

**Devotions:** 8/3 to 8/8

**Monday:** Endurance

This morning's scripture is James 1:12 – "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

We are to keep our focus on God; and on the crown of life He has promised to those who love Him. There is a sense in which life on this earth is an endurance contest. It can be helpful to view our lives this way, because then we are not shocked or disappointed by the many trials we encounter along the way.

Nonetheless, He does provide splashes of pleasure even in the midst of our hardest times. Among the many blessings He has for us, the Joy of His Presence is always available to us.

The crown of Life is similar to the wreath that was awarded for athletic victory in biblical times. However, those athletes competed to get a perishable crown, a wreath of greenery, and we are receiving a crown that will last forever! Whenever we are feeling battered by life's trials, remember the crown of righteousness that is stored up for each of us. Because it is Christ's righteousness that saves us, this eternal reward is absolutely guaranteed. He has promised to give it to all those who love Him, who long for His return. When Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, comes back for us, we will receive the crown of Glory that will never fade away!

Stay safe, stay healthy, take care and God Bless! Pastor Mary Lou

**Tuesday:** Thankfulness

This morning's scripture is 1 Thessalonians 5:18 – "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Every time we thank God, we acknowledge that Christ is our Lord and Provider. And every time we receive with thanksgiving, we demonstrate our kinship with Him.

Yet even though we are His children, and we know we are supposed to give thanks in all circumstances, sometimes our words ring hollow: We can say them without feeling the least bit thankful. It is especially hard for us to be grateful in the midst of a “bad” day, when everything seems to be going wrong.

He knows what is going on in our hearts far better than we do. He knows when we feel thankful, and when we don't. However, Christ can also see in the depths of our hearts a desire to please Him by offering thanks even when we do not feel like it.

When we struggle to be grateful, stop and remember that He is: the Author of our lives and our faith. We are utterly dependent on Him for everything, including our next breath. Every good gift comes from Him! When we thank Him during a difficult day, we are assuming the proper stance for children of God. If we persevere in this thankfulness, resisting the temptation to grumble, we can find Joy and Peace in the midst of our struggles.

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**Wednesday:** Weakness

This morning's scripture is 2 Corinthians 12:9 – “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.”

Thank God for our weaknesses. Even better, boast gladly about our weaknesses. Boasting can be either good or bad, depending on the object of the boast. People who brag about their wisdom, strength, or riches are offensive to Him. David was on the right track when he wrote about his soul boasting in the Lord. He wants us to express pride in Him, just as a child of a good father likes to brag about his big, strong dad.

People who are well aware of their weaknesses are less tempted to boast about themselves. However, they are more vulnerable to other temptations: indulging in self-pity and complaints. So it is essential for weak ones to take pride in god, rejoicing in who He is.

Children tend to feel good about themselves, when they are bragging about their fathers. Similarly, we can feel glad when we boast about Him: proudly proclaiming His praises! Awareness of our weaknesses has deepened our dependence on God and helped us to know Him more fully. So, we can be joyful about these afflictions that have blessed our relationship with Him. As we rejoice in our weaknesses, we open ourselves to His Power. Let this sacred Power rest upon us, displaying His delight in each one of us.

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**Thursday:** His Love

This morning's scripture is Romans 8:38-39 – “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>[a]</sup> neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,<sup>3</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Nothing can separate us from Christ's Love. When we trust Him as Savior, He unites Himself to us in eternal matrimony. Many things threaten to rip apart this holy bond, principalities and powers, controlling people, dire circumstances, but nothing can succeed, not even death. In fact, dying opens the way to ecstatic enjoyment of Him: exponentially better than our best moment of earth!

Jesus embodies not only perfect Love but all the fullness of the Deity as well. In Him we have everything we could ever need. Feelings of emptiness can serve as signals, reminding us to turn back towards Him. No matter what we are doing, He can be a co-participant with us. As we invite Him into more and more aspects of our lives, we will discover a growing contentment within us. In times of adversity we can lean on Him for support; in joyous times we can celebrate with him. He is as near as a whispered prayer, even nearer. His banner over us is Love. Stay safe, stay healthy, take care and God Bless! Pastor Mary Lou

**Friday:** Abiding in Him

This morning's scripture is psalm 52:8 – “But I am like an olive tree, flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever.”

God delights in our desire to live steadfastly in His Presence, as if we were a tree planted close to Him. However, unlike a tree that cannot move from the place where it is planted, each moment we choose to stay near to Him or not. Though God will never leave us, we can leave Him by forgetting He is with us. When that happens, we start looking for ways to bolster our own resources. We also tend to run away from challenges He puts in our lives.

His Spirit, who lives in us, will not leave us in this compromised condition. He helps us to remember who we are and Whose we are. We belong to God! Returning to Him is not an arduous task. Simply affirm our trust in His unfailing Love. As we thus reconnect with Him, His Love washes over us, cleansing, refreshing, and filling us. No matter how many times we forget Him, His Love for us will never fail. Grow strong in this constant, nourishing Love. Stay safe, stay healthy, take care and God Bless! Pastor Mary Lou

**Saturday:**

His Presence

This morning's scripture is Matthew 23:37 – “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

Jesus is Immanuel, God with you, an ever-present help in trouble. No matter what may happen, He is sufficient to provide whatever we need. Instead of imagining how we might respond to terrible things that could happen, draw our minds back to the present and take refuge in His Presence. He is much like a mother hen, eager to cover us with His protective pinions. As we snuggle under His wings, we will not only find refuge; we will also discover a growing ability to trust Him. It is in closeness to Him we realize how trustworthy Christ is.

Remember that He is both our Rock and our Redeemer. Though He is impregnable in His vast strength, He became a vulnerable Man so He could redeem us from our sins. The more we take refuge in Him, the more aware we become of His overflowing Love. In Him we are utterly safe, for He is our rock of everlasting Love. Stay safe, stay healthy, take care and God Bless! Pastor Mary Lou