

| Date | Bible Reading | Thoughts Prompted by God's Word | Prayer |
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| Devotion Number One for Week of Feb. 11, 2013 | Matthew 23:23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others. | Wow! Jesus does not mince any words. Jesus is not angry with the people for tithing (giving ten percent of their income), but He is angry with the way some people are giving! They are careful to give ten percent of their garden herbs (mint, dill and cumin) but they do not understand the importance of giving themselves to Jesus and His people. They are willing to give of their most valuable herbs (mint and cumin were so valuable, they were actually taxed in those days), but they are not willing to be merciful (kind, forgiving and loving) to others. God does not just want ten percent of their garden seeds; He wants one hundred percent of them. He wants them to understand all of His Word rather than thinking they are doing everything He expects of them by simply giving some of the seeds they have grown. He wants them to live by the Gospel rather than just religiously try to keep the Law. The message for us is clear and unmistakable. Jesus wants us to give ten percent of our valuable earnings, but even more important to Him is that we be loving and compassionate toward others. Jesus would not want us to think we are fully committed to Him and doing all He has asked us to do simply because we give Him one dollar out of every ten dollars we earn. Jesus wants and deserves our whole heart. When Jesus lives in our hearts it will show in all of our actions and attitudes as we love and forgive others and as we joyfully give Him at least ten percent of the one hundred percent He has given us! | Lord, Help me to understand what You want me to do with the many blessings You have given me. Help me to joyfully share them with others. Create in me a heart filled with mercy that is faithful to You! Help me to forgive others the way You have forgiven me. In Your Name I pray. Amen |
| Devotion Number Two for Week of Feb. 11, 2013 | I Corinthians 13:3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. | It is believed the phrase "deliver up my body to be burned" is referring to those early Christians who were martyred—people who were burned to death because they refused to deny their belief in the one true God. It is kind of amazing then that our Lord would tell us that even if we give away everything we have (not just a portion of it, but all of it) and even if we die rather than deny our beliefs, we gain nothing if we do not have love. Perhaps the key to unlocking this puzzling statement is found by reading I John 4:8. "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." Love is certainly the most fitting way to describe God. It was love for us that motivated God to give His Son to save us. Everything that God does for us, He does out of love—even when we do not like His choices, it is done out of love for us. Hebrews 12:6 reminds us that the Lord "disciplines those He loves." The first gift God wants to receive from us is love. The greatest gift we can share with each other as a body of believers is love. A gift is not a true gift unless it is given in love. Once we begin to catch a glimpse of how much God truly loves us, our heart willingly, joyfully and lovingly wants to respond with gifts of love for God's work and God's people. | Lord Jesus, I cannot imagine what it would be like to give away everything I have. I have never really had to suffer because I believe in You. Fill my heart, Lord, with that kind of bold love for You so that I would be ready and willing to do whatever You asked me to do. In Your Name I pray. Amen |
| Devotion Number Three for Week of Feb. 18, 2013 | II Corinthians 9:7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. | We can never pay for our sins. We are not perfect. We cannot become perfect. It is too late. We were born sinful and we will die sinful. We can be perfectly forgiven and we are. Christ came, died and rose to remove every one of our sins. When we sincerely think about that, our heart swells with joy and thanksgiving. Our heart moves our hands and we become willing givers! Someone once said people should give till it hurts. Jesus wants us to give until it feels good. Giving is just one more way God gives us joy! When we give, we, the adopted children of | Lord, I want to be a cheerful giver. I know I can never repay You for all You have done for me, but whatever and however I have the opportunity to give, let me do it joyfully! In Your Name I pray. Amen |

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| | | God, follow the example of our Father who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. God indeed always loves all of us, but the message is clear. God loves a CHEERFUL giver. | |
| Devotion Number Four for Week of Feb. 18, 2013 | Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he, himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." | The weak are those who cannot support themselves because of sickness, age or some type of injury. God wants us to work hard so that we are able to help our weaker brothers and sisters. Paul invites us to remember the words of Christ and do what He has directed us to do. Although these words are not recorded in any of the four Gospels, they are genuinely the words of Christ. They characterize the very nature of Jesus. Jesus lived these words and wants us to do the same. When we care for those who are not able to take care of themselves, we do to others what Christ did for us. We could not take away our sins. He worked hard to do that for us. Now, always with joy, we can do for others what has been done for us! Truly, it is more blessed to give than to receive! We can believe it because Jesus taught it. | Lord Jesus, the world teaches us to get all we can. You teach us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Help us to live what You have taught us. In Your Name we pray. Amen |
| Devotion Number Five for Week of Feb. 25, 2013 | Proverbs 11:24-25 One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched and one who waters will himself be watered. | It makes no sense, but it does make cents! Here God tells us to do something that does not make sense. He tells us to freely give away things and then promises we will get richer. This is one of those many times our God is telling us to trust Him—to take Him at His Word. He also tells us that if we do not give and freely share, we will suffer want. When God tells us things that do not make sense to us, we are wise to follow His words. We will always find them to be true. When we take Him at His Word, follow His lead, He is able to teach us and we are able to discover, learn and live a life that truly matters—a life that makes us a blessing. The reference to water in this passage is written about those desert people who desperately needed water for themselves and their animals. It had to do with their irrigating. To share water with others was to give away the very thing that could make the difference between life and death—for themselves and their crops and animals. Here our Lord again says something that makes no sense, but is TRUE and can be TRUSTED. He says the one who shares his water, will be watered. God wants us not only to share our surplus with others, but also to share those things that are most vital to us. God wants us to recognize Him as our Provider and to trust Him to supply all our needs. When we do that, we are able to share freely. We are able to be a blessing and we can expect to be blessed by our Almighty God. It may not make sense, but it does make cents...the more we give away, the more we will have. | Lord, How can this be? How can we freely give things away and still prosper? Even though we may not understand this, Lord, help us to follow Your Words. When we do Your will, You bless us. Help us to trust Your Word. Help us to trust You to always keep Your Word. In Your Name we pray. Amen |
| Devotion Number Six for Week of Feb. 25, 2013 | Matthew 6:19-21 ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. | Everything on this earth will one day be destroyed. Bright, firm, red apples turn to a smelly pile of mush. Beautiful, expensive, powerful vehicles become a bundle of scrap metal. One out of control flame can suddenly melt a mansion into a pile of ashes. Nothing on this earth lasts forever. God does have a plan for His children so that they will truly live forever. That will happen in heaven where we will encounter the gold streets and the prepared mansions God has promised us. The treasures of heaven will not be earned; they are simply given to us out of love. The treasures of heaven are eternal. The things people treasure on this earth are very temporary. God wants His children to know the difference between the earthly "treasures" and the "treasures of heaven". God does not want us to spend our lives trying to accumulate things that have no real value. Now is the time for us to invest in the heavenly treasures by using our time, our | Lord, help us to treasure You. Help us to trust Your Word. Give us the courage to boldly invest our time, our talent and our earthly treasures in anything and anyone who will tell others about how Your Son has opened the doors of heaven for all who will simply believe in Him. In Your Name we pray. Amen |

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| | | talents and our treasures to share the Good News of Jesus Christ! Without a doubt we are not able to earn heaven or to upgrade our heavenly mansion by the doing of good deeds, but we are able to invest wisely in those things that will make it possible for more people to enjoy those heavenly treasures. | |
| Devotion Number Seven for Week of March 3, 2013 | Luke 12:34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. | Someone once said you could discover much about a person by simply looking at their checkbook register and their credit card statements. Most everyone pays for utilities, house and car payments and of course taxes, but we also make many choices with every dollar that is entrusted to our care. Some people buy lots of books, others value expensive clothing. Some families prefer McDonalds or Taco Bell while others would prefer Lucky's or Uno's. Sometimes we are even unaware of how much we are spending on some of our favorites. Some people enjoy being generous to particular organizations that value what is important to them. Some have a heart for taking care of animals or orphans while others will be passionate about fighting cancer or heart disease or making sure Hospice care is available. The causes or organizations we support are often chosen because they have gained access to our heart by the way they have cared for someone or something we love. The more we think about this, the more we realize Luke 12:34 is true! The way we spend the money God entrusts to us, tells us a lot about where our heart is. Perhaps it is a time for us to take a look at our credit card statements and checkbook ledgers with God's eyes. God wants His children to be warm and well fed and to relax and have fun, but God also wants more than that for His children. God wants His children to have a joy filled heart because they are investing in the things that matter most to Him. So, be brave, take a look and ask yourself, "Where is my heart?" Chances are most of us will have some adjustments to make, but we cannot make those adjustments until we look at our lives through the truthful eyes of Luke 12:34. | Lord, Be with me as I look at my heart—the heart in which You live—the heart that guides so many choices in my life. Send me Your Holy Spirit so that I might have the wisdom, to make Godly choices with my treasures. In Your Name I pray. Amen. |
| Devotion Number Eight for Week of March 10, 2013 | I Timothy 6:17-19 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. | The early Christian churches had quite a few members who were from the upper, wealthier classes. These people were already rich in terms of worldly possessions. Paul is not talking about people who want to become rich. He is also not talking about people who are spiritually rich. He is talking directly to people who have an accumulation of wealth on this earth. Paul instructs them to remain humble rather than using their riches as bragging rights. He also reminds them not to place their hope in the uncertainty of their earthly wealth since that can change suddenly. Instead, Paul invites us to place our hope in God who is the source, the provider of their many possessions. Paul reminds them to use their wealth for a good purpose—to become rich in good works! Whenever God blesses us with riches, He does so for a purpose. He will also provide us with opportunities to use those riches for the good of others so we can discover true treasure. Notice the phrase "take hold" of that which is truly life. For many the "good life", riches and all their privileges always seem to be just beyond their reach. No matter how hard they try, they are not able to quite grasp it. In this passage, our Lord reminds us to realize His treasures have already been promised to us. They have already been handed to us. Now we are to hold fast to them—hang onto them—fight to keep them while we await the treasures of heaven, | Lord, Help me to put my trust in You rather than any riches You may have given me. Help me to use my riches for a good purpose so that I, too, can take hold of the good life You want me to have. In Your Name I pray. Amen |
| Devotion Number | Malachi 3:8-10 Will man rob God? Yet you | Obviously, man could never overpower God and steal from Him the way robberies usually occur. God does make it clear however, that when we do not give Him our | Lord, help me to trust You and take You at Your Word. You |

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| <p>Nine for Week of March 10, 2013</p> | <p>are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.</p> | <p>proper tithes and offerings, we are robbing Him of His portion. No one deserves to be robbed, but God especially should never be robbed. The Lord had commanded His people to give a tenth of their income to the support of the Levites (the priests) as a contribution to the Lord. In other words the gift was to the Lord even though it was being used to support those who were working in the church. What makes this even more interesting is that God told them to do that even though some of the Levite priests were not performing their duties very well. God wants the ministry of the Word to be preserved! God lets them know how serious He is about this by cursing them with a curse. God then says something that He says nowhere else in all of Scripture, "put me to the test". While it is unusual for God to challenge His people in this way, He is totally sincere. So, have you taken the challenge? Have you given your tithes and offerings? If you have, you know God is sincere about opening the windows of heaven and pouring His blessings on you. If you have not taken the challenge, please know God might just be trying to get your attention so that He can pour out His abundant blessings on you.</p> | <p>have kept every promise You have ever given. You promised to send a Savior, and You did that even though the only one who could save us was your Son.</p> |
| <p>Devotion Number Ten for Week of March 17, 2013</p> | <p>II Corinthians 8:1-5 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.</p> | <p>The Macedonians had it right! They had truly discovered the joy of giving and were even begging to give more. What would make people beg to give? They were not giving a mere ten percent. They gave according to what they were able to give and even more than they should have been able to give. One thing is certain. Their needs were met. The God who they worshiped with their offerings would bless them again and again. They had discovered the joy of helping their fellow saints. They understood what it truly meant to be brothers and sisters in Christ. How could they do this? They gave themselves FIRST to God and then to their fellow Christians. They did this during a severe test of affliction. Even when everything was going wrong, they were doing the right thing. Because of that they still had joy—the joy that no man or situation can ever take from them. Likewise, they must have also had that peace that passes understanding. They had a choice. They could have looked at their situation and grumbled and complained. They could have been angry with God because they were facing some tough situations, but they did not. Instead, they faced each day with faith in God, and because of that they had something that some of the richest people on earth do not have—they had abundant JOY. May we learn from them, so that what was said of them might be said of us! God has lots of joy to give to us. All we need to do is trust Him!</p> | <p>Lord, fill me with faith. Fill me with joy! Help me to look for ways to help others no matter what might be going on in my own life.</p> |
| <p>Devotion Number Eleven for Week of March 17</p> | <p>Numbers 18:8-10 and 24 Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, "Behold, I have given you charge of the contributions made to me, all the consecrated things of the people of Israel. I have given them to you as a portion and to your sons as a perpetual due. This shall be yours of</p> | <p>The tabernacle (place of worship) in the Old Testament was a combination of a church, a slaughterhouse and an open air kitchen. Each day the priests sacrificed animals and grain offerings. When people brought their personal offerings of animals and grain and any other items they were giving to God, the priests were in charge of offering up these sacrifices. The priests were not given land on which to grow grain or to feed animals. The priests were to be supported from the offerings the people brought. They were not allowed to eat the burnt offerings—they were strictly for God. The priests were allowed to have a portion of the other offerings. The portions they were allowed to have were very specific. The portions were to provide for their needs, not to make them wealthy. This was how the priests were</p> | <p>Lord, help me to look at my life and find ways to make sacrifices so that I can help to support those whom You have called into the ministry. Help me to do this out of love for You and out of love for them since You have given them to me as Your special servants. Help me to encourage them in their ministry so that,</p> |

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| | <p>the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs and every sin offering of theirs and every guilt offering of theirs, which they render to me shall be most holy to you and to your sons</p> | <p>supported so they could spend their time in the tabernacle doing the Lord's work. Today we no longer bring animal and grain sacrifices to our places of worship. We bring bills and coins instead. In one way at least the sacrifices have the same purpose. The sacrificial gifts are to support those who work in the church so they can be fully devoted to the Lord's work. God's people make personal sacrifices to provide for the needs of the church workers—not to make them rich, but to make certain the church workers and their families have their needs met. This frees them to live a life of service to God and His people.</p> | <p>together, we can do Your work. In Your Name I pray. Amen</p> |
| <p>Devotion Number Twelve for Week of March 24, 2013</p> | <p>Galatians 6:7and 9 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap...And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.</p> | <p>From the very first time we planted a seed as a child, we rapidly discovered that if we planted a bean seed, a bean plant would grown. If we planted grass seed, grass would grow. God wants us to know our actions have consequences. If we sow seeds of obedience, God will bless them. If we ignore God and live a life of disobedience, we will reap the consequences of that life. Sometimes it is easy for us to grow weary of doing good, of making unselfish decisions, of giving rather than taking. The world certainly tells us that we are foolish and unproductive if we don't look out for our own interests first. God tells us to keep on living according to His will, and we can expect good things. God does not want His children to be discouraged. He wants them to trust Him and to follow His Holy Spirit. Our rewards for doing good might not be immediate, but our God makes all things beautiful in His time.</p> | <p>Lord, help me to remember You are the Lord of my life. You are the one who directs my path. Help me to trust You enough to continue doing what You have asked me to do. In Your Name I pray. Amen</p> |
| <p>Devotion Number Thirteen for Week of March 31, 2013</p> | <p>I Timothy 5:17-18 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."</p> | <p>In this passage the word "elder" is referring to those people in the early church who were overseers—those men who were actively leading and directing the church. God's Word tells us these men should receive "double honor." They are to receive respectful honor and they are also to receive an honorarium or compensation for what they do to make it possible for others to hear and learn God's Word. The elders in our church today are the overseers and active leaders in directing our body of believers. The elders in our church do not receive an honorarium or any kind of compensation for the many hours they spend making it possible for us to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. The elders do take on the responsibility of making sure that those who actively preach and teach God's Word are properly compensated. They know God believes His laborers deserve a wage just as the Levite priests did in the Old Testament times. Thanks be to God for the godly men God has chosen to be our leaders at St. Paul Lutheran. Thanks be to God for the many honorable people who make it possible for the Lord's workers to receive their wages. God expects it. We do it. God blesses it.</p> | <p>Lord, help us to treasure and honor the elders you have given us. Help us to work with them to make certain that God's Word is preached in its truth and purity in our church and that those who do the Lord's work would be fairly compensated. In Your Name we pray. Amen</p> |
| <p>Devotion Number Fourteen for Week of March 31, 2013</p> | <p>Matthew 25:35-45 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord,</p> | <p>Remember all the people who claimed to see Elvis long after he had died. There were supposed sightings of him in gas stations, McDonald's restaurants and every other imaginable place. People were always looking for him and when they saw "the king" it brought them joy and peace to know Elvis was "still alive". Jesus is not someone simply called "the king", He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Jesus really is alive! It comforts us, the followers of Jesus to spot Him and to know He is alive and at work. Some people do not know Jesus, The King, all that well. If they were told to go out and look for Him, they would likely head to an empty church somewhere and wait for Him to show up. Jesus is without a doubt found in churches. Since there are Bibles in churches, Jesus can be found there. Actually, Jesus can be found everywhere, since He is Omnipresent which means</p> | <p>Lord, Help me to look for ways to give others the things You would want them to have. Forgive me for those times when I could have helped someone but I did not help them. Help me to see the needs of others as opportunities to serve You. In Your Name I pray. Amen</p> |

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| <p>when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will answer them, "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they will also answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?" Then he will answer them saying, "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."</p> | <p>He is everywhere. No matter where you go, Jesus is there ahead of You, behind You and hopefully in you.</p> <p>This section of Scripture makes it clear though that if you really want to "see" Jesus, you should look in hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, homeless shelters and under bridges and overpasses. Jesus can easily be spotted in the life of anyone who has a need. Jesus becomes "visible" when one of His followers shows His love and does His work. Jesus comes alive in the hearts and minds of His followers in specific actions rather than specific places. We would probably never have figured all that out except that He told us in these passages of His living Word!</p> <p>If you are looking to spot Jesus today, there is no need to head out to the nearest overpass, just look into the eyes of the nearest passerby which might well be someone in your own family. Your son or daughter might need someone to pray with them or play with them. Your mother might be lonely and need a phone call or a hug. Your wife needs someone to notice the trash should be taken out to the road. Your neighbor needs a friendly hello or his driveway shoveled or his hand shook. Look for Jesus everywhere and you will find Him and the joy of living the giving life by being His hands and feet.</p> <p>So, who will you be when Jesus meets you to evaluate your life? Will you be amongst the confused that never saw the opportunities to serve others because you were too busy serving yourself? Will you be among those who spent their lives joyfully giving joy and hope to others by helping to provide for their needs? The good news for all of us is that our lives are not over. No matter what decisions we have made in the past, Jesus has given us a new day with new opportunities to learn from our past, to make changes in our lives and then DO what He has asked us to do. All of us always have something to give and when we give it, we see our King!</p> | |
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February 7, 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When a dying friend has a request, we do our very best to honor that request. We see it as a way to show them love and respect and let them know how very much we love them.

Jesus is not just any dying friend. He is the Friend who died for us. Most dying people do not have a choice. Jesus did. He chose to die for us, for our sins. He has a request. It is the very same request He made of His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. As He spent those final days and hours before His crucifixion, He was very aware of the pain and the hatred He would be facing. When we are facing hard times, we want our friends nearby. Jesus was no exception. It was for this reason He asked His disciples, His closest friends to come with Him to the Garden while He prayed. They went with Him but promptly fell asleep. When Jesus found the disciples asleep, He asked Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour?”

Our dying but also risen Lord and Savior is asking you, His disciple, a similar question, “Could you watch one hour with Me?” During this time of Lent, it is important for us to spend extra time with our Savior so that we can carefully study His Word and come to a greater understanding of what His death and resurrection means for us. How will it change us? How will it change everything?

The enclosed mini Bible lessons are designed to give you two extra opportunities per week to read a portion of God’s Holy Word and to apply it to your life, so that together we might all see how an all giving Christ can teach us to live the giving life—the joy filled life He wants to give us. You can do them whenever you want—by yourself or with your family. They are portable. You can take them to work and read them at a break. You can read them in the morning when you wake up or before you say your bedtime prayers. Think of it as Jesus trying to communicate with you.

So, how will you answer Him when He asks, “Could you watch one hour with Me?”