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DRAW NEAR







Crozet Baptist Church

Advent Devotional 2026

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS

DRAW NEAR









Thursday, December 27, 2024

“I am weak, but he is strong.”

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” Genesis 3:8

In the beginning, God was close to humanity; he was not merely a creator but a nurturer, as he set the first man in the middle of a garden full of abundant food. Later he even created a helper to make man more complete. But after sin entered the world, God became someone to be feared (Genesis 3:8). For the majority of human cultures, the Divine was something remote and terrifying. People were more likely to bribe the gods to look away from their sin rather than to seek after them. Even among the Israelites, all the while God was with them, he was set apart from them and only a handful came into his close presence. Indeed, all too quickly, the Israelites were willing to bow down to an idol which they had created rather than put their trust in a God who was powerful enough to save.

Jesus changed things by coming in weakness—a helpless babe prone to all the ills which befell man after the fall. Even in adulthood during his ministry, Jesus remained fully divine while living fully as a man. Consequently, people could argue with him, dismiss him out of hand, and ultimately put him to death. Jesus drew near to us so we could choose to draw near to him without fear.

Prayer: “O God, who wonderfully created man’s dignity and yet more wonderfully restored it: grant that we may share in the divinity of Him who humbled Himself to share in our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.” — From the Gelasian Sacramentary (Ancient Christian Liturgy).

Adam Defibaugh

Foreword

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” James 4:8

The theme for this year’s Crozet Baptist Church Advent devotional booklet written by the members of the church family for the members of the church family is “Draw Near.” It is the same message that is inscribed on the backpack tags that were distributed to our students during the Blessing of the Backpacks. The phrase is taken from the first part of James 4:8: “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”

This verse is a reminder that God is always there for us, waiting for us to establish a relationship with Him. It is a comforting thought. No matter how daunting the task, how heavy the workload, or how difficult our interactions and relationships with others may be, we are not alone. No matter what twist or turn life might take, God is there. We just need to reach out to Him.

But the verse is more than just a gentle nudge in God’s direction. The second half of the verse reads as follows: “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded.” When we draw near to God, there is work involved. We must examine our lives and be truly repentant for any wrongs we may have done. We must have a heart given totally to God and not torn between God and love of earthly things. It is a process that we must renew each and every day.

The Advent season is a fitting time to contemplate this verse and ponder what it means to “Draw near to God.” Advent is a time of celebration and anticipation. We read scriptures and sing hymns that point to the time when God drew so close to us, the mystery of the Incarnation.

In the following pages, members of the CBC church family have shared their thoughts about what it means to “Draw near to God.” It is our hope that you will find them both a blessing and a guide as you navigate your personal Advent journey.

Wishing you all the best throughout the Christmas season and for the coming year.
Your 2026 CBC Advent Devotional Booklet Team

Sunday, November 29, 2026

Seeking God First

"I say this because I know what I have planned for you," says the Lord. "I have good plans for you. I don't plan to hurt you. I plan to give you hope and a good future. Then you will call my name. You will come to me and pray to me. And I will listen to you. You will search for me. And when you search for me with all your heart, you will find me!" Jeremiah 29:11-13

Just before I turned 70 years old, and after nearly that many years of Bible study, it was while participating in prayer meetings on Wednesday nights that I had a revelation. You know, one of those moments when it finally makes sense to you in a deep way and you have an "aha moment" – that I am sure I had heard a multitude of times before and even should have gotten years before. But I realized that rather than going to God in prayer when I didn't know how to solve a situation and I had tried everything, I should go to God FIRST.

I think I aways knew to let God know what "we" had planned, but rather than listening and waiting for his direction and timing, my impatience and need for control got in the way to really understand this.

The verses above are from a letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the Jewish exiles living in Babylon around 600 years before Jesus was born. In fact, verse 10 tells the exiled people that after 70 years of Babylon being powerful, God will keep his promise to bring them back to Jerusalem.

But these words also remind us to call on God's name when he says, "When you search for me with all of your heart, you will find me." These words reflect our theme, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." But I must remind myself that it may not happen instantly, maybe not until after 70 years. And there is the caveat that it must be "with all of your heart." So that would mean spending quality time with God, and maybe asking over and over again. But regardless of the timing, God is always near to us and always cares for us.

As we celebrate this Christmas, we are in awe that God gave his only Son, Jesus, to give us hope.

Dear God, as we prepare to celebrate this Christmas, we thank you for the hope and promise you have given us through your son Jesus. Help us to remember to reach out to you first and to have patience to listen for your answers to the big and little questions that we have in our everyday life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Vicki Miller

Wednesday, December 26, 2024

Jesus is with Us

"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."
Psalm: 139:7-8

During Advent, as we tend to take stock of our lives, evaluating the past year and making plans for the upcoming one, we can take comfort that God knows us. We can turn to Him in all things, no matter how big or how small. We can reveal our struggles, our smallness at times, and how we wish things were different. We can appreciate all that we have and thank Him for the creation of the universe with our earth as a part of it and all the beauty around us - the constantly changing seasons which remind us of the cycle of life, each beautiful in its own way. We can be thankful for our family and friends and the beauty of living in those relationships – sharing our lives in personal ways. Most of all, we can meditate on the amazing gift of a God who wants a personal relationship with us and to have us join Him in creating His goodness in the world.

Recently, in the Tuesday morning Women's Prayer Group, we were discussing the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. Most of us are familiar with these: spiritual humility, mourning, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking and endurance through persecution – each paired with a divine promise. Although Jesus refers to a reward in heaven, I also believe that these verses show us that Jesus is saying that He sees us right now. He sees us struggling in our human condition with very real things. By coming to earth in human form, he also experienced these emotions and struggles.

In times when I feel far from God, I remember these words. When I struggle with being sad or trying to make peace or showing mercy when it is hard, to do so, I hear Jesus saying, I see you there and I am with you. In these words, I see HIM drawing near to US. We also try to draw near to him, but many, many times, He has taken the first step and reached a hand out to us – across time and generations with these verses.

Although we live very differently from the people he was speaking to, the conditions that we struggle with are universal across time. We benefit by listening to his encouragement and appreciating his solidarity with us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for all you provide for us on earth. Help us to see that gift and to expand it as you would direct. Help us to be humble, meek, and pure of heart as we move through Advent. Help us to be spiritually hungry and to pursue your holiness in our lives. Remind us to take time to be quiet and listen to your words. Help us to endure difficult times with the love of our family and friends. We appreciate all that you have done in our lives and ask you to stay with us, side by side, every day to continue to grow with you. Amen.

Nancy Black

Speaking of God's divine plan, let's not forget the testimony of the shepherds who heard the angel's pronouncement of Jesus' birth. And the wise men: They traveled hundreds of miles by camel to worship the newborn king. Magi in some translations, they would not have journeyed so far and endured hunger and harsh conditions to see an ordinary newborn. They knew Jesus arrived as Messiah.

In this life there is the smart thing to do and the heart thing to do. Believing in Jesus is both. We can be sure of our eternal destiny in Christ, who shines so brightly at Christmas. I see Christmas in John 1:9: "The true light , which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."

I have also observed the lives of Christians, even those battling cancer, a house fire, or the loss of a loved one. I remember driving home from church and thinking, I'm fuming because I don't want to go grocery shopping and so- and-so is smiling between chemotherapy treatments.

Sometimes a man needs a wakeup call.

I'm not going to claim that I never get annoyed by aspects of Christmas, but this year I feel excitement, not dread, remembering the words of the Apostle Paul: "But Godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Timothy 6:6-7

Merry Christmas. Really.

Prayer: Lord, help us to always cling to you, to keep you as number one in our lives regardless of circumstances. Amen.

Gordon Ovenshine



Monday, November 30, 2026

Draw Near Through Music

"Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs."
Psalm 100:2

One of my earliest memories is swinging on my swing set, singing a nonsense song at the top of my voice. I made up the words and melody as I went. I'm sure the neighbors were touched. I didn't have words then for what music meant to me—I just loved to sing. Looking back, I can see how that simple joy connects with our Advent invitation to draw near.

There's something about music that reaches places in us that ordinary words sometimes miss. A melody can touch our hearts before we've even stopped to think about it. In worship, though, the words matter too. As we sing, they can help us put our gratitude, our longings, and our trust into words. What begins as a familiar tune can become a prayer.

Music has often helped me draw near to God and notice his nearness. But Advent reminds me that God made the first move. Before we ever reached toward him, he came to us. John 1:14 tells us that the Word became flesh and lived among us. In Jesus, God came into our everyday human life. His nearness is more than the feeling a beautiful song gives us. We don't have to sing well enough—or feel deeply enough—to bring him close. Our songs are a response to his love, not a way to earn it.

Psalm 100:2 says, "Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs." I love that invitation: come before him singing. When Jesus was born, the announcement of a Savior was followed by the heavenly host praising God (Luke 2:10–14). As we sing our Advent songs, we can join in that glad response. We're not just enjoying lovely music. We're remembering what God has done and saying thank you.

This Advent, why not take a little time with a familiar carol? Instead of hurrying through it, pause over a line that speaks to you. Sing it, hum it, or simply listen, and let the words become your prayer. You don't need a strong voice or a perfect melody. Just come as you are, with a heart ready to receive the love of Jesus, who has drawn near to us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to us. Help us slow down, notice your presence, and answer your love with grateful hearts. Amen.

Pastor David

Tuesday, December 1, 2026

Drawing Near to God in Every Season

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

There are seasons in life when drawing near to God seems to come naturally. When our families are well, our prayers are being answered, and life is going according to plan, it is easy to feel His presence and give Him praise. We can look around at our blessings and see His goodness in so many ways.

But what happens when life takes an unexpected turn? What happens when we face disappointment, loss, uncertainty, or setbacks that leave us wondering what God is doing? When prayers seem unanswered and the road ahead feels unclear, drawing near to God can become more difficult. Our hearts may grow weary, our faith may be tested, and we may even find ourselves asking, "Lord, where are You in all of this?" Yet it is in these very moments that we need God the most.

Our circumstances may change, but God's faithfulness does not.

James 4:8 reminds us that drawing near to God is not dependent on everything in our lives going according to plan. God invites us to seek Him in every season – not only when we are joyful and life is good, but also when we are hurting, confused, or weary.

Trials can become opportunities to deepen our relationship with Him. When the things we once relied on begin to fail us, we are reminded that our ultimate security has never been in our circumstances, possessions, abilities, or plans, but in the unchanging character of God.

Psalm 46:1 declares, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." God is our refuge not only when life is peaceful, but also when we are struggling. He is our strength when we feel weak and our comfort when we cannot understand what He is doing. We may not always feel His presence, but our feelings do not determine His faithfulness.

Sometimes drawing near to God means praying when we have no words beyond, "Lord, help me." Sometimes it means opening our Bible when our hearts feel heavy, worshiping when our circumstances give us little reason to rejoice, or choosing to trust Him when we cannot see how things will work out. Sometimes it simply means getting on our knees and surrendering the very things we have been trying so hard to control.

Friday, December 25, 2024

Feeling discouraged? Draw nearer to God

"And the angel said to them, fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10-11

I'll be honest. For years, even though I was a Christian, I felt little joy at Christmas. I resented the commercial frenzy, the expense and the feeling that gift-giving and merry making was insincere, like people saying "Merry Christmas" as a flippant greeting.

To be sure, our family embraced all the Christmas trappings of a Hallmark movie. But for me, especially since Christmas starts at Halloween, the season felt like a windstorm blowing paper all over the place. I was so maxed out by Christmas night, I fled to the basement with a book as the presents piled up like blocks. Irritated — the family Scrooge — I remember thinking there must be more joy to Christmas, especially for a believer.

Then something happened: I drew near to God. In lamenting Christmas, I realized I was only punishing myself. I resolved to delete Scrooge. I tuned out the secular and studied my way through the Nativity narratives with a more receptive heart.

Perhaps more than any other story, the first Christmas has connected with people for millennia. So, what is this story of peace and goodwill all about?

Love.

My sea change in attitude drew me nearer to the fullness of Jesus' deity. I came to understand that even in the manger, Jesus shines as God and Savior, not a folklore figure with cuddly animals looking on. In fact, Jesus is God in eternity past, present and future.

He was in the beginning with God. John 1:2

For by him all things were created, in heaven, and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. Colossians 1:16-17

Jesus proved his divinity with the virgin birth and — more importantly— by rising from the dead; the resurrection really did happen. All of human history points to the cross. After 2,000 years, Jesus of Nazareth remains the most influential person who ever lived. Isn't that what you would expect if there really is a God who sent his son into the world? Jesus deserves our worship at Christmas.

When doing so, I also needed to remember the second half of the verse. “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded.” When James challenges us to “Draw near,” it is more of an admonition than a sweet suggestion. God wants us to be truly repentant of our sins and to overcome the worldly desires that might stand in the way of our relationship with Him. He wants us to approach him with clean hands and pure hearts.

And so, this particular morning, before heading out to exercise, I found myself taking an extra moment to apologize for being so easily distracted and to appreciate God’s presence. And for a moment, though it was August, I could visualize the candlelight of Christmas Eve and what it represents, God’s grace and truth.

Pr*ayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your presence. Help me remember that you are always there for me. All I need to do, though at times it is no small task, is to accept your gift and clear my life of any clutter that might stand between me and your open arms. Amen.*

Chuck Miller



Merry Christmas

These small acts of faith matter. They remind us that our relationship with God is not built solely on what He does for us, but on who He is to us. James 1:2-4 teaches us that the testing of our faith produces perseverance. This does not mean trials are easy or that we must pretend our pain does not exist. Rather, it reminds us that God can work in us even through the seasons we would never have chosen. He can strengthen our faith, develop patience, and teach us to depend on Him more deeply.

God does not turn away from us in our brokenness. We do not have to hide our disappointments, fears, or tears from Him. We can come to Him honestly, knowing He welcomes us into his presence.

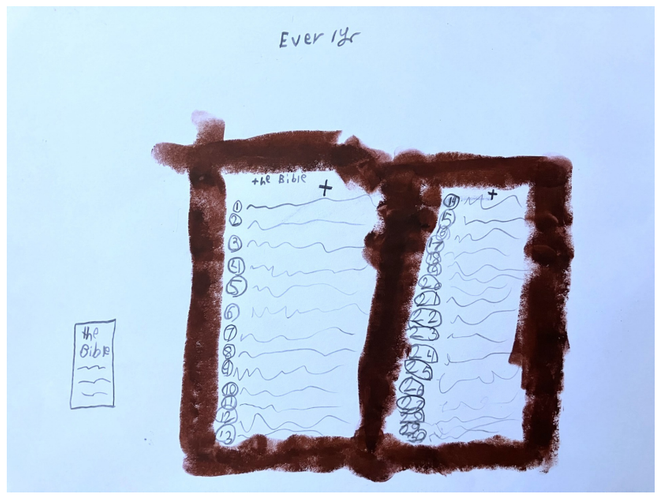
Perhaps you are walking through a difficult season right now. Maybe a prayer has not been answered as you hoped, a door has closed, or an unexpected setback has left you questioning your next step. Do not allow your circumstances to convince you that God has abandoned you. Instead, let this be a time to draw closer to Him.

Keep praying, keep trusting and keep returning to His Word. You do not have to have extraordinary faith every moment; you simply need to keep turning your heart toward the One who is faithful.

The greatest measure of our faith is not how close we feel to God when life is good, but whether we continue to seek Him when life is hard. In every season, draw near to Him, knowing that He is faithful, His grace is sufficient, and His presence is worth seeking above all else.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for reminding us that You are faithful in every season of life. Help us to draw near to You not only in our times of joy, but also in our times of struggle. When life is difficult and answers seem far away, strengthen our faith, calm our hearts, and help us trust in Your perfect plan. May we always remember that you are our refuge, our strength, our ever-present help. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Karen Kelly



Wednesday, December 2, 2026

Lost in the Darkness and Rain

"Do not be afraid–I am with you. I am your God–let nothing terrify you. I will make you strong and help you. I will protect you and save you." Isaiah 41:10

I have traveled with Shenandoah Tours for 30 years and have always boarded the coach in Waynesboro. It usually takes about 20 minutes from my house heading out on 250 west. I have never had any trouble finding my way, but recently VDOT made some directional changes to the road to make for better access onto I-64 at the top of the mountain.



In late summer, I was scheduled to go on a one-day trip. That morning (we were still in daylight savings time), I headed out an hour early to provide ample time to get to Waynesboro. There was still predawn darkness and a drizzle to boot. I got to the top of the mountain, no problem, but somehow, distracted by some approaching headlights, I turned left too early and wound up on some two-lane round.

I stayed on the road for a mile or so and realized I did not know where I was. I became very frightened and started to cry. I cried out, "Oh God, I'm scared! Please help me! I don't know where I am."

When no traffic was approaching, I turned around in the middle of this dark tree lined, two-lane road. I retraced my route and somehow made my way onto the interstate, still not sure I was headed in the right direction since there were no other cars around.

I eventually saw signs indicating my exit to Waynesboro and reached the coach with a couple of minutes to spare. I collapsed onto my assigned seat and said out loud, "Thank you God for helping me." To this day, I still don't know what road I was on or how I found my way back where I was supposed to be. All I know is that God heard my cry for help and responded.

Prayer: Thank you for always being with me and coming after me when I lose my way. And when I am afraid, I can always turn to you. Amen.

Bonnie Samuel

Thursday, December 24, 2024

Candlelight in August

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."
John 1:14

The 11 o'clock candlelight Christmas Eve service at CBC has become, for me, a precious part of the celebration of the Advent season, so much so that it has superseded Christmas day, as the event that I fondly look forward to each and every December. For more years than I can remember, Vicki and I have "burned up the road" between Richmond and Crozet, leaving a family Christmas Eve party to make it back to Crozet in time for the 11 p.m. service.

There are several thoughts that come to mind that make this service special for me. Usually, it is preceded by the aforementioned fun time with extended family. It is also a time to celebrate the most holy of nights with my church family. And when the service has concluded and we walk out of the church into the frosty night air, it is past midnight and already Christmas, and all is quiet and still, a "silent night" indeed.

This is the service in which we commemorate the night that God drew so near to us, when "the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." On such a night, it is easy to feel close to God and take comfort in His presence with us. But, what about the other 364 nights? What about March 7 or July 23 or October 12?

Though I try to find time for reflection and study each day, how often has that time become rote, just another aspect of my day like the cup of coffee I sip as I study or the walk I usually take right after the study? Just this morning, August 19, the day I wrote this devotional, I found my mind wandering during prayer, and instead of talking with God and listening for His response, my mind was jumping around all over the place thinking about my plans for the rest of the day, the forthcoming football season, and my upcoming vacation.

God was near me, and He had provided a cool (especially for August) and peaceful morning just perfect for sitting outside on the deck, enjoying His creation, and opening my heart to Him. Instead, my mind started racing about as far away from Him as it could get. The first part of James 4:8, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you," the verse that I chose to put on the kids' backpack tags and to inspire our Advent booklet this year, was "hitting me right between the eyes," and I was ignoring it. I needed to do a hard stop, clear my mind of distractions, and actively seek a closer relationship with God.

- Continued on the next page

Wednesday, December 23, 2024

Drawing Near to the Light

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." Isaiah 9:2

For the last few summers, one of the farms on Garth Road has planted a large field of sunflowers. I travel that road often and make it a point to check on the field of sunflowers regularly. As I've driven past, I've noticed that, during the growing season, all of the sunflowers are facing in the same direction. It's as if they are a high school band in uniform marching in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

Here's what happens with sunflowers. Young sunflower plants pivot to follow the sun as it moves across the sky from east to west. Then during the night, the plants rotate 180 degrees to greet the morning sun. WOW! Scientists at the The University of California have determined how they do it. The eastern facing side of the stem elongates more than the western facing side during the day allowing the stem and flower to track with the sun. At night the western side of the stem grows faster, causing the sunflower to head back east for the first rays of sunshine in the morning.

Plants instinctively orient themselves to get the most benefit from the sun. It's called heliotropism and those sunflowers illustrate the scientific principle perfectly. Maybe you've noticed this tendency recently with plants that you are growing on your windowsill. They want to grow closer to the sun! If the visuals team did not rotate the plants that we use for our worship services, we would have plants that leaned in one direction-toward the sunny window where they were placed last.

I particularly like to think about tropism during the season of Advent. The sun is lower in the sky, daylight hours are fewer-it's dark when I go to the grocery store, it's dark when I start my morning routine. It's tempting to bend toward negativity, discouragement, fatigue.

I want to Mimic the sunflowers-I long to draw near-to bend toward the Son, toward the "Light that has dawned." I want to consciously turn away from shadow, doubt, anxiety, stress.

Prayer: Lord of Light, forgive me for the times that I have turned inward or bent toward the shadows. Pull my attention back to you in a similar way that the sun pulls plants toward it. Help me to stretch toward your grace and love. Amen.

Susan Collyer

Thursday, December 3, 2026

Drawing Near in the Waiting

"For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations." Isaiah 61:11

I'm writing this devotional during the last week of October. Nothing beats a deadline! In just a few days, the garden at the west entrance of the church will give in to the shorter days and cooler nights of fall. Many of you have expressed your enjoyment in seeing it during the summer and it has provided us with flowers for worship since June!

I'm always sad to see it go! It doesn't take many frosty nights to turn leaves brown and brightly colored flowers the same tan. Very soon, the garden will call loudly for cleanup. But first, I'll allow the birds to picnic from the seeds that are forming at the base of the flowers. Eventually, I'll send the stems and leaves to the compost pile, but not before I've cut off whatever flowers remain and allowed them to drop to the ground. To passers-by the winter garden will look empty, bare, lifeless, wanting. But the seeds will lie there invisible and asleep on the cool, bare earth throughout the winter.

It is then that the seeds will go through the important process of stratification. Cool temperatures will prohibit their sprouting. Lying on the moist soil will soften the seed coating and prepare it to sprout when the soil warms into the 50s in spring. After this period of resting, the germination rate for those seeds that spend their winter outdoors will be more reliable and uniform. The seeds will sprout and new plants will grow. Before we know it, people will be asking what we do to make that garden so lively. In fact, we simply allowed a holy and necessary process to take place.

It is in our nature to think of quiet, stillness, waiting, winter as a sign of distance from God. After all, our culture emphasizes achieving, moving forward, making things happen. But drawing near to God sometimes means lying fallow in His presence (just like the seeds lay during the cold and dark of winter) and allowing a holy and necessary period of waiting. It means trusting that he is near in all the spaces of our lives.

When I look at the winter garden in the upcoming weeks and months, I am going to reframe my thinking and see it as a space full of hidden potential. I'm going to let it remind me to trust God for the things that I cannot see. As I wait for next summer's garden, I'll be reminded that God has planned for a harvest of righteousness and praise.

Prayer: Patient Father, Thank you for the seasons, even winter, in my soul. I recognize that quiet seasons are just as important as the seasons of growth, inspiration, and progress. I trust that you are near in all seasons of life and that in each season, you are preparing me for the next. Amen.

Susan Collyer

Friday, December 4, 2026

Draw Near, What Does it Mean?

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."
James 4:8

What was James talking about when he wrote this? Does it mean to have a closer relationship with God? Closer relationship with family? Closer relationship with other Christians? Treat others like family?

James, in Chapter 4, verse 8, tells us to "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Is he talking about only reaching out to God when we are in crisis, conflict or hardship? How do we reach out? When do we reach out? In Matthew 11:28 we are told, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Too often, we let our busy lives of work, family, sports, hobbies, etc. guide us and take up most of our time. We are then tired and many times don't find the time to reach out to God.

Like most of us, I have been guilty at times of doing this. I'm older, sometime tire easily, get busy with helping my children, transporting grandchildren to and from places, and taking care of a house. Then I say, hey I'll do this in a bit, and sometimes it may not happen. Not an easy confession, but the truth.

Recently God sort of kicked me hard. My 3-1/2-year-old great-grandson was really sick, He spent three weeks in the hospital. Diagnosed with a brain strep infection, he had to have two brain surgeries and was on a ventilator several times. He had a fever, respiratory issues, and was in PICU twice for several days. We were not sure of his outcome for a couple of weeks. When discharged, he had home O/T and P/T, antibiotics for 6 weeks, etc. I prayed and prayed hard. He had to learn to walk again and is still somewhat restricted in his activities but improving each day.

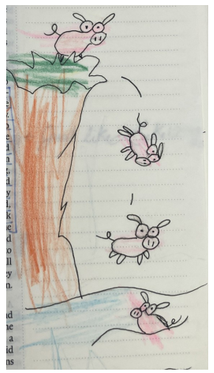
I realized during this time that I pray more when things are not good and I cannot control the outcome. It was during these hard days that I felt God in that hospital room. He provided us with the incredible doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, and physical therapists who made sure that Asher recovered. He surrounded us with his love and gave us the strength to face each day and each new complication. He comforted us when we shed tears and helped us through sleepless nights.

Since that time, I have tried really hard to spend time with a journal, writing down my thoughts and prayer concerns, and Bible study each day. But I am still a work in progress. Drawing near to him includes, for me, feeling his presence in my life every day. He does listen; he may not always answer immediately but he is there. He may not give us what we ask for all the time, but he hears us and knows our heart. He walks with us each step that we take.

Tuesday, December 22, 2024

"Draw Near" - Literally

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." James 1:17



Sometimes I can be a very literal person. So, when I saw "draw near," I literally thought of the little drawings my daughters (Margaret & Marianne) and I make in my Journaling Bible. Just to explain, you can buy Bibles with large blank, columns on the outer side of the page, intended for writing notes or pictures that relate to the text on that page. I love writing important notes in my Bible, but some of my favorite pages have cute or silly pictures. The story of Jesus casting out demons from two demon-possessed men (Matthew 8:28-32) into a herd of pigs, that then run into the sea and drown, isn't probably the most important story in scripture. But because of the cute drawing in my Bible, it's one of my most memorable.

Since the girls are young, I usually draw a picture, and one of them colors it in. We write their name, the date and how old they were, so that we can remember forever. I hadn't realized how much they enjoyed it until one of them said it was her Bible and she would get it when she got older. To which, the other child said no, it was her Bible and she wanted it. So, I got a second Journaling Bible, and each girl knows which one is hers, and they ask for more pictures to draw.

What does this have to do with drawing near to God, you may ask? Well, sometimes, I might not feel like doing my devotional. I'm probably not supposed to admit that, but it happens right? I'm tired. I'm not sure that I have the mental capacity to think deeply. I just feel like doodling. And that is where the brilliance of this Bible comes in. I usually see inspiring Christian journaling or artwork. Then, I'll draw a picture, or sometimes it's a favorite verse written in pretty script. Then, BAM, the next thing I know, I'm reading the whole chapter and even comparing the various translations. **I thought I wasn't in the mood to read God's word, but I just needed a different pathway to inspiration.** Even better, when my girls color the picture, we read the verses together too. In school, we all have different ways of learning. And I would say, that applies to the Bible as well.



You don't even need a special Journaling Bible to take advantage of this. You could have a separate devotional journal (or notebook) where you can write your prayer requests, thoughts, pictures, and even (dare I say it) sermon notes. Give it a try, you might like it.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the small things in life that make me smile: such as the drawings and handwritten "I love you" notes, that are stuffed in my Bible. Help me to find the motivation to open your word, not just on Sunday, but every day. And, not just to talk about what I've learned, but to demonstrate it, each and every day through my actions. Amen!

Serena Butcher

Monday, December 21, 2024

Never Too Small

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and by supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God." Philippians 4:6

I used to think I was too small to be in the presence of God Almighty. When I came to know that I am one of his children, I began to think of Him as my heavenly Father. I draw near to Him now, telling Him what makes me happy, what worries me, what fears I have, everything in my heart.

I ask for guidance and confess my shortcomings and areas I struggle in. I thank Him daily for everything He provides.

Prayer: Father, I give you thanks for the way you meet my needs-sometimes before I even ask. Amen.

Peggy Wahlen



Like the poem, "Footprints in the Sand," says, when we saw only one set of footprints, it was then that God carried us when we could not do it alone. Just like he promised in Matthew, when we come to him, he provides for us.

We must remember that we have to take that step to talk with him, believe in him, invite him into our lives, and listen. That to me is Drawing Near to God and as promised in Matthew 11:28, he will give us strength and rest.

My prayer for each of you: During this holiday season may each of us remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus, the true meaning of the Christmas season. For those who this season brings sorrow, not joy, let God's love surround you and yours. Let this season be one of renewal, allowing you to draw closer to God in your life. Amen.

Rachel Collier



Saturday, December 5, 2026

Drawing Near to God

"You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water."
Psalm 63:1

I must admit that the phrase "draw near" has always made me a bit nervous. Probably from the mistaken idea in youth that the whole process was somehow up to me – that if I forgot to draw near or neglected to pay attention, I was in real trouble. Thankfully, as I have matured, I have begun to see that God would not let me slip away so easily. Once I committed to God, he would use all my life experiences, even "accidental" encounters, to nudge me back toward Himself. As the source of all ultimate satisfaction and goodness, and the source of life itself, where else could I go?

When I was a youngster, I would sometimes read to my nephews from a compilation of short stories, including some from the Bible (as I realized later). I remember being stirred by them and thinking, if only these were true! Imagine my surprise later in life when I began reading the Bible and realized that they were indeed true. God used this experience to begin drawing me to Himself before I even heard God calling me to draw near.

C.S. Lewis called this experience joy, "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." You could also describe it as a longing or a signpost pointing to God. Some Christians mention "God sightings" or small ways that God shows himself to us through the beauty of nature, the love of a friend, even the answer to a prayer. When we begin to feel this longing, we are called (or recalled) to actively pursue "a closer walk with Jesus." God is gentle with us when we stray or become discouraged, not reprimanding but speaking in a loving whisper. He sustains and supplies what we need, as he did for Elijah (I Kings 19).

Once we feel His Presence working in our lives we become like David the Psalmist, "O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land without water (Psalm 63:1 NIV)." God has placed eternity into our hearts, in our very being, and we remain restless until we find our rest in Him (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us take heart! Let us know that before we begin to draw near, you are already present and seeking us. Amen. Amen.

Sharon Defibaugh

Sunday, December 20, 2024

Draw Near to God

"For it is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God.
That I may declare all of your works." Psalm 73:28

As I thought about what that phrase meant to me, I went back over the last year in my prayer journal. My husband passed away on September 22,2025. We were one week shy of our 49th anniversary. God has literally brought me through this, as I knew I could not do it alone.

We had moved out in the country and remodeled an older home, I had decorated it, and was feeling like I was making it my own. We were one hour away from Crozet, friends, family and our church. Then all of a sudden, eight weeks later, after one phone call, I was alone.

In the weeks after the funeral, my three sons were concerned about me being so isolated. God provided just what I needed, a small cottage down the street from my church, and right in the middle of two of our sons. Both are five minutes away on either side. And I have called them many times.

My financial concerns have been met, and God has helped me to depend on him for my every need. And He has given me more than I could ever imagine. Things I had never really paid attention to i.e.: taxes, utilities in my name, car maintenance etc. One by one, God has helped me do one big girl thing after another.

We have gone through birthdays, holidays, and many firsts this year. And God was there. I have found such comfort in my home, my family, my friends and my church family. God has made sure every detail has been taken care of. We had a large dog, Belle, that was too big for this little house. God helped us find the perfect home for her. It was hard to do, but God knew I needed to feel at peace. Such a small thing, but very big to me.

We have spent that last few months helping our mom get settled in a nursing home in AL. This too has been hard and we have shed many tears. But once again, God has promised if I stick close to him, he will lead the way. I do not know what is around the corner, no one does. God has helped me do this with laughter, and tears. But I know that no matter what, if I trust him, he will never let me down.

Prayer: Dearest Lord Jesus, as we go into a new year, please help us to let go of our fears, our grudges, our hurts. Please help us to draw near to your word, your promises and to you. Guide us daily to draw our strength from you only. Forgive us for holding on to fears. Thank you that you are always here for us. And you never leave or forsake us. Amen.

Gale Hughes

So, what is the next step in my plan to add believers to pray the code?

First, it's to ensure as many people as possible are Christians, understand the code verse and third, pray it every day. I use the term "code" as it's generally thought of as a military term to remind us of what to pray for and who to pray for every day.

James 4, verse 8: Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.

P*rayer: Dear God, we ask for your guidance and direction as we pray for peace in the world. We ask that peace comes to every corner of the world. We pray that leaders will learn from your direction to end conflict and not start new wars. We pray that you God will heal the wounded, provide supplies, and aid where needed. As new troops enter military service, we pray that they can be retrained to provide comfort, direction, and prayer around the world. Guide us in remembering to pray every day for everlasting peace. Amen.*

Bill Schrader



Stations of the Cross
Good Friday
Downtown Crozet

The Perfect Life

"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." Romans 8:28

My Dad's favorite Bible verse! When I was young, I thought that meant that God would make everything work out the way Christians wanted. We don't have any problems, right? WRONG! Life happens!

It is easy to keep the faith when everything is going well. You meet that special person, get married, purchase the perfect home in the perfect neighborhood, perhaps have a child, get promotions at work, take the trip of a lifetime. Life is good! God is good!

Then things start to unravel. Your perfect life isn't so perfect anymore. People change or get sick, bad choices are made, the economy changes and you lose your job or your home. Life is hard! But God is still good!

People ask how you can still have faith in a God who lets bad, hurtful things happen. Shouldn't He be able to prevent those things? You know the truth but what they say starts to make you question a bit. Life is confusing! But God is still good!

There are times when we wonder why life has turned out the way it has. n every situation, you have to decide if you are going to mire in the muck or if you will learn and move forward. The best way, by far, is to draw near to God. He will guide you while you deal with the present and help you move forward.

Whatever is happening in your life, there is one thing that never changes. God is ALWAYS good!!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, first we want to thank you for sending Your only Son to earth so we can spend eternity with You. Throughout whatever life throws at us, thank you for always being close and loving us even when it is hard for us to love ourselves. Help us to intentionally draw close to you every day, whether life is going well or we are facing challenges. May we always remember that You ARE always good! In His precious name we pray, Amen

Judy Woods

Monday, December 7, 2026

Draw Near… *Faster*

"Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. "
James 5:13-14

I love Excel spreadsheets. I love data. Is it really possible that data is getting between God and me?

Recently, my yearly bloodwork showed that I am in the pre-diabetes range. This one blood test set off a cascade of fact-finding. I am not a person who just accepts that family history is the problem. I needed to know more about what I could do to improve my health. My first instinct was to learn even more about diabetes, so the next day on a vacation flight, I read a book written by a UVA endocrinologist. I had, of course, planned on reading a book for leisure, but I chose to read the one about diabetes instead. The book discussed which foods are the best for keeping your blood sugar in a healthy range. It also mentioned two companies that sell continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) without needing a doctor's order. These devices are pretty cool because they sync with your phone to give you real-time blood sugar readings. Data!!!

Once I was back home from vacation, I asked my doctor if she could prescribe me a CGM. She said insurance will not contribute unless you have diabetes. That seemed a little late to me, so I checked out the companies the book mentioned. After purchasing one month of monitoring devices, I started tracking all my data, inputting food, exercise, and sleep into the phone app. Data, data, data!!!

One day, as I was inputting my food, something (or someone) slapped me in the face. I realized that I had read a book, ordered the CGM, and started inputting data before I ever thought to ask God's help. I had gotten that far in this process before even thinking about praying about my health. I cannot count the number of times that I have sprung into action before considering the scripture above. Once again, my "fixer" instinct forged ahead without recognizing the One who really has the power. I have been singing "Take it to the Lord in prayer" my whole life, but somehow, I still failed at drawing close to God before collecting data. Maybe next time…

Prayer: Lord, please forgive me for not turning to you first regarding all aspects of my life. Help me to slow down and draw nearer to you, recognizing that your wisdom and guidance are necessary for my next steps. Amen.

Shannon Franklin

Saturday, December 19, 2024

The Code

"And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Matthew 24:6

As I thought about Chuck's request to prepare a devotional message, I was struck by a different verse that led me to rethink how this could be presented. For this 81-year-old, the one verse that had been with me forever was about wars and rumors of wars. The verse is Matthew 24:6.

One of my earliest memories was listening on a car radio to the announcement that the United States was going to war in Korea. From that date onward, it seems like we are at war every few years in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East and the Strait of Hormuz. We have wars that never have an end date. I have left out many smaller conflicts that have left our troops killed or wounded. Our leaders state that they do not want war, but they keep finding conflict.

The war that most impacted my generation was Vietnam. During my high school years, we lost members that had graduated a year or two before me. In college, we continued to lose local boys. After two years of college, my draft number was called, and I joined the U. S. Army. My service was spent entirely in Germany, and my wife was able to join me. While I had a great job and outstanding leaders, my brother was sent to Vietnam (as a helicopter gunner) and had some tough events. He did survive and became a very successful fund raiser for a Christian organization.

So why do I specifically mention Vietnam and its deep impact? Because I have for many years prayed to end wars but only as a small, slight idea. I tell myself that we will always have war according to the Bible, so why spend a lot of time on the idea. I did not ask others to join me in prayer or lead discussion about war. I did not give it the thought it deserved and really missed others' input and ideas.

I knew it was tough to talk about, but the real problem was that I was just lazy. I could pray about it, then let it slide for months before I touched it again. Because I had not included others in my prayer plans, I had no fallback or support. If I remembered, I said a prayer, but only as one. I did not think of the prayer as mine alone but just didn't take the next step and invite others to join the prayer. I am sure others have prayed for the end of conflicts, but we did not make contact to grow the group with the same feeling. By adding people, we could make the prayer a code for ending conflict and adding services for wounded troops.

In Douglas J. Moo's book entitled The Letter of James, Mr. Moo makes the following statement: "It should, of course be obvious that James is not here talking about salvation, but about the repentance of those who already are Christians."

- Continued on the next page

Friday, December 18, 2024

Grains of Sand

"Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you." Psalm 139:16-18

We all have that special place where we just feel closer to God. It may be a mountaintop experience or just a quiet warm feeling. For me, I love the mountains, and we are so fortunate to be so close to them to see God's wonder. It reminds me of the time that my husband and I were out for a ride on the Blue Ridge Parkway, and as he turned a corner, we literally at the same time said. "Wow." The fall colors were striking, and we just had to praise God for his wonders.



But the place that I feel closest to God is at the beach. Maybe because it is not outside our windows and instead is special because it takes planning and looking forward to the trip. Or maybe it is just because we are away from the routines and responsibilities at home. But I never tire of watching the waves hit the shore. I am fascinated that one hour the waves are gentle and another hour, they crash onto the shore. And this all just makes me ponder God's power and awesomeness.

This summer for our "Rainforest Falls…Exploring the Nature of God" Vacation Bible School, we introduced the kids to Psalm 139 where David, the psalmist, celebrates that God knows everything (Wow, God) He knows everything about each of us before we are even born (Wow, God). And he created a world much bigger than each of us, yet He loves and cares for each of us. Verse 18 talks about God's vast thoughts that outnumber the grains of sand. So, a few months later as we spent our two-week vacation on the beach, I held a handful of sand. As a banker and accountant, I enjoy numbers, but I could not even begin to count this tiny handful, much less all of the grains I could see on this beach, much less all of the sand on all of the other beaches that God has made. How can one be at the beach and not feel closer to God? And he is always close to us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the awesome world that you have created and allowed us to enjoy. But thank you more for loving us and caring for us. Each of us you know and love. And thank you for giving us your Son who came to earth to show us how to live on earth and died that we may all have eternal life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Vicki Miller

Tuesday, December 8, 2026

There's An App For That

"You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways." Psalm 139:1-4

A second thought came out of my experience with the continuous glucose monitor (CGM). As I consumed certain foods and drinks, the app on my phone graphed my blood sugar, going up and down depending on the number of carbohydrates and in what order I ate the food. The graph also changed based on how much I exercised. I was getting real-time data that told me if my risk for developing diabetes was increasing or decreasing based on my actions. Using the data, I was able to shift my behaviors to draw closer to my goal.

It made me think: what if there was an app that tracked our closeness to God? Each of our thoughts and actions graphed out for us to see the impact. How many of us would download the app? How many of us would use the app? Would we turn on the notifications? Would we be as obsessed with the app as I am with my blood sugar readings? Would we delete it after a couple of days when the truth is just too difficult to accept? Would we share it with others?

Prayer: Lord, let me live my life drawing closer to you each day through my thoughts and actions. Let me obsess over loving you more than the material things of this world. Help me better know the path to you. Amen.

Shannon Franklin



Wednesday, December 9, 2024

PLEASE HEAR MY PLEA

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." Jeremiah 33:3

The doctor had been gentle and kind, and he held me as I wept, standing patient and still as I beat my fists into his chest. Now he was gone, and I was left alone with my reality.

"Oh, God! Why? Why? Why would you allow this? Why him? Why me? Why now?" I shook my fist in the air and pounded on the windowsill. The pain and grief held my heart in a viselike grip. I felt like my chest would explode. "You cannot be doing this to me," my mind screamed over and over in silent pain. "He is my son, my only child, you cannot take him from me. You cannot."

I made myself take one more look at the tiny figure in the crib. Tony was separated from me by two thick panes of glass. Such a beautiful son, so precious, so perfectly formed. "Oh, God!" I cried. "You have to let him live!"

Tony had been suffering from a very high fever and could have some serious complications. The thought of losing my son was too much for me to bear.

As I made my way outside, rain hit my face and mingled with my tears. As I walked down the road, cold gusts of wind pulled against me. I had planned to go home but an empty house held me back.

I saw an unfamiliar chapel, dimly lit. Pulling the heavy door, I let myself into the chapel. As I walked to the front pew, I saw the Christmas lights and candles so tastefully placed.

Suddenly, I felt like shouting at God. I wanted to pray, but it seemed so helpless, so futile, so useless.

Your word says that you love us and see our tears, but do you really care? Are you too big, too far above us to hear our cries or see our pain? The Bible tells us how you bid the little children to come to you and how you touched the sick, the lame, the blind and the deaf.

Are you not a God of love, a God showing mercy, never sleeping, a God who cares to protect his little ones?

As I sat there with my tears, I felt a gentle hand touch my shoulder, "May I help you?" causing me to jump slightly for several minutes. The pastor sat beside me, gently holding my hand. I cried, sobs shook my body, then my anger and pain poured out. He sat there and allowed my outburst without any effort to interrupt me.

Thursday, December 17, 2024

"I Want to Do It Myself!"

"And since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..." Hebrews 10:21-22

April 13, 2026 at an early-awful hour, I arrived at the surgery center to have eye surgery to reduce the ravages of glaucoma. The expectation was I would need to recuperate for a few weeks. I expected to be out of commission and away from my part-time job for two weeks. I was away from the job and unable to participate in normal life for two full months. There were eye doctor checkups every few days; restrictions to not bend, lift, stoop or squat; and sitting and standing only with my head erect. And, all this time I had blurry vision. Very blurry vision.

Had I made a terrible mistake by having this surgery? The consequences in not having it were grim – very grim. Over time, especially during the first two months, my vision began to improve. Less blurriness. More freedom of movement. But still, even today, months after surgery, there are post-op appointments to check progress. So, there is improvement. But it is slow.

Following this surgery and my inability to function normally, I have had to learn patience and humility. I have had to depend on others. Independent me! A person who thinks "I can do it myself – you don't need to help me! I've got this!" Well, I didn't "have this". I had to reach out. Ask for help. Pray about this situation and the need for help. Pray and pray and pray. Listen to our Father saying, "Be patient. Trust me. Accept help from my people." Oh, how hard that has been when I really don't want to impose. In other words, I have had to accept the fact that I do need help.

I got help and still am getting it. So very much loving, caring help. Taking me to eye doctor appointments. Delivering meals to me. Taking me grocery shopping. Doing my laundry. Doing my housework. Taking my car for the yearly vehicle inspection. Covering for me at my job when the plan that had been for two weeks but had become two months. Helping me in so many ways. As my vision is healing and improving, my abilities are getting better but I still need to accept help which is so lovingly given.

All through this, our Father has been saying "Be still. Listen to me. Let my people help you. Draw near to me and I will draw near to you – helping you, guiding you, comforting you." He is still having that conversation with me even today in early October. I struggle to depend on others and, in doing so, am becoming closer to our Almighty God. I am learning to accept the gracious help of others and to listen more closely to our loving Father as He tells me again "Draw near to Me and I will draw near to you".

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for your patience with me, for loving me even though I want to act like a stubborn 3-year-old who wants to do everything on her own. Guide me that I will humbly and gratefully accept the assistance of others. May I give my help as I am able to others in need. In Jesus' Name, I pray, Amen.

Edna Lumley

Wednesday, December 16, 2024

My Daily Thoughts of a Beautiful Memory

"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." James 4:8

In these present days, I find myself worrying about everything from the health of family and friends to the state of our country and its problems. Sometimes my worries seem like a dark cloud overhead. I know I should give my worries to the Lord, but sometimes I still find myself worried about things of daily life.

One day as I was out running errands, I turned on my car radio, which is usually set on Spiritual music stations. At that moment, the radio commentator was giving some daily words of wisdom. He said our Heavenly Father is often mentioned while talking about our earthly father and of their great love for us in our lives. His message made me smile because he said we often hesitate to ask our Heavenly Father for things that we think are too insignificant to Him. But then he said he imagined our Heavenly Father smiling down at us just as we have seen our earthly father do in our lives.

At that moment, I had a flashback memory of when I was about ten years old sitting in church with my mother and father. I suddenly could vividly see my mom on my left and my dad on my right. I could imagine the exact section and pew we sat in at the church, as well as the surrounding memories of that church in which I grew up. Then a memory of my dad holding my hand during church and smiling down at me was so clear in my mind. I found myself smiling at that sixty-five-year-old memory! At that moment of that day, I found myself thinking about the love of my earthly father and then the great unconditional love of my Heavenly Father. I suddenly felt extremely close to my Heavenly Father and was reminded of His great love for me each and every moment of a day.

Pr*ayer: Dear Lord, thank you so much for your love, your sacrifice, your presence in my life, your listening ear, and your many blessings given to me throughout my life. Forgive me for my worries as I leave them at your feet and trust in you. Amen.*



Jackie Morgan

The pastor's eyes were full of compassion, and he spoke to me in a soothing voice. He spoke of a gentle, loving, merciful God who saw my grief and felt my pain. This wise servant of God introduced me to a Jesus who is able to hear my every need. As I sat there for a few moments, all was quiet as I allowed the pastor's words echo through my mind.

Suddenly, I felt, for the first time ever, that I really was a child of the living, loving God. I thanked the pastor and headed home. "Oh, holy God", I whispered. "I offer all to your loving hands. Tony is your child and you love him, more than I am able. I freely give him back to you".

Tony is now 34 years old. He graduated from high school with honors and has become an accomplished chef. Every day of his life has been a blessing to me. I am so thankful to God for leading me to that kind, gentle pastor on a dark, rainy day when my heart was breaking. With the inspirational words spoken to me by the kind pastor, I was able to see that the deepest, purest love is the kind that can let go.

Prayer: God, help me to remember to bring every anxious thought and hard circumstance to you and lay them at your feet. In Jesus name. Amen.

Brenda Johnson.



Thursday, December 10, 2024

Just Another Day

"This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."
Psalm 118:24
"At the office where the papers grow, she takes a break
Drinks another coffee and she finds it hard to stay awake
It's just another day
Du-du-du-du, du-du, it's just another day."
Paul McCartney

It was just another day. I had morning coffee to help me wake up as I read my daily devotional and scribbled in my prayer journal. I went out for a walk. Soon after returning home, I cleaned up email. Then I took my four-footed friend, Eddie, for a ride in the car and a walk at Mint Springs. I made a Harris-Teeter run for ingredients for dinner. Vicki "came up for air" after working at the dining room table on a special project for the bank, and we sat on the deck for a few moments. I cooked dinner and then did the dishes. After enjoying some evening conversation together while glancing at our phones with a baseball game on in the background, Vicki turned in for the night, and I ventured back out to the deck while Eddie was in the yard for his nighttime potty break. It was just another day.

Or was it? On this particular autumn day after completing my Bible study, I walked up St George Avenue past the church, my eyes on our ever-changing mountains. This particular morning, they were arrayed with a riot of fall colors that reflected the glow of the sunrise and reached up to a cloudless blue sky. So good, so very good. And as a bonus, my pace was such that my smart watch recognized my efforts at exercise as a run. Hardly, the young lion who competed in road races back in the day, but heart racing in a good way.

Mid-morning found me at the computer. Among the emails were several from members of the church family submitting devotional thoughts for our 2026 Advent Devotional booklet. Gradually, we were approaching our "magic" number of 24. Might we even surpass it? It was heartening to see so many sharing their time and talents with their church family. We are so blessed to be a part of the community of faith at Crozet Baptist Church.

In early afternoon, Eddie and I drove to Mint Springs. The mountain was still radiant in its autumn splendor. I had to pause during our walk and take a picture of the upper lake surrounded by and reflecting trees with brilliant red foliage. Eddie and I made friends as he overcame his shyness and rubbed noses with some of his canine counterparts while I chatted with their humans.

I find cooking to be kind of fun, though I have to confess that cleaning up afterwards is hardly my favorite

Tuesday, December 15, 2024

Drawing Near Together

"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, purifies us from all sin." I John 1:7

It's happening. Summer is leaving and fall is on its heels. Leaves are showing their true colors. During the summer months, the leaves, with plenty of sunlight, produced green chlorophyll that hid the reds, oranges, golds, and bronzes that make fall so colorful. Cooler weather and shortened daylight hours make it impossible for those trees to produce the chlorophyll needed to support their green leaf canopy. Without that energy, leaves will die and be cut off from the tree. In just a week or two, most deciduous trees (those that lose their leaves) will be bare. What a change!

It's time for trees to channel their energy away from outward growth (leaves and flowers) and focus instead on sending their roots deeper into the soil. (This makes fall the perfect time for planting.) Trees will be much more prepared to face winter storms without their leaves and with their roots deep down.

For a long time, we believed that a tree and its corresponding roots existed in isolation from other trees and their roots. No longer! Scientists tell us that there is a massive, interconnected root system underground. Through this hidden network, trees share water, carbon, and vital nutrients. In her book, Finding the Mother Tree, Suzanne Simard proposes that strong trees pump life-saving sugars to their struggling neighbors. Here's an example that she gives: during summer when birch trees produce excess photosynthate (sugars) they send carbon through the "wood-wide web" to the evergreen trees that are shaded under them. Then when autumn arrives and birches lose their leaves, the exchange of carbon reverses. Simard's research suggests that trees communicate their vitality and vulnerabilities in ways that contribute favorably to their communal living.

These implications are worth remembering for our life together at Crozet Baptist. Deep roots can withstand strong storms! Drawing near to God should not be a solitary endeavor. We can draw close to the father when we are completely immersed in his family. When we share joys, bear one another's burdens, and worship together, we form a spiritual network that sustains us when our individual strength runs dry.

Prayer: God of Community, you did not design us to live in isolation. Thank you for the gift of our church family (it is a gift!) and the hidden network of love that sustains us. Encourage us as we share joys and burdens and thus draw near to one another and to you. Amen.

Susan Collyer

Monday, December 14, 2024

Draw Near

"But as for me it is good to be near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare Your works." Psalm 73:28

Being near to God began when I believed in Him as a child. I learned later that He even gives us the faith to believe and draws us to Him first.

John 6:44 says, " No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

At eleven, I was baptized. And by sixteen, I rededicated my life to Christ. I wanted to turn away from sin and turn to Him. That spiritual growth would help later in life when I faced challenges. Those mountaintop experiences were literal as I took faith walks through the Pennsylvania mountains at Camp Christian.

Soon thereafter I got depressed. Late,r I wondered if the enemy was distracting me from a contented life of faith? I questioned God in the dark times but knew He was always there; He carried me. Isaiah 46:4 explains that "God promises to sustain and carry His people through every stage of life."

Fast forward to my 50s when my Mom, my best friend, got ALS and went to be the Lord in 2015.

I pushed God away for a while but I knew in my heart that the best and only way to find peace was to draw near to Him. Her name was Vivian, and she was the strongest believer I knew --she had her own life struggles -and she modeled what it is to be a person of faith.

Ways to be near to Him come from reading his word, carving out personal quiet time to pray and staying a part of a community of believers. Being a Lone Ranger Christian is isolating and makes one vulnerable to discouragement.

My life's goal is to point others to Him, encourage them, and tell of HIs works.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I am grateful for all you've done for me. Your works are mighty. Please remind me you are there when I feel alone or discouraged. And I pray that someone reading this will be encouraged by Your care for them as well.... In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Kris Ovenshine

thing. I was experimenting with a new recipe for one of our favorite comfort foods, stroganoff. Since Vicki has recently been diagnosed with lactose intolerance, gathering the ingredients for and preparing a meal has become a bit of a challenge as I search grocery store refrigerator cases for lactose free items and explore alternatives for dairy products. This particular dinner was delicious “even if I do say so myself” as my mother often said when she was proud of the results of her culinary efforts.



Before eating, as the stroganoff simmered on the stove, Vicki and I sat on the deck and enjoyed (those mountains again) the view from our backyard, the sun setting and lending a golden hue to the crest of the mountains. Dinner was somewhat special this day as our daughter Jennie was home in Crozet for a couple of days and had helped us out with Trunk or Treat for CBC's Fall Festival.

As we settled for the evening, a ping on our phones alerted Vicki and me to some photos sent by our son, Jeff. In addition to a picture of the whole family, there were many shots of our grandkids admiring the same sunset that Vicki and I had enjoyed from an overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We are blessed to live in such a beautiful place.

Night falls earlier and earlier each passing day in autumn, and as it does, so do the temperatures. I bundled up in a hoodie and gazed at a ridiculously huge full moon while Eddie wandered around in the dark. “…The greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night.” I would receive another text, this time pictures of that moon from my older grandkids who were likewise enchanted and inspired by it.

Just another day? Hardly. It is a day that “the Lord has made.” And as such, we should draw closer to Him with gratitude for the blessing of a normal day.

In Act 3 of Thornton Wilder's classic play, Our Town, Emily Webb, who has recently died during childbirth and taken her place in the cemetery on the hill outside of Grover's Corners, asks if it’s possible to return to the life she once lived, if only for a day, simply to experience it with, what one might call, the eyes of eternity. The stage manager grants her wish, but Emily is disappointed as she sadly watches her former self and those around her going through the motions of their lives and not taking the time to appreciate “just another day.”

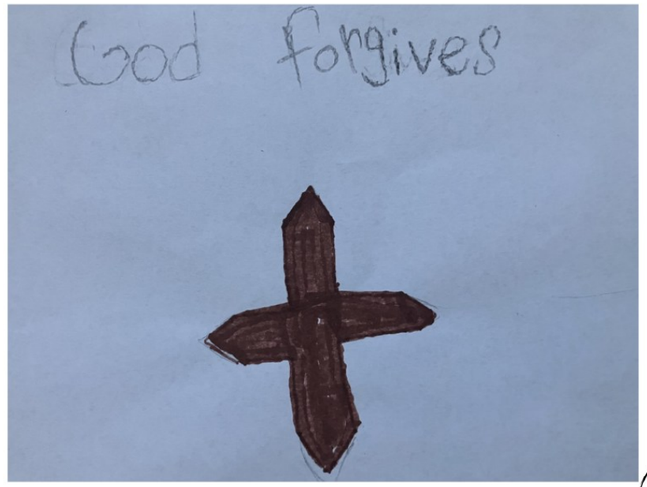
Before returning to her grave, Emily asks the stage manager, “Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? —every, every minute?

“No,” he replies, “The saints and poets, maybe—they do some.”

Though I am hardly a saint and by no means a poet, I would like to propose that we take a moment and pause and ponder God's goodness and greatness and draw near to Him each and every day.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for life and the living of it. Thank you for the wonder of Your creation and the blessing of being able to experience it in all its glory. Thank you for the gift of another day. Du-du-du-du, du-du. Amen.

Chuck Miller









The next three days I don't remember a whole lot because of all the pain medications they were giving me to keep me comfortable. I found out later that they didn't want me moving around until there was a plan for surgery to fix my neck. After three days, my doctor and his team finally devised a plan for surgery to repair my broken neck and not paralyze me. The surgery was a complete success!

When I woke up and my brain wasn't foggy from all the pain medications, I realized that GOD had had me in his hands since the morning I fell. Some days, I am still not exactly sure what HIS plan is, but every morning I wake up thanking and praying to HIM for letting me LIVE and being able to put my feet on the floor and get out of bed.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for my life and for being in my life every day. Thank you for being there to listen to my prayers. Thank you for my family and the blessings you give me and my family each day. Thank you for always being there when I have needed you and need to talk to you. Please bless each person that touches my life! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Linda Crawford



Sunday, December 13, 2024

DRAW NEAR - A Story of God Letting Me LIVE

"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."
Psalm 145:18

It was the early morning of the last day of Vacation Bible School on July 18, 2023 and I was getting up to go to the bathroom. The next thing I remember is being on my back and having excruciating pain in my neck. I tried to get up and realized that I couldn't. I called for my granddaughter to go get my daughter and son-in-law.

When my daughter and son-in-law came, they found me lying in the hallway with my head up against the bathroom door frame. I had struck the back of my head/neck on the doorframe. When they tried to help get me up off the floor, and I screamed in pain, we all realized I was really hurt.

At this point, my daughter called the Rescue Squad. When the Rescue Squad arrived, they assessed me taking my medical history and what medications I was taking, etc. They then realized I had hurt my neck and was complaining of back pain. As most of you know, I have had many operations on my back and have lots of hardware back there. They put me in a neck brace and carefully put me on a stretcher and carried me to the squad. All the time, I was crying in extreme pain.

I remember the two squad members in the back with me, talking and trying to calm me down all the way to UVA ER. When we got to the hospital, I was taken back to an exam room. At some point they must have given me some pain medication, because I remember calming down some. Nurses and doctors came in and out doing their evaluations. I remember being taken to X-ray and so many x-rays being taken. Then I was transported back to the exam room in the ER.

By this time, my daughter had gotten to the hospital. I remember a neurosurgeon coming in at some point to talk to us who said that the x-rays showed I had fractured the C1 vertebra in my neck. He told us that Neurosurgery was covering the ER that day, but since I had an extensive surgical history with Orthopedics, I could request them to come see me. Since they knew my surgical history, I asked if they could they come. So Orthopedic Surgery was paged to come see me and it just happened that my orthopedic surgeon was in the hospital that morning.

I remember my doctor and several others coming into the room and talking to each other and then to my daughter. He then said to me "You are so very lucky! Do you know you have fractured the only thing in your back that I haven't operated on. And, most people with this type of a fracture either don't LIVE or they are paralyzed. Also, you didn't damage any of the hardware in your back. You must have a connection or something that GOD really wants or needs you to do!!"

Friday, December 11, 2024

Tightrope

"For we walk by faith, not by sight."
2 Corinthians 5:7

A new year, a fresh start, but life throws us curve balls. We can't see all the blessings and miracles around us, as we balance the tightrope beneath us.

Wondering how much more you can handle because God surely must believe you're stronger than you do. You can't possibly bear anymore. Remembering that God never gives us more than we can handle and never expects us to walk through these valleys alone. He walks them with us.

He gives us dear friends to stand by our side; to carry us, fight for us, hold our hand and pray us through it all, each and every day, when our own faith fails. They're the sweet blessings He gives us.

No matter what, we must stand by a short, but sweet testimony to life. A scripture to carry us, that has always carried me is, "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

As hard as times may be and with all the weight we're made to bear, we have to keep turning it all over to Him. We have to believe there is something good to come from the hardships we've endured. Holding onto hope and faith. Knowing that God always has a much grander plan than we can see. Just lay it all down and remember He's with us through each and every step we take. Being grateful for and knowing that faith is not only what helped us survive, but the very strength that keeps the tightrope from ever breaking beneath us.

The gifts and miracles of life don't just come at Christmas, but every day, all year long. We just have to believe and look around us. Just a few I have found and am so thankful for-Mom's restored health, a new job, friendships which became stronger than before, acts of love that took my breath away. And, a faith that continues to only grow deeper. Just open your eyes, and you will find your beautiful miracles and blessings, too.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for believing in us when we can't believe in ourselves. For always leading us through the toughest waters, only to see the beauty on the other side. Thank you for all that you grace us with, day after day. We pray that we will always live by faith, turn to you and see the blessings around us. It's in your name that we pray, Amen.

Heather Laramy

Saturday, December 12, 2024

Peace and Joy

"The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call out to Him in truth."
Psalm 145:18

In Advent, a time of preparation to anticipate and understand the significance of the birth of Jesus, there is usually a lot of activity. As one of the most impactful and meaningful moments in the church year, we spend time focused on it in many ways. We make special meals, share time together, share our resources with those less fortunate and share gifts with our friends and family. It sounds wonderful and is certainly portrayed that way in the images around us on tv, in movies and on social media. Still, many folks can feel spiritually dry and unconnected – just going through the motions and feeling overwhelmed. Over the years we keep adding "traditions" that we always do. Eventually we might feel a bit guilty that we aren't more "in the spirit" while we work hard to create a special dinner or event. The spiritual good from God feels a long way away and maybe it feels like the Advent Season is asking a lot of us.

One way that we can move around these feelings it to turn toward God in a more purposeful way. It involves not any special activity, reading, book or podcast. Especially when those things seem overwhelming. Turning toward God means to get closer to God. Through our movement toward Him, He promises that He moves toward us. It involves quieting down and seeking God. This can happen anytime and anywhere. You might find a quiet moment in the morning or while driving to work. You might make a special effort to do this while doing a routine activity like folding laundry or doing the dishes. One way I do this is to find a quiet time and focus on my breath. As I breathe in, I am breathing in God and inviting Him into my life. As I breathe out, I am sending that spirit and love to everyone who is on my mind and in my heart at that moment.

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and just feel wide awake. When this happens, I always believe that God is asking me to be with Him. In the peaceful quiet of the night, when all the activities and stresses of the day are laid down, my mind clears and I find the conversation with God is more meaningful and gives me more direction. This is one of the ways that I feel God calls me to "draw near". Even when I don't remember Him, He remembers me. It makes me laugh sometimes because usually when this happens, I truly am very awake and not sleepy at all. I think, "OK God, you got me."

In asking us to "draw near" I feel that God is asking us to experience his love, peace and security - which we need on a daily basis in order to go through the world in the way that best represents Him. Without this touchstone to God, we risk making decisions based on our own preferences, time and feelings instead of what God asks of us. By drawing near to this source of all life, we can have more confidence to face our fears, more compassion and empathy for others and an inner peace which can respect and love people in all walks of our life. In living a life with increasing connectedness to God, we can release many petty desires, hurt feelings and even outcomes we hope for. We can rest in knowing that God is in control and able to take all situations and turn them for good in some way. Leaving expectations to God, brings peace to us and joy when we see his wisdom and work in the world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and desiring to know us. Thank you for sending your Son, who came to understand very specifically what it is like to be in the world. Sometimes we feel so small, lost and overwhelmed that we stop seeking you each day. Help us to overcome that feeling by reaching out to you, knowing that you will reach back to us. We know that you will never leave us alone – you will always be there for us. Amen.

Nancy Black



