn, "In the Garden". The words of course are very rich with this imagery. Some of the lyrics read:

*I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear
Falling on my ear
The song of God discloses
And He walks with me
And He talks with me
And He tells me I am his own
And the joy we share
As we tarry there
None other has ever known*

I see this hymn as a glimpse of what heaven will be. I've included photos from my yard, which is decidedly NOT Eden. The Bible doesn't say anything about Adam and Eve having a mailbox.

I spend much time in my garden pulling weeds and moving plants from place to place looking to find better locations for their need of sun or shade. Some plants albeit beautiful, can overtake and choke other plant life and so get pruned back. But every little stone I move, or weed pulled or plant trimmed, adds to a place more pleasant than yesterday. What is funny is that I can be working in a flower bed and actually dig up, inches below the surface, stone that I remember setting years before. I've been at this property for 26 years so it's possible that some details I put in place during past seasons have settled and become more or less, "foundation". There is nothing wrong with this. They are a

pleasant discovery of material I can re-purpose for another creative detail somewhere in the garden. The whole idea of a garden for me is a place that grows and changes, ebbs and flows. Where the colors change and a variety of plants show their beauty at different times as the seasons come and go.

I have *Ivy, Day Lilies, Japanese Iris, Snapdragons* and many other varieties from my Dad's garden. I have plants I've received from other relatives also. I have *Hosta* plants in my garden that came from my friend Chester Sitler. I have *Lily of the Valley* from our sister Emily Gray. I have *Clematis* from Bob & Betsy Jett that yields hundreds of beautiful white blooms. These plants propagate and continue and if we are fortunate, we can remember who we got them from and are uplifted. In a way, a garden is a place of constant blessing. Though the season ends and the color dies off, if they have been pruned and properly cared for, they come back even more vibrant, strong and beautiful in the next season.

God created the first garden, Eden. After Eden, the Bible mentions numerous gardens and their attributes. In the Song of Solomon 6:11 and Luke 13:19, a garden is referred to as a place of shelter and shade, and also as a place of protection. In Amos 9 God speaks of bringing the exiled Israelites back to rebuild their ruined cities and live in them again. They were to plant vineyards and gardens; and eat their crops and drink their wine.

I believe a garden is a good analogy for how we can grow and cultivate our families, our church, our relationships. How if pruned and cared for, they will only grow and increase in beauty, year after year. My "Chester Hostas" are a reminder of this for me. If you've received hostas from me in the past, you have "Chester Hostas" too.

Elder Jay



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Water is good. We use it for everything. All that is alive needs it to stay alive. It will replenish our physical body and wash away the dust and residue of our world. It is so important that, in Genesis 1:2 we learn that it was created on the first day. God created a mechanism for water to fall from the heavens and provide hydration for all living things in his creation.

As essential as water is, it can play tricks on us as well. As a new homeowner, I learned that water can be your worst enemy. Try finding a leak in the roof directly above the point where it drips on your floor. Water generally follows the path of least resistance so, it could seep through your roofing in one place, drip onto an attic beam, flow along a joist yards away and form a water stain on your ceiling in an entirely different location inside your home.

Sally often complains that I only clean out the gutters during a rainy downpour. I contend that you can't always tell if they need cleaned out unless you can see them overflow during a storm. I find that if the rain is coming down hard enough, I can clean the gutters and have them rinsed all at the same time.

Hurricanes, flooding and potential hydrostatic events aside, we need water to live. Without it, there are many places in our world that suffer drought and famine. Livelihoods and even lives are lost for lack of this valuable resource. Again, water gives and sustains life for all things that live.

We generally think of water as it relates to physical things but what is interesting to me are the parallels found in the Bible relating to water.

Naaman commander of the army of the king of Aram had a brief dilemma over which water he was willing to wash in. When told by the prophet Elisha to dip seven times in the Jordan River he was taken slightly aback. Instead of showing faith and obedience, he questioned whether the rivers of Damascus wouldn't be better than any of the waters of Israel for healing? He actually went into a rage. Naaman's brave and wise servants went to him and said, *"My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?"*

How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" Certainly then, Naaman washed in the Jordan and his flesh was restored.

As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."*

"Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

This water doesn't seep through a leak in the roof. It doesn't flood our basement or rise as a storm surge during a tropical hurricane. Don't wait on the rain to fall to clean out your gutters or search for the origin of the water dripping from your ceiling. There is better water to be had.

We know the importance of water for life. How much better is the water for eternal life? Like the woman at the well we only need to ask, and like Naaman, to be healed.



Photo Jack Brauer

© Jack Brauer

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I asked Chuck Miller years ago how he goes about writing his *Preacher's Perspective* bulletin article. His suggestion was that he most often starts with an image, then writes his comments around it. I have never done it this way, but I thought this would be a great opportunity and a new challenge to try and follow Chuck's tried and true process.

The image I chose is of beautiful fall colors, the trees mirrored in a glassy lake. The blue sky appears to go on forever, which I guess, it actually does. I love an image that seems to draw me in. If I was actually in this picture I would throw out a fishing line or skip a rock across the surface of the water. This must be somewhat the attitude of a nature artists attempting to reproduce what they see into a painting. An effort to capture a moment of beauty, to draw the viewer in and



to create a pleasant image that others can experience over and over. As attractive as the image is, the scale of His actual creation far transcends the perception of the artist.

Job 12:7-10 *"But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind."*

When I was younger, a year or two before I met Sally, I often would ride my bicycle through the countryside around Ottawa where I grew up. Farmland actually, not quite as pretty as the image I chose. While riding my bike out away from my town however, I would sometimes experience a sense of euphoria, a feeling that all was right with the world, that I was capable of riding on forever. Even riding my bike

past a field of dried-up corn felt like being in the midst of God's creation.

If I were going to draw some parallels from the picture, I would probably point out a few things. Like perhaps how we have the ability to mirror the beauty of God's love. How the diverse color in God's palette matches the diversity of His family. The blue sky goes on forever as does His love for us. And, I guess if I was actually able to enter into this

picture and cast a fishing line, I would be reminded of how God always provides for his children.

But the leaves die and fall away. They don't retain their color for long. They brown and crumble to dust. The trees are left bare against the coming winter winds. **But the tree, does not die!** In fact, it grows, inches, maybe feet, in the coming year. It gains

a new ring around it's trunk. Some rings more pronounced than others. The tree's rings vary based on the challenges faced by it's habitat. This strength and growth only adds to it's beauty for the year to come.

I guess I also see each one of us in this image. We are strong, we are diverse, we are beautiful, and even though we struggle, and can lose our leaves for a time, we come back taller, straighter, stronger, and these blessings are mirrored to those around us.

Romans 1:20 *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

Praise God, be renewed and ride on forever.

Elder Jay

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“Hey! I think we should go around the table and everyone can say what they are most thankful for.” “Ugh mom! Do we hafta?” Not only was I part of this appropriate yet tedious Thanksgiving tradition growing up, I’m pretty sure we did it a time or two when our kids were still living at home. In fact, Sally just reminded me that one Thanksgiving at her parent’s house, we even drew pictures to dramatize our special thoughts about this most important subject.

Gratitude is a very important thing. I find that, to include a “thank you” for even the smallest kindness received, shows that you are worthy of the gift. That this special consideration wasn’t wasted on you. When someone makes a special effort on your behalf, they show you that you are in their thoughts, that you matter, that you are worth the effort. You are special.

I am reminded of our sister Linda Vantrese, who has an amazing gift for recognizing people on their birthday. It may seem like a small thing to some, but to receive a card on your special day, is an example of what I just mentioned above. Someone is thinking about you. And she is deserving of this gratitude.

When Sally and I were married, I have to admit, I was pretty overwhelmed. Family and friends showering us with cake, cards and gifts. I remember being somewhat uncomfortable with the focused attention. Luckily, these occasions are directed more at the bride than the groom, so there was my consolation. But, because of my love for Sally, I remember feeling grateful for the attention paid to her. How her sisters gathered around with great effort and attention to make the day most special. With this in mind, I took on the job of filling out the thank you cards for all our wedding guests and gifts. Gratitude to be welcomed into

another family and accepted. Gratitude that Sally was willing to marry me. Gratitude that we got through the big day without a hitch. So, from family and friends, to the couple that made our wedding cake, and even our flower girl (Sally’s niece Katie), all were worthy of our heartfelt thanks.

David was a man with a heart after God. He wasn’t perfect. Many times he failed and sinned, but David’s life is characterized by his love for and dependence on God. He was

a man of Godly character and integrity. In **Psalm 30** David wrote a song as a dedication of the temple. He reflects on God’s deliverance personally, and calls the congregation to worship as well. David speaks of the Lord turning his mourning into dancing and of his soul singing praise to God and giving thanks forever.

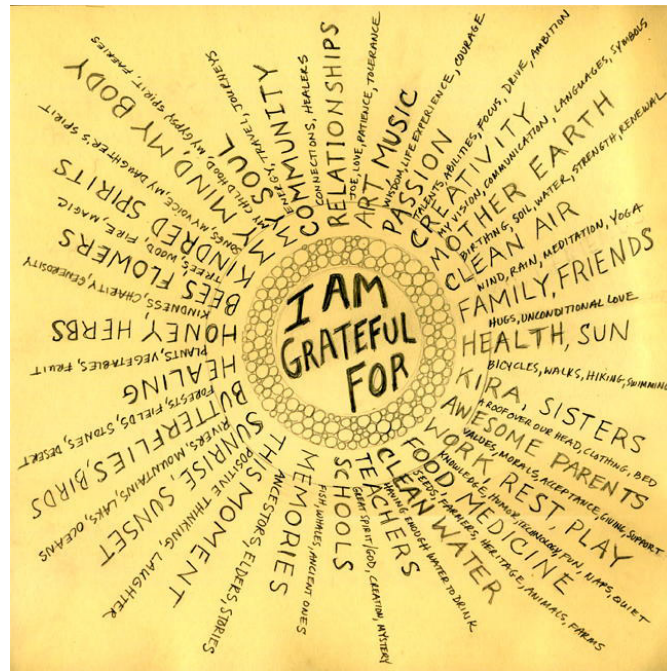
In **Psalm 103:2-5** it says: “*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*”

What will you say this Thanksgiving when you are gathered around the table and someone says, “Let’s all tell what we are most thankful for.”? It’s been a rough year. There has been great suffering in our world and some of it has hit pretty close to home. But God is merciful. We have received great blessings from him.

2 Corinthians 2:14 “*But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.*”

I’m thankful for our church family.

“Ugh mom, do we hafta?”
 “Yes, you hafta.”



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"We cannot cure the world of sorrows, but we can choose to live in joy." – Joseph Campbell

"The soul's joy lies in doing." – Percy Bysshe Shelley

"If you carry joy in your heart, you can heal any moment." – Carlos Santana

"Let your joy be in your journey – not in some distant goal." – Tim Cook

Joy is one of my favorite words. I like the short quotes above for a couple of reasons. Firstly, because they are short. Secondly because I see joy in the quotes taking on different tasks. "Living, doing, healing, journeying."

The dictionary definition of the word "joy" is kind of simplistic however. It's a noun defined as, "a feeling of great pleasure and happiness." But, approach joy from a spiritual direction and it goes deeper.

Joy, in its fuller, spiritual meaning of expressing God's goodness, actually involves more. It is a deep-rooted, inspired

happiness. The Bible says, *"The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving."* Psalm 28:7

I was fortunate this week to have some long overdue time with Minister Tim to pray, talk, share and laugh a little. Our discussion together is always enjoyable and the time seems to fly. As we talked, I expressed that my prayer for my children is for them to find joy. In their work. In their relationships. In their spiritual journey. We concluded that happiness and joy are actually two different things and though happiness is good, joy is a much greater goal. I believe that joy, if attained seems made up of a formula that is a little more permanent than the momentary effect of happiness. Joy is a lasting inward experience. Though I think

that happiness can be sustained for a time, my belief is that if lasting, it's being powered by joy. Does that make sense?

Anyway, in our time together I was inspired to hear Tim "testify" that he found true joy 27 years ago. Certainly if I'm doing the math right, that was when he and Cathy began dating. (Correct me if not). But what makes this sentiment true, and the relationship a strong and mighty tower, is that God is the foundation. He is the one behind it all. Tim and

Cathy are just one great example in our church family that God has provided joy in this way. But, because of its indelible nature, joy is not only present in the good times we receive.

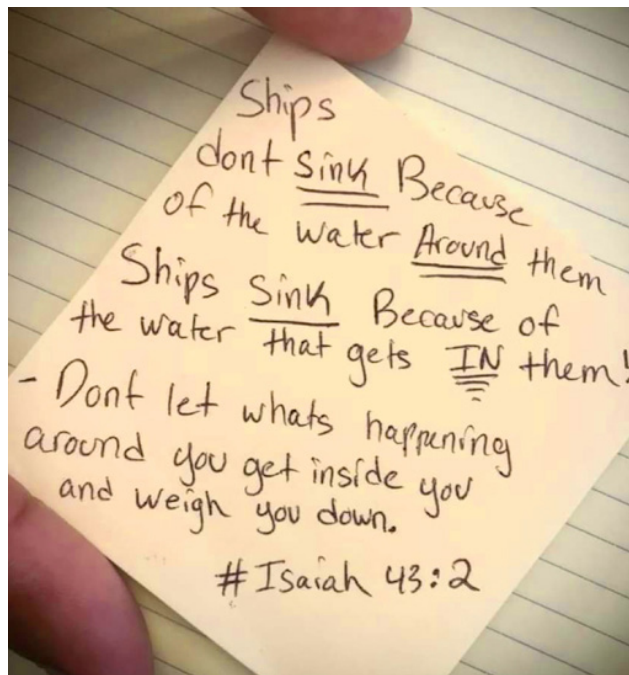
James 1:2-4 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Sally's sister has been in the hospital ICU for about two weeks with COVID like symptoms. Through much of this time she has experienced two steps

forward one step back in her healing process. Oxygen has made it impossible to communicate with her on the phone. Just recently we viewed this Facebook repost from Susie that suggests she has a bigger picture outlook than what can be seen from her hospital bed. It included the image above. Reading *Isaiah 43:2* it says: *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

If I could give added dimension to the Post-it® note in the photograph, I would say that joy is the water-seal that keeps the ship afloat. The joy received from God involves a strong and persistent formula. It binds us together. It is waterproof. It is permanent. My prayer for you is to find this joy!

Elder Jay



West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

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The perfect gift. It means something different to each person. This idea of gift giving and gift receiving changes with age. When we are young, we are often more focused on receiving the perfect gift.

When I was a kid we would mark pages in the Sears and J.C. Penney catalogs. How many remember this particular holiday ritual? My brothers and I could easily submit a Christmas list six feet long.

Very often a list might have contained items that were hugely impractical, dangerous or really expensive. If you were

a little girl you might have asked your mom and dad for a pony. That for most is certainly impractical. This week I watched a Christmas movie where-in a ten year old boy asked his parents for a Lamborghini sports car. That's certainly an expensive gift, and impractical. In a favorite Christmas movie of mine, the main character Ralphie spends the entire film trying to convince his parents to get him an "Official Red Rider carbine action, 200-shot, Range Model air rifle." His all too fervent request receives, from his parents and Santa both, the epic and memorable response, "You'll shoot your eye out kid."

As I get older it is more difficult to come up with a list of things that I might want to receive for Christmas. And, if I do, they are usually more practical in nature, not too expensive, and definitely not dangerous. As an adult and a parent, I find that great joy comes from gift giving. I told Sally just this week, that starting too early with gift shopping makes it more difficult to stop gift shopping. The "Season" can be great for cultivating this attitude in people.

I love to remember a story about Rachel when she was maybe 10 or 11 years old. Her action defied her age

at the time. She wanted to get Charlie a certain Star Wars light saber. I understand that different color sabers are representative of certain characters in the movie. Rachel wanted to get Charlie a blue one. We went to three different Walmart stores before finding the one she wanted. She would not relent from her quest. She wanted to give him the perfect gift.

William Sydney Porter known as the author O. Henry, wrote a beautiful short story entitled **The Gift of the Magi**. If you're familiar, the two main characters are so intent

on giving their loved one the perfect gift, they each sacrificed a prized possession to make this happen. Della sells her hair to buy Jim an expensive watch fob. And Jim sells his prized pocket watch to buy Della a beautiful set of combs. Generosity and selflessness are strong elements in the story. I see however, love emerging as the greatest theme and the reason for this considerable sacrifice.

Because of His great love for us, God offered up his son. A truly great

sacrifice. **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Our faith tells us this is true. And, though we can compare the boundless love we hold for those closest to us as a parallel, God's love for us can be multiplied exponentially. **James 1:17** "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

We don't have to go to the Sears Catalog and mark the pages to receive God's love. This is one gift we know we will receive without question, gift wrapped from the Father above.



Photo: Rachel Hearn 2012