

AWAKE AND BE CHANGED

First Christian Church of North Hollywood Elders'
2013 LENTEN MEDITATIONS



FEBRUARY 13, 2013—ASH WEDNESDAY
ROBERT M. BOCK, SENIOR PASTOR
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH *of* NORTH HOLLYWOOD

Dear Family and Friends,

Every year our Elders write two meditation booklets—one for the Season of Advent and one for the Season of Lent. The booklets are written in a form that can be used for daily prayer and meditation each day of the two Seasons. The Advent theme in 2012 was “Awake, You Have a Song to Sing.” The meditations encouraged us to find our own unique “songs” to sing in praise of our God.

The Lenten theme builds on the idea of spiritual alertness—“Stay Awake and Be Changed!” Because of the Lenten Season coming so soon following the conclusion of Advent, our twenty-four Elders have been thinking and praying about this theme since before Christmas. The idea of being awake and “staying awake” is familiar to our Elders. Their terms as Elders have prepared them to be ready at any time to meet the spiritual needs of our church family.

Whether serving at one of the four services of worship each Sunday or serving Holy Communion to a hospital patient during the week, whether standing by their Pastor’s side in ministering to the homeless and grief stricken or helping host a reception following a memorial service, the Elders must always practice the theme of this booklet. They “stay awake” and through their shared ministry they are “changed.” It’s a process that takes common men and women and makes them uncommon servants of Christ and spiritual leaders in Christ’s Church.

Thus the meditations that have been written for this booklet are not written by novices in the world of spiritual journeys. The men and women who serve our church family as Elders are truly “ministers to their Pastors” and “servants to the family of Jesus.” They “walk the walk” as they “talk the talk”!

I know I express the appreciation of every Elder to Dr. Richard Follett who once again served as our Editor-in-Chief and patiently waited the arrival of each meditation. Deep appreciation is also expressed to Terri Burton, our Director of Publicity, for her graphic arts genius and proofreading. Finally, to my Administrative Assistant Diane Hirsch we express our combined appreciation for your “final proofing.”

These booklets are a labor of love, not just for Jesus but for everyone who uses them as a means to draw closer to our Lord through regular prayer and meditation. Read – stay awake – and be change!

Robert M. Bock

FEBRUARY 13, 2013—ASH WEDNESDAY
JUSTIN K. (JAY) ALDRICH

I am not really a betting man, but I know that if you asked 100 people (not our church folks) what Lent is you would probably get 100 different answers. The season of Lent can be confusing if you are not really familiar with scripture or you don't go to church enough. But if you stay awake during the following notes you will be changed for the better—I promise.

Now, pay attention. Lent is the Christian season of preparation before Easter. In Western Christianity, Ash Wednesday marks the first day or the start of the season of Lent, which begins 40 days prior to Easter, and I didn't know that Sundays are not included in the count.

Lent is a time when many Christians prepare for Easter by observing a period of (pay attention now) fasting, repentance, moderation, and spiritual discipline. Now see, don't you feel "changed" already? The main purpose is to set aside time for reflection on Jesus Christ—His suffering and His sacrifice, His life, death, burial, and resurrection.

So, there you have it. This is what Lent is all about and if you practice this observance even just a little I guarantee that you will be changed for the better, better for you personally and better for your church.

God Bless.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS NAVY SEAL IS NOW THE PRESIDENT OF
THE FCCNH BOARD OF DIRECTORS. SO, LISTEN UP!)

FEBRUARY 14, 2013
RICHARD FOLLETT

Each year for Christmas, my good friend Frenchie gives me a daily calendar. Last year, I saved this quotation from Baba Hari Dass: "If a pickpocket meets a Holy Man, he will see only his pockets." It reminds me in a very stark, very negative way of "What you seek, you will find" (see Matthew 7:7).

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Even though we may think we're awake, we might miss the most important events in our lives if we're overly concerned with the mundane, the trivial, the ephemeral—or even if we're looking only through our routine frames of reference (female/male, resident/immigrant, younger/older, straight/gay, Christian/Other, etc.). To be awake is to be open to seeing what's there in front of us through many eyes.

In literary scholarship, we've borrowed a word from the chemists and mathematicians for this process: multivalence. It's a recognition that two people may see the same thing but each will notice something different. Even within ourselves we notice multivalence: the second time we hear a song, read a book, see a movie, and so on, we notice things we didn't catch the first time around. Good art grows as we appreciate it; bad art falls apart. Good, healthy religion grows and nurtures; bad religion smells (and should fall apart).

So, during this season of Lent, are there some things we'd like to take a second, fresh look at? How about rereading the four gospels? (Note: the Gospel of Mark can be recited aloud in about 2 hours, so it can be read in one sitting.) How about noticing some things God has put in front of us that we've been overlooking? How about lifting our eyes off the pockets of the Holy Man and looking into His eyes instead?

FEBRUARY 15, 2013

ANNA SIGALA

When I was 18 years old, I was asked to assist as a translator for *Wheels for Humanity*. The trip was to Baja California to translate for a team of medical providers who donated their time to ones in need. My parent agreed and sent me on this mission. There I was flying on a four passenger plane to Baja. Note: it was my first time flying. We landed on a dirt runway just feet from the clinic where I met the team.

We opened the clinic and started seeing patients. The line was out the door. We saw patients from prenatal to dental care. To my amazement and to others, these patients did not speak any Spanish. The spoke some type of Indian-Mayan dialect. I was still able to assist as best I could. An American family fishing trip was cut short when they were involved in a car accident about a mile up from where we were. The villagers knew to bring the family to our clinic. The father was injured

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very severely and the clinic in seconds turned into a scene from *ER*. Everyone assisted in this man's care, including me. I was able to take orders and do what I could to aid. The clinic was granted permission to transport the father and the doctor to San Diego Hospital. If not for this clinic and the volunteers, this family would probably not have made it.

This was the jump start and love for the medical field I am in now, thanks to *Wheels for Humanity* and First Christian Church.

FEBRUARY 16, 2013 SHERI IZZARD

Any teacher or student can understand what it's like to have an “aha!” moment—that moment when something becomes clear for the first time. You “get” the meaning. These moments can change you. They can alter the way you see things, change what gets your attention, redirect the plans and habits you develop and affect the way you see people and, most of all, yourself.

Jesus knew He needed to go so far as to die on the cross and rise up to awaken us to who He really was/is and to bring us to the consciousness of His Father. It worked. Each of us has been changed as we begin to understand Christ. Even though there is still much mystery for all of us when it comes to how God works, Jesus' life and resurrection has resulted in life changes or guidance for each one of us.

Prayer includes being awake to the spirit of God in yourself. The “aha” moments in your faith can be the best ones of all by reading His Word and praying. Prayer is a way of staying awake to how God works in our lives through his answers to our prayers. To reflect upon your prayers and answers is to grow in understanding of God's work in your life.

May your Lenten Season include prayers that help you to grow and change as a Christian. And may you revisit the realization of the meaning of His death and resurrection in a personal way. Maybe something new will come to your attention. I pray that it will. If it is an “aha moment,” it is a blessing.

Happy Easter.

FEBRUARY 17, 2013

Stay Awake and Be Changed!

SUE MALOTTE

*W*hat a strange title, I thought. As I pondered, I remembered some four years ago when I was approached about being an Elder for a three year term. My first thought was “They either must crazy or they have a lot of faith to ask one in her mid-eighties to serve as an Elder!” My first inclination was to refuse, but I am so glad I didn’t. It was as if they were asking me to “Wake up! You can do this!” It has been a life changing experience.

One of the greatest and unexpected gifts in my life has been serving as an Elder of this church. It has been a gift that has blossomed with time.

In retrospect, I realize that we are asked, as Christians, to imitate Jesus Christ. Such simple words are they but so complex to fulfill. In real life, we tend to exalt ourselves instead of God. I find it deceptively easy to think that because I am a “Christian,” I am a “good person.” Think again, Sue.

It is only when I experience humility that I can feel God’s presence and perhaps in some small way imitate The Christ I wish to serve.

As an Elder, I am surrounded by other Elders who do a better job than I, and I am humbled. They do not judge, and individually they might be as weak as I but collectively a power is generated that releases Jesus’ love for humankind. It is a power that inspires us to be better than we are as individuals. We laugh, we pray, we sometimes get caught up in our emotions and cry. We feel for one another and for those we serve. When one grieves, we all grieve; when one rejoices, we all rejoice. Is this not a way to imitate Christ Jesus? It might seem insignificant and small, but if it is of God, it is good.

As I enter my ninetieth year, I still struggle to be humble. The Elders, as a group, inspire and help me on the path to meet God and Jesus, His Son, my Redeemer.

Thank you, God, for the gift of the collective power of goodness of the Saints around me. They help me stand firm in the faith of Jesus’ and God’s will for my life. I stay awake, and I am changed. Amen.

FEBRUARY 18, 2013
PATSY MEYER KREITLER

*F*or another year, God has blessed me with a view of the ocean and mountains while I write this Lenten meditation. This beautiful view, bonita vista, comes during a time of rest that allows me endless time to spend in His presence. The soundtrack of chirping birds and ocean surf plays a relaxing melody in my soul. I am thinking, “Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.” On this balcony, I feel like I am removed from the world, away from work and everyday worries where I can run into Christ’s waiting, restful arms. Yes, Miss Patsy (preschool music teacher) has on her “listening ears” and is now ready for the two-way conversation with Christ.

While my body and mind are resting, I am even more aware of God’s presence and His gentle nudges, as He awakes my heart and soul. Christ knows I’ve come here to meet Him and be in His presence. He has made me laugh, cry, think too much for a vacation, and has even whispered a thought-provoking question to me for contemplation. I have been invited into a space where my soul can awake and therefore be changed by being in His presence.

During the 40 days of Lent, I encourage you to find a special, restful space and put on your “listening ears” to listen for His still small voice so your heart and soul might be awakened and be changed.

Peace.

FEBRUARY 19, 2013
REV. LOUISE SLOAN GOBEN

*Awake, my soul!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn.
I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.*

*For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens;
your faithfulness extends to the clouds.*

—Psalm 57:8-10

Each morning, Galen and I begin the day by walking the dog. During these winter months, we are bundled against the cold, wearing our warm coats, hats, and gloves. It is still dark out—sometimes the stars wink at us, and the moon is still in the western sky. Sam doesn't seem to mind the cold or the darkness at all. He is filled with the joy and freedom of simply being outdoors.

We walk the short distance to the park. In the dark, the trees resemble giant shadows. I don't know that I would choose to make this trek around the track without Sam as our chaperone. Not that Sam is vicious, just large. He has a big bark and the build of a Shepherd. He's really a mutt. But he is our mutt, our shepherd, our reason for being in the park before dawn!

I have come to love our walks. I have come to enjoy watching the light transform the shadows into trees, large and small. It happens so slowly that I don't notice the transformation until suddenly I am aware that one tree is an elm and another is a jacaranda. Or I see that the leaves are beginning to bud again after the very cold winter we have had. I notice the lawn is greener and the children have begun to return to the playground, a child's carelessly forgotten scooter left at the edge of the swing set. All this awakening happens slowly, outside my awareness, until I notice the details that were hidden in the darkness.

Sometimes my faith is that way too. I know God is real and very much a part of my life and being. But the business of each day can obscure the depth of our relationship until something unique happens that makes me sit up and take notice of the details. This is what the season of Lent is about—sitting up and taking notice of the details—the details of God, the details of what it means to love Jesus and one another—and to walk the path of Grace.

Awake, my soul! Let us awake with the dawning of renewed and strengthened spirit.

FEBRUARY 20, 2013

Stay Awake and Be Changed!

CLAIRE MITCHLLL

*I*t is amazing how these five words have so much meaning, inspiration, insight, and thought. They make you stop and say, “Hmmmmm! These words speak to me in so many ways, but they definitely tell me to be blessed for every day that God has given me and that each day I need to change something in my life to become more Christ-like.” We cannot learn in darkness and fear, just like in order to see we need light, and in order to stay warm we need heat. So to be like Him we must stay awake and be changed.

God knows all about our struggles and what is in our hearts. Every day as we awake we need to stop and give God some time whether it’s for a few minutes or hours. He does not judge us but he does accept us when He knows that we come to Him with sincere hearts and loving peace.

With the recent events in our schools and around the world, staying awake and being changed is necessary. We cannot be going through this world without Him. He is our refuge in the time of storm, our rock, sword, and shield. Always know that God is available and He will always answer the door when we knock.

He doesn’t turn His back on anyone. This is one of the things that I love about Him. He does not JUDGE! He accepts us all. Always know that in order to receive blessings we must give to others. It doesn’t have to be something of great magnitude; it could be a simple “Hello” or “Good Morning.” It is those little things that grow to become BIG things. Always know that God loves you no matter what!

FEBRUARY 21, 2013

Awake... get up and...

RANDY CARVER

- 1) Stay in the “Now” All day,
- 2) Thank God,
- 3) Praise God,
- 4) Pray Without Ceasing,
- 5) Brush your Teeth,
- 6) Wash your Face ... comb your Hair,
- 7) Put on some Clothes,
- 8) Open your Heart,
- 9) Go Smell the Flowers, and
- 10) Greet Your Brand New Day !!!

Read Psalm 100.

FEBRUARY 22, 2013

JUSTIN K. (JAY) ALDRICH

*A*s I sat here trying to get my passages done for the Lenten booklet, I again found myself staring at a blank page until the tragedy of Friday, December 14 hit the airwaves and I thought, “Stay awake and be changed”—and I was!

As I watched the news unfold that terrible day, many things popped into my head, things like oh my God what the parents must be going through and the poor children, what does their future hold and, of course, better gun control in this country.

Schools, especially elementary schools, are meant to be “happy places,” places for making new friends and playing together and learning in fun and new ways. Now look what happened in

picturesque Newton, Conn.

I followed the news as long as I could, then after a number of hours hearing all the details I just couldn't take it anymore. I had to mute the TV and just remain still and silent saying a special prayer for all of those people affected by this tragic incident. The world will be affected by this, not just America; this made news all around the world! How does this make us look as Americans to the rest of the world?

Perhaps the most telling and lasting image appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* Saturday edition in the LATEXTRA section: a picture of an overflowing crowd at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Newton, Conn. Hundreds of people were standing outside for a special healing service for all affected by this tragedy. This image is what we as Christians are all about—in tough or difficult times most of us find solace in our varied faiths. This is what “stay awake and be changed” means to me this year. Families and victims will forever be in our prayers.

FEBRUARY 23, 2013

Questions?

ROGER GONZALEZ-HIBNER

In my last Advent meditation I asked:

Is it that I have the faith to trust unconditionally in Faith?
 Do I make the room to ask of Heaven to fill me?
 Do I listen to the voice of Silence?

Next I suggested a prayer (for me, prayer is a source of unimagined change), so I suggest:

Lord, make me a channel of thy peace
 -that where there is hatred, I may bring love
 -that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness
 -that where there is discord, I may bring harmony
 -that where there is error, I may bring truth

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-that where there is doubt, I may bring faith
-that where there is despair, I may bring hope
-that where there are shadows, I may bring light
-that where there is sadness, I may bring joy.

Lord, grant that I may seek rather
-to comfort, than to be comforted
-to understand, than to be understood
-to love, than to be loved.

For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life.
AMEN

FEBRUARY 24, 2013

ANNA SIGALA

*I*t was Thanksgiving weekend 2007, and we were driving home from a family member's home. My family and I were hit by a drunk driver. My son Aden was 4 weeks old, Alyssa was 4, and Amanda was 10. The driver hit our truck between the driver's and passenger's side going around 80 mph.

I remember everything in slow motion: telling my husband the car was not going to stop, closing my eyes for a short instant, and feeling such an overwhelming calmness around our vehicle. I let everything go and opened my eyes as the truck was rolling over. I managed to free myself, trying not to get cut on all the broken glass around us. My husband and a bystander helped us get our son's car seat removed from the truck and at that moment I remembered my other two children. I quickly looked up and saw them there standing at the corner, blankets around them, water bottles in their hands, and a look of amazement of their faces that we all made it.

The officer met us in the ER, pulled my husband to the side, and told him, "Stories don't end up like this one." We didn't even have a scratch on us. When we got home, we listened to our answering machine and there was one message from Dolly, the children's director at FCCNH at the

time, asking if Aden could partake in the Christmas pageant as baby Jesus.

We were not alone. We had many angels with us that night, and miracles do happen.

That was my awakening!

FEBRUARY 25, 2013

ALISON HAWKINS-KEOGH

Last year, living constantly in the shadowy chaos of imminent eviction, understanding strife and stress on relationships for all of us during difficult times became much clearer. Walking my dogs past many foreclosed homes, as well as encountering families coming to terms in their grief and pure anger with each other, demonstrated that surely through the hardest times everything and anything surfaces like a volcano not only begging the airing but the healing and the mixed anguish can feel like extra salt thrown into a deep wound.

We ourselves sat during the cold snap by a wood fire in coats, hats, and blankets coping by laughing and joking about inside camping, more aware than ever that there were others who had coats, hats, and blankets outside not camping with no fire in sight... and probably not much laughter either.

Lying down in a warm bed... keeping the fear at bay... reciting gritudes in my heart... remembering the meager meals, of the day... but glad of a belly full of carbs none the less.

Fighting for permission to work... knowing that friends known and unknown were also fighting sometimes with so much added heartbreak. Loss of love, loss of loved ones, unpromising medical news, ugly betrayals... and those who were already two layers down and couldn't fight much... for the effort to jump up just one step becomes bigger and more overwhelming the further you go down....

The first waves of massive change came. Wherever we were they came like a tsunami and gave us our own Spiritual one as everything shifted and our faith waited as we had to decide how we would face things: running and blaming, magnifying all that is already tough... or looking up to God... trusting that we could ride this one out... and any that followed.

FEBRUARY 25 — CONTINUED

We do change through difficult times. We stretch and things can never go back. With a deeper view and understanding comes responsibility, something we can either embrace or ignore, calling us to action or living a lie. These are our choices. For in Crisis, truth can be more readily found.

I choose to awaken, Holy Spirit. Changing my heart will change me. My heart is me, the only part that really matters, in any case. I try to remember to dig for more forgiveness, more gratitude, and find possibilities of generosity. That's where the good seeds grow.

The seasons always change,
The oceans always calm,
and so another chapter begins.

The Promise of God—*Never will I leave; never will I forsake*—is echoed by The Promise of Christ, *I am with you always*.

There is one rock that is always dry land... even when the big ones come.

Land ahoy.

By the Grace of God.

FEBRUARY 26, 2013

STEVE JOHNSON

I have been a funeral director for over 36 years now, and in that time, I've seen a lot of changes in the industry from the vehicles we use, the uniforms we wear, the terminology we use, and the buildings we create to serve those who need us and come to us for help.

A funeral director's main goal is to comfort and ease the pain of the person or persons who are suffering the loss of a loved one. This could mean comforting a bunch of people or just a single soul. It can be a very tricky and touchy situation.

With all the new changes and equipment introduced to help deal with families and the fact that years of study have been done to help the funeral director fulfill his goal of being there for the family, sometimes it is a simple thing that means so much to a family or person. It's just the need to

awake and know that the change is in you, not in a book, computer, or training film.

I had just finished a graveside service late one afternoon. Most everyone had left, and I was waiting for the men to arrive to lower the casket. I had noticed a woman a little distance away visiting another graveside, and she had been looking at me several times. When I looked back at her, she would quickly turn away.

So, I walked over to her and, as I gave her a big smile, asked if she needed any help. She said I looked so much like her son, and she looked down at the grave stone. I noticed that he had died young and that he would have been my age. She went on for about five minutes on what a good kid he was and how much she missed him. I just stood there and listened until she finally stopped and apologized for going on and on. I told her that it was okay and how talking helps healing.

Then she asked me if she could have a hug. Without hesitation I said, "Sure." As we hugged, I heard her cry. She then stepped back and thanked me for the hug. She said that I so much reminded her of her son, kind, polite, and well-mannered. She said, "I needed a hug from my son today; thank you for giving that to me."

We parted ways, and I have never seen her again. Yet, because of that meeting, I became changed. You can touch someone's life in a profound way every day if you just slow down and recognize the opportunity. Give someone a hug, give someone hope, and make that change, both in you and in them.

FEBRUARY 27, 2013

Asleep at the Wheel

IRION DEROUEN

Raising four children, for about two decades, I was asleep at the wheel. Oh, I brought my children to Sunday School and taught them what was right and wrong. I taught them to share, be good citizens at school, help those in need, use words instead of hitting, be kind and considerate and value love above all else.

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I practiced what I preached with family, friends and the community at large.

But, my own spiritual journey did not really begin until I was in my forties and had time to think again by myself. I feel sure many other young parents have gone through this; just treading water, making sure everything gets done and basically ignoring or not having time for “what’s it all about?” or “how can I make a difference?” Life changes, life slows down, and you begin to hear that inner voice calling to you.

This Lenten Season, listen to that inner voice. Praise God often. Ponder the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for us. Begin each day with gratitude and attempt to walk in His shoes and speak through His mouth.

Awake and be changed.

FEBRUARY 28, 2013

MICHAEL LEVER

Remember as a child being told to take a nap? Most likely you fussed and fought about it, afraid you might miss something, swearing you were not at all tired. And, even during that time, you tried your hardest to ward off sleep, fidgeting and fuming until surrender. Now, as youth gives way to maturity and the business of life, a time-out sounds heavenly! We know now the value of a few moments away from the noise and bustle to recharge and refresh. It’s understandable that our younger self might not need (or know) to take the time, but our adult mind can recognize the value of a few minutes of shut eye. Our need to “hit the pause button” grows stronger with age.

The same can be said of the Spirit, and the same methods apply. If only for a few moments, stop and be still. Take a short “nap” from the worries of the world and be with God. Let His love flow over you, soothing your heart and your head. Be quiet and listen for Him, knowing He is always near. When you “awake,” you will be changed—revived and refreshed in the light of His presence.

MARCH 1, 2013
REV. GALEN GOBEN

I was standing on a hillside at Forest Lawn at a graveside. The family was playing Elvis Presley's "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" and they were having some trouble getting it started. Soon that music began to come through the boom box and I felt my spirit being comforted by the familiar melody, the words, and the knowledge that the family was being comforted by the presence of the Lord. I was caught up in the song when I began to notice another melody floating in over the hills in Glendale. It took me a moment to figure out that it was coming from outside of the cemetery and that I had heard this music before. It was the electronic, tinkling tune that every ice-cream truck uses to capture your interest and draw you in to buy some ice cream.

Oh, the irony of it all! I was caught between the sublime and the ridiculous. Standing on a beautiful, lush green hillside with a grieving family hearing the words of a well-loved hymn will focus one's attention on ultimate things. And then to have the jangly, jingle of the ice-cream truck snatch that attention and draw one's awareness to other things in life was ironic. And... it is the place where much of life is lived.

Lent provides us the time to recognize that we live between the ridiculous and the sublime. It is ridiculous that the Creator of everything would actually know us as individuals. It is sublime that God not only know us but loves us fiercely and goes to great lengths to capture our attention. It is outrageous that Death in all its forms has no power over us because Life has come out of the Tomb in the Resurrection of Jesus. It is magnificent that there is nothing that we can do to cause God to reject us. It is the place we live, and it is a place full of the presence of God.

MARCH 2, 2013
REV. JEFFERSON BEEKER

A mission team of students experienced the life-changing power of the gospel firsthand when working in a small village in Africa. They were trying to hold a Sunday morning service, but it was too light to show the Jesus film they had brought with them, and no one on the team spoke the local

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dialect anyway. As the villagers gathered, it seemed their grand idea was doomed. What to do? How were they going to reach these people? These students had traveled a long way and now it seemed their mission could be in vain. The students searched for a translator and finally found a young man who spoke English. He agreed to translate, and as a member of the student team shared the message of freedom in Christ, a large crowd began to form and grow.

What the team didn't know was that their translator was a local gangster! And the villagers were actually coming to find out why this hoodlum was talking about God. When the student speaker ended the message with an invitation, the translator added a challenge of his own. "I want all of you to know that I have decided to ask Jesus Christ into my life. I am going to come forward, and I recommend that you do the same."

Seeing God's power to change even a notorious gangster prompted many people to accept Christ that morning. Their unlikely evangelist served as translator for the rest of the team's trip and became a member of a nearby church. The mission trip may have started with one idea in mind, but God seemed to have another idea. The trip was not in vain, but ultimately, through the hand of God, something even greater resulted.

How might God use you today in a way that you never before thought possible? Are you willing to be that unlikely evangelist for another?

MARCH 3, 2013

ADRIAN SPINKS

When I was growing up in West Los Angeles in a neighborhood filled with darkness, all I could do was run the streets searching for things to fill the void in my soul. Listening to bad information killed my spirit and led me into many jails and institutions. I have spent over 25 years of my life in places that would make your skin cringe and I just thought that was what life was all about. The street life is a life filled with illusions and I bought into all of them.

When I came to realize that life was much more than a prison I locked myself up in, things became clearer to me. You see, the book of Timothy talks about the Bible being God's breath to us, and when I started to breathe, His words, my spirit came back to life. Today life is not about the

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streets; it is about becoming the best employee to God, learning not just to seek Him but to build a relationship with Him, and staying awake to be changed for the better.

I know today I am just a child of God and His purpose is for me to walk with a light that attracts the lost with love, no matter who it is. That, to me, is being changed because without the book of Timothy how could I start to breathe?

MARCH 4, 2013

JOSÉ PRETLOW

I met Billy Reid when I was just 15 years old. He was carrying a six-month-old gift he had never used. It was a brand new Spaulding tennis racket that he finally decided to give a try. But Billy also had another gift and this one didn't come out of a box and it wasn't wrapped; deep inside the heart and soul of this lanky kid, God planted a tennis warrior and he was something to behold.

Unlike the rest of us who had endured summers of tennis camps and coaches, without a single lesson Billy stepped onto the court like he already knew the game. In two months he was on par with the rest of us; in three he was better. Billy Reid became so good that people would line the fence around his court like wallpaper just to see him play. I almost had him beaten once, but Billy found something deep inside of him and he won and he made me feel stupid for thinking I could.

I was jealous of Billy and endured three summers of his reign. I wanted him to just go away. I never thought that by the third summer, he would. Billy fell into a bad crowd who told him tennis was a sissy game and that's all it took. Billy was done. I won the park's championship that year and it was the first time I'd won something and not been proud. I knew that trophy belonged to Billy. I spent so much time despising Billy's gift that I had failed to use mine: God's gift of encouragement, support, and praise for others that lives inside each of us. Jesus set the example for each of us during his time here on earth.

I ran into Billy Reid over 15 years later in a mall during one of my trips back home and I finally got a chance to give him my gift. I told him I thought he was the best tennis player I'd ever seen.

MARCH 5, 2013

Change or Stay Behind

REV. ALFREDO GOMEZ

A few years ago I heard a story about a lady who was celebrating her 70th birthday. Her family and friends tried to convince her to have an easier life, not to work anymore and stay home or maybe travel, and rest, enjoy her life, etc. Everybody had something similar to say.

Before the party finished she gathered her family and friends to let them know her plans. She said thank you all for your advice and, yes, I will enjoy my life, I will do and learn new things, such as learn French. Not because I did not have time before, but because every day is a new opportunity to do something different and it is my choice if I stay behind or renew myself every day.

When life is hard and it sometimes looks like there is no solution for our situation, we can trust in the Lord our God for the bible says so:

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness.

The LORD is my portion, says my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.

It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

—Lamentations 3:21-26

In the same way, it is our choice if we change our thinking way and enjoy the blessings that God has for us every day or if we just let these blessings go and stay behind.

May you choose to enjoy the Lord's mercies every morning.

MARCH 6, 2013
CLAIRE MITCHLLL

*F*irst let me give thanks to God and all the wonderful things He has done and blessed me with in my life. It is through this grace and mercy that we are able to praise and get through the trials and tribulations of life. So it is very important to stay awake and be changed.

When we are awake, God gives us strength and insight of things around us to let us know what we need and don't need. It is through His divine intervention that we are able to change and become more like Him. He will never lead us down a road of blindness and darkness.

We learn by the things around us, the people around us, and the situations around us. Sometimes these things are not what I want to deal with but it is a learning lesson from God to show us things like patience, love, understanding, forgiveness, and compassion. We would never grow as individuals if we didn't have these experiences.

Yes, it is easy to ask "Why me" but think about it—"Why not you?" You have to remember that if we want to be Christ-like and live in His ways we'll have to struggle. Look what Jesus experienced for us and He never doubted, second guessed, or let us down. It is so very easy to walk away from difficult, hard, and challenging situations, but the hard part and the learning part is to be strong and work through it. God will never leave your side! He is always there through the storm. He will NEVER, NEVER LEAVE YOU ALONE!

Remember it is through his GRACE and MERCY that he will bring us through. Stay Blessed! In Jesus' name, Amen!

MARCH 7, 2013

In the wee hours of the morning...

CRAIG BROOKS

*A*s I am sure you have surmised by reading the Lenten Meditations in this book, our theme is “Awake and be changed.” Now as a parent of young children the phrase “Awake and be changed” struck me in a completely different way than it probably did for most of our Elders. Diaper duty is what came to my mind! Hearing your child cry in the night and stumbling to their crib to find your little one wet and in need of diaper change is never a pleasant experience but it’s definitely one that helped me understand what it means to be a father. My need for sleep was not nearly as important as my son’s needs. I heard his cry and answered the call.

Being a father has changed me in so many ways. My needs and desires have taken a back seat to the needs and desires of my family. At least I have tried to do that. Being a father has awakened me to a completely different understanding of the sacrifice our Heavenly Father made with his only son, Jesus. I have also come to completely trust that when we cry out in the night He is there to comfort us and protect us. And, like a father, He knows our needs and desires and is there ready to help.

MARCH 8, 2013

BARBARA WILES

In the Blink of an Eye was an ABC News report about drivers who unknowingly dozed off when they were sleep deprived. The statistics are sobering: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that more than 6,000 people are killed every year in vehicle accidents blamed on an exhausted driver being behind the wheel. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* puts an annual dollar figure for workplace accidents associated with sleep deprivation at \$31 billion.

MARCH 8—CONTINUED

When you are very tired, the phenomenon of micro-sleep may cause you to nod off, often without knowing it. It can last for 20-30 seconds and may occur even with your eyes open. I never realized how dangerous driving while fatigued could be until I watched the newsman take the wheel of a car on a test track after being awake for 32 hours. In his mind, he was doing fine. Monitoring devices tracking his eye movement and brain activity proved otherwise. Again and again, his eyes blinked and his brain waves revealed the onset of sleep. In his two hours on the test track, he micro-slept a total of 22 times. He thought he had dozed off only twice.

The Bible asks us, as Christians, to stay spiritually awake. I don't think we intentionally or consciously set out to fall asleep on God. Most of us honestly believe we are being watchful and aware of Him. Is it possible that we are just spiritually complacent and "micro-sleeping"?

Jesus' teaching is wonderfully simple. He asks us to "Stay Awake"—to be alert to God at work and to listen for Him as we go about our daily lives. When we are prayerfully awake to God, it is impossible not to be changed.

MARCH 9, 2013

REV. LOUISE SLOAN GOBEN

Believe in God, believe also in me. — John 14:1

Several years ago I read a book that afforded me one of those "Ah ha!" moments that put so many ideas into perspective. The book is by Karen Armstrong, titled *The Case for God*. It is not as though I felt the need to make a case for God or that my faith was lacking. In seminary however, there is a push for students to develop and be able to articulate a well-reasoned theology about God, Jesus, and the Church. My experience however, is that our faith and our personal experience of the Holy Spirit are not always well-reasoned, well-developed or easily amenable to articulation!

When our young people come forward for baptism, we ask them to affirm the statement, *I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, and I accept him as my Lord and savior. I commit myself to his Gospel of unconditional love.* For those who are coming to the church for membership, we ask that they also assent to this statement. Through the years, a few people have joined the church admitting that they don't always understand what that statement means, so it

would be difficult to affirm it publically.

We understand those misgivings. After all, the walk of faith is a lifetime journey. What we affirm now may be altered through our experience of living.

Armstrong made the case in her book that our word usage and understanding has changed from when the Church first began creating Statements of Faith, or creedal formulas. Take the word believe, for instance. It implies an intellectual assent to a truth or because of certain evidence we may possess. It is an intellectual exercise. But the root of the word believe is *liebe* (German) and *libido* (Latin) meaning to belove or desire, or to hold dear. Our affirmation of faith is that we love and desire to walk in the path of God's unconditional love for us.

It seems to me that Jesus has always called us to love—love God, love him, love one another. Our Christian walk is not so much what we believe about God but how we choose to love.

Ah ha! I get it!

EDITOR'S NOTE: DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS AT 2 A.M. SUNDAY MORNING.

MARCH 10, 2013

RICHARD FOLLETT

In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.—1 Thessalonians 5:18

It was a relaxed Sunday morning, 11/11/12. I had a 15-minute drive to church and 20 minutes to make it, but when I started my car, a low tire warning light came on. Living just a short distance from *Just Tires* in Reseda, I checked the tire, saw it wasn't too low to drive on slowly, and headed over there thinking they'd find a nail in it. However, when I got there, the attendant said it was just a product of a cold weather snap and quickly topped it off to get me going. Now, however, I only had 10 minutes for my drive to church.

The Highway Patrol officer was really surprised when I, driving well above the speed limit, changed lanes directly in front of his motorcycle, thus giving him no real option than to pull me over just before my exit at Laurel Canyon. I didn't argue; I was guilty, though we were both amused that

MARCH 9 — CONTINUED

I was breaking the law to get to choir just a little bit late. (There was no break for a “holy sin.”)

It was a good wake up call, though. There’s no reason to be upset about it, though I had to spend a day in traffic school, and the total cost for the ticket and expenses was over \$400. First, my justification for speeding fell apart. Second, now that I’ve been driving slower for the past two months, my gas mileage has improved 5 to 10 miles per gallon. At that rate, I’ll both obey the law and save money at the same time. So, yes, I’m giving thanks even for a timely speeding ticket.

MARCH 11, 2013

JUDY DAY

*Y*ou probably know I live in the small town of Jackson, California. It is about six and a half hours drive north from Burbank. When we leave Burbank, we are usually heading up the last ten to twelve mile stretch of highway at dusk or full dark. It is not a freeway so I do mean dark. We are tired and anxious to be home and it seems like we will never get there. It is so dark some nights you are not quite sure just where you are.

About two years ago we saw it for the first time. It made us sit up straighter, open our eyes wider, and wake up. It was like a beacon, a sign, a reminder of God’s presence with us guiding us always.

I bet you are wondering what we saw. It’s a star. It’s huge, about two stories tall, maybe more, and it sits at the top of a ridge above Hwy. 88 just outside the small town of Ione. At night, small lights outline it so it glows. During the day, it sits against the sky as a dark outline. It’s there all the time, winter, summer, spring, and fall.

Now we watch for it. It’s our star, our beacon, our guide, a reminder that God is always directing us home, if only we wake up and look.

MARCH 12, 2013

So... love!

ROGER GONZALEZ HIBNER

*A*t times I feel like the prayer I am living by is one colorfully and succinctly shared by Calvin and Hobbes (of cartoon strip fame):

“Know what I pray for?”

“What?”

“The strength to change what I can, the inability to accept what I can’t, and the incapacity to tell the difference...”

“You should lead an interesting life.”

Interesting is a kind word. However, what I strive to live by, and actually pray for, comes from family lessons: faith from my mom and love from my grandma.

At FCCNH, the most beautifully nourishing soil to grow these ideals surrounds us. Inside and outside, the daily life of our Church invites our involvement, invites our commitment to serve that we may try to make the world a little better place.

Stay awake, get involved...and change.

MARCH 13, 2013

MARLA FAIN

I like most types of music, but deep down I’m a rock n’ roller and Bruce Springsteen is a favorite of mine. I’ve followed him for years, am familiar with most of his songs/lyrics, and can say I was pleasantly surprised with his latest CD *Wrecking Ball* because more than ever before Bruce shows us his faith. I chose this song to use in my meditation because the subject is one perhaps we need to be reminded of from time to time.

Land of Hope and Dreams

Well, I will provide for you
And I'll stand by your side
You'll need a good companion now
For this part of the ride
Leave behind your sorrows
Let this day be the last
Tomorrow there'll be sunshine
And all this darkness past

Big wheels roll through fields
Where sunlight streams
Oh meet me in a land of hope and dreams

This train...
Carries saints and sinners
This train...
Carries losers and winners
This train...
Carries whores and gamblers
This train...
Carries lost souls

Said this train...
Dreams will not be thwarted
This train...
Faith will be rewarded

I said this train
Carries broken hearted
This train..
Thieves and sweet souls departed
This train...
Carries fools and kings
This train...
All aboard

MARCH 14, 2013
MICHAEL LEVER

*A*nd do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).

I find particular comfort in this passage of Scripture. It lays out in such simple and beautiful terms one of the most profound aspects of God and His love for us. We have permission to change our world, our lives, our hearts, our minds—anything we see fit—by placing it in God’s hands.

We are not bound by any aspect of our life, for that very life was given to us by God. All we need do is place our faith and trust in Him, fulfilling His will that all we do in His name is good, acceptable, pleasing, and perfect.

As we move into the Lenten season, we look to Christ for inspiration and understanding. He came to earth to exact change, to give us a new way of thinking. He lived His life as the prime example of putting God first. We know now that even in sacrifice when the world is dark and times seem hopeless, we need only turn to God and speak the words as Jesus did: *Thy will be done.*

MARCH 15, 2013

Change... your...
RANDY CARVER

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1) Approach, | 4) Mind, | 7) Prayers, |
| 2) Attitude, | 5) Feelings, | 8) Heart, |
| 3) Socks and Underwear, | 6) Methods, | 9) Direction |

...because God never Changes.

Read Psalm 102:11-28

MARCH 16, 2013
ADRIAN SPINKS

When I sit down and look at how my life has been changed, the first thing that comes to mind is that it was a 12 step program of spiritual principles that awakened my spirit and helped me change. You see, I realize today God has always been with me but I just continued to run the other way because I wanted to live life in a coma.

The principles I now live each day keep me awake, because they are lived from the inside out. I can change the outside with many things, but what has to happen is I must change the inside. The 12 steps opened the door to me accepting Jesus as my savior and 1st John talks about asking God to come into my life and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Change is the hardest thing I had to do. Think of all the times we have judged people by where they come from or how they look. Dr. Martin L. King said, *judge me by the content of my character not the color of my skin*. We often miss that and forget Jesus made us all the same, His children, and we must look at each other as family and build unity in everything we do because that is staying awake and being changed.

I understand more than anything that is my purpose today and I stay awake and am changed because I became an employee of the greatest employer in the world: God.

MARCH 17, 2013
SUE MALOTTE

There is a hymn written many years ago that I find dear to my heart. In one verse, it reminds our souls to awake and sing, to do it for Him who died for us. We are asked to hail Him as our matchless King, through all eternity.

We know that Jesus died for us, and that He was glorified. To me, it is one of the mysteries of life that God gave His Son to die that I might find new life and that eternal. What an awesome

MARCH 17—CONTINUED

thing to do! What a responsibility I have, and I wonder what I can do to ever repay God for such a gift. I am told I should awake and sing! I can only do this when I realize that Jesus was raised to eternal life. In giving His life, we are asked to glorify Him by singing His praises not just with our songs but by living a life that is true to His goodness. In doing this, we spread the good news of God's love for all humankind.

We are called to love Jesus more than idle riches. We are asked to take care of the ill, the poor, the homeless, to feed the hungry, to stand up for the downtrodden, and to remember those who are weary and heavy laden and to help them with their burdens. This will be our joy—to live life as God would have us live.

So, awake and sing God's praises in the doing of these things God wants us to do. You will find you will be changed!

God of all the Universe, lover of all people, guide our lives to seek justice for all on this planet we call home. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

MARCH 18, 2013 CRAIG BROOKS

Change—it's a powerful word. It's something that a lot of us would like in our lives. We make New Year's resolutions with the hope to change. Sometimes we go to the hairdresser or barber shop and get a drastically different look because we want to shake things up.

When I was growing up, my Mom would move the household furniture around once every year. She had to have a change. It made her happy. She loved the feeling of sitting on the couch after my brothers and I moved the furniture and just taking it all in. It was and still is a way that she can recharge her batteries and feel different.

For most of us change is hard. I'm no different. I am set in my ways and find it difficult to really change especially when it comes to bad habits. During this Lenten season, I am going to do my best to find something to change in my life that will make me a better person. Not just for Lent but for good. Not sure what it is yet, but I am excited at the prospect.

MARCH 19, 2013

Awake and Walk Down that Road

IRION DEROUEN

I have traveled a twisted and complicated freeway of life. There have been long stretches of straight roads, divided with treacherous rivers and dangerous underpasses. There has been splendor and there has been decay. I have shaken hands with both demons and angels. I have witnessed horror beyond my imagining and beauty beyond my imagining. I have experienced great joy as well as the depths of despair.

But, while I may have been lonely at times, I was never alone. And I have always treasured hope.

The God that dwells within me keeps me company, keeps my sense of humor intact, keeps me always focused on love and encourages me to keep trying to be the person I want to become.

No, I am not perfect—far from it. I sin. I ask for forgiveness. I say or do something that hurts someone and I apologize and ask for forgiveness.

This freeway of life that I am on is not paved with gold. I stumble, I fall, and I bruise myself. I get up. I continue to strive to be the person He would want me to become.

With great resolve, I begin the Lenten Season with new hope, new awakening, and a new dedication to see the change in me.

MARCH 20, 2013

JUDY DAY

*W*ake-up, wake-up, you'll miss it! But I don't want to. Will my life change if I sleep longer or wake up sooner? What will I miss?

In my case it was turkeys standing on our wrought iron fence and eating out of the bird

MARCH 20 — CONTINUED

feeder. I admit I was fascinated. I sure didn't want to miss it the next time. Up close, they are huge birds with tiny heads and big bodies. They balance precariously on a one inch wide rail, lean out, and eat bird seed. There are dozens of wild ones in our area but that was the first time I had seen one that close. I discovered they are amazing to watch. Did you know when the babies are only a few weeks old they can fly? It's true. I began watching all sorts of other things as well: Quail, Finch, the colors of the oak trees, the change of colors on the hillsides, the frost on the patio rails and the droplets on the weeds, the sunrise through the clouds, and... I could go on and on. I can no longer wait to wake up.

I challenge you:

- Wake up and see the World God has made and be changed
- Wake up and see what God has in store for you today
- Wake up and do something for someone else, make a difference
- Wake up and be energized by God's love to do something new

You will be changed.

MARCH 21, 2013

REV. JEFFERSON BEEKER

Jesus said over and over when he performed a miracle, *You are forgiven*. Forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of ourselves, is key in our healing. Unforgiveness is that which blocks us from receiving the flow of God's Spirit in our lives. Unforgiveness keeps our minds churning in negativity. And all this negativity can only breed more of the same because it's what we are focused upon. What we think about multiplies. If we are to expect healing we have to forgive. Anyone and everyone. Every situation in our lives. People's lives have been changed and dramatic healings have occurred when they've learned to forgive. We unblock. In our prayer and meditation time, ask God to reveal to us all of those we need to forgive, and then, one by one, release all negativity toward that person. That releases the floodgates of God's Spirit. Releasing old thoughts of negativity and replacing them with the presence of God creates miracles. Forgiveness cleanses our emotions. The very word forgiveness means "cleansing."

On the cross, moments away from his most painful death, Jesus said, *Forgive them, for*

MARCH 21—CONTINUED

they know not what they do. How beautiful that in his final moments Jesus would think of others and ask God to forgive them. Can we then do less for those with whom we encounter?

Lent is a wonderful time to release, let go, and unburden ourselves of all that would hold us back from truly experiencing Spirit/God in our lives. Then, on that glorious Easter morning, we are truly open to receive the abundant grace of a loving God.

MARCH 22, 2013

Awake

ANDY HOLMER

I am asleep, he tells everyone. He came to wake me up. They move the stone.

...

Suddenly I'm dreaming. I realize I haven't been dreaming until just now but can't remember why anymore. I am sleeping so deeply that dreams are divorced from my memory. I am in an endless hallway full of footlockers. I run from chest to chest, throwing each one open, searching more and more frantically as I go. Where could I have put my memories? I just had them. They must be around here someplace. I close one more footlocker and look up, ready to run to the next, but the hallway is gone. I look down and the chest has vanished, too. It's bright. Really bright. I've got a terrible headache.

I'm no longer standing. I'm lying down. I try to move, but my stubborn limbs don't respond. A fine time for my body to go on strike, don't you think? Perhaps we need a mediator. I'm willing to negotiate. Paralyzed on my back in a formless universe of nothing but light, I'll consider just about any proposal—within reason.

A noise. It's muffled, but familiar. Repeating. What could possibly be familiar about this place?

A name! It's a name! But whose name? If only I had found my memories.

MARCH 22 — CONTINUED

My body shoots up without my permission. Why am I covered in cloth? My hands finally decide to get in on the action and remove the cloth from my face. Thanks, they must have finished their smoke break. But now it's even brighter than before. I shut my eyes tight to give them time to adjust and notice that the sound is still repeating.

Wait, the sound isn't a name, it's my name. Someone is saying my name!

Lazarus, it says. Come out.

I'm awake.

MARCH 23, 2013

Be Renewed

ANDY HOLMER

Emerging from the cave, I notice that everyone is crying. Even him. What on earth is he doing here? My sisters rush up to me, and tell me that I have been asleep for four days. I start to remember. I was sick. They cannot bring themselves to say it now, but I understand what they mean. I was dead. Four days ago I died.

...

Three weeks later and my whole body still aches. It's a little known fact that resurrection hurts a whole lot more than dying.

Every night I have the same dream. I'm paralyzed in the cave again and I hear him calling out my name. I walk out of the cave, but this time he's by himself. My cheering crowd is nowhere to be found. I tell him that I have been asleep for four days. *No, my friend,* he responds. *You've been asleep much longer than that. It's time to wake up.*

For the first time, I find that I am awake. I perceive now what must have always been—that I am, that everything is, inexorably submerged in God's reality. Or perhaps in the reality of God. A truth as terrifying as it is wonderful.

MARCH 23 — CONTINUED

Some nights I wake from my dream wishing I could just go back to a time when I was asleep. Not the covered-in-cloth-lying-in-a-dark-cave-with-a-giant-stone-in-front-of-it kind of sleep, mind you. I'm glad to wait a while for that. The other almost deeper kind of sleep, though. Sometimes I think it would be nice to go back to a time when I was asleep to the Reality. When I was wonderfully, blissfully ignorant.

But I can't go back. He called my name and I'm not asleep anymore.

I'm awake.

MARCH 24, 2013 — PALM SUNDAY

PATSY MEYER KREITLER

*I*n a book I'm currently reading, *Drawing Near*, the author writes, *Over time I've discovered two major groups within the church.... The first are those who seek Christ for what He can do for them; while the second seek Him for who He is.* Then the author asks, *What group do you see yourself in?*

That one hit me! I imagine over my lifetime, I have viewed God from both perspectives. Even if we start out seeking God for the good He can do in our lives, we can eventually get to an intimate place where we just want to know Him for who He is and not just what He can do for us. I am sure many of us have had friendships that have followed the same progression.

If you see yourself in the first group, know that God actively works in our hearts to transform us into mature believers who long to really know Him in an intimate way. He can actually change our hearts when we desire to know Him more. Draw near to him and he will draw near to you.

When we spend time getting to know the qualities and nature of Christ, we have the opportunity to enjoy the full gift of His relationship with us. Christ's resurrection confirms that Jesus was who He said He was: God's son sent that we might have eternal life. God's fulfilled promise offers us this gift of a relationship with Him, but like any other gift it doesn't become ours until we accept it.

God has provided us with salvation and a way to have relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. It is up to us to wake up and seek Him for who He is, allow the change in our hearts, and accept the most precious gift any one can give us—a relationship with Jesus Christ.

MARCH 25, 2013

JOSÉ PRETLOW

One of my guilty pleasures as a kid was to observe my parents when they didn't know I was looking. I watched the way they talked with each other, I listened to their interactions with family relatives and friends, and I observed how they treated strangers we encountered when we were out socially. I was always comforted by the fact that my parents seemed to be the same people privately that they were publically. There was no difference in the two personas, no aura of phoniness, not a single pretense. My parents were the same people, even when they didn't think anyone was looking.

I always liked that. Their consistent behaviors reinforced in me the manner in which Jesus lived his life. Jesus was consistent in his dealings with people he encountered. He didn't care if you were rich or poor, popular or unpopular. Jesus wasn't swayed by public opinion or perception. He was the same person privately as he was in public.

My comforting respect for my parents and my love for the teaching of our savior remind me daily of the bar that's been set for me in life: to try to portray the same qualities so that my own family and others can see the same consistency that we have all been shown by our savior, Jesus Christ.

MARCH 26, 2013

REV. GALEN GOBEN

When I was in seventh grade, Mrs. Bilger, my amazing choir director, had us start each class with breathing exercises. Working every day at it, I was able to hold a tone for two minutes. It took a lot of practice and a lot of work. I was proud of being able to do that as it was one of the longest in the class. Sadly, age, laziness, and a lack of exercise have changed that, and there are times that it is hard for me to get through a musical phrase.

Josh Elson, our magnificent choir director has very specific ideas about where we can and can't breathe. Sometimes Josh's directions and my lung capacity don't match and I've got to take a breath. That is when I let the rest of the choir sing for me while I take a breath.

MARCH 26 — CONTINUED

Times of sorrow, loss, betrayal, emptiness, restlessness, and fear can make it hard to catch your breath. There is so much that is asked of you, so many things that are requiring your time and attention and so little time to breathe and to fill your lungs with the Spirit of God. That is when you let the rest of the Body of Christ “bear your burdens” as Galatians 5: 22 says. In those times, there is someone else who can hold the note for you, someone else who can hold your faith when it is assailed by doubt and grief, someone else who can breathe for you and offer the prayer for which you wish you had the words. In those times we must let go of our pride, our belief in our own strength, and learn to trust others. We learn to let go and to allow God to support us through their faith and their strength so that the music is still being made in our soul.

MARCH 27, 2013

BARBARA WILES

Stay awake, don't rest your head,
Don't lie down upon your bed,
While the moon drifts in the skies
Stay awake, don't close your eyes.
Though the world is fast asleep,
Though your pillow's soft and deep
You're not sleepy as you seem
Stay awake, don't nod and dream.
Stay awake, don't nod and dream.

Stay Awake— R.M. and R.B. Sherman

Julie Andrews sang this lullaby to her wide-awake young charges in *Mary Poppins*. While they tried hard to stay awake, the soft words and music soon put them to sleep anyway.

Have you ever felt like those children? Try as we might to stay awake, how often in our daily lives do our minds fall asleep to what is happening around us?

How often do we fall asleep to our faith? God asks us to stay awake to the possibilities He might bring our way. Perhaps we hear Him asking us to be wakeful but are lulled by the continuing

MARCH 27—CONTINUED

words and melody of daily living. The Bible admonishes us to *Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all you do be done in love* (2 Corinthians 16:13-14).

We are challenged to be our better selves by staying awake to God's voice. Soon, it will be Easter, a time of hope and new beginnings. It is time to stay awake and find ourselves changed.

MARCH 28, 2013—MAUNDY THURSDAY

SHERI IZZARD

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. . . . Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. —from John 17

We pay attention to God sometimes as a last resort. Things can become so wrong that it becomes time to pay attention to God. This takes mental and spiritual focus, humility, honesty in prayer. John says that while Jesus was praying at a crucial moment, his disciples had trouble staying awake. But someone who was awake heard his most loving and beautiful words.

In his heartfelt and emotional prayer, Jesus stated that he was about to sanctify himself so that we may be sanctified. His prayer for his disciples included all those who would believe in the Father in the future... that means you and me.

The disciples fell asleep while Jesus prayed through the night, but I thank God someone was awake to hear and then record these words, understand them, and pass them on. The comfort in reading them 2000 years later is one of the great blessings of Easter. The comfort of being “in Christ” and He in us and also that we will be with Him in his Glory where He is now is beyond words.

May we all stay awake to our own faith in Him and His Word. Jesus' prayer for us will be answered if we follow Him. May God bless us all.

MARCH 29, 2013—GOOD FRIDAY
STEVE JOHNSON

*A*t times, I have looked back into my past and wished I had handled a certain situation a little differently. And when I do, one common excuse comes to mind: Hindsight is 20/20. That is a short way of saying, “Well, if I’d only known then what I know now, I would have done much better.”

20/20 vision is a wonderful advantage. But if our vision is only clear when looking backwards, we are headed for many regrets. Our need is to see clearly into the future, not so we can predict the future but so we will rightly act with wisdom in the present.

God’s word promises that He has given to everyone perfect 20/20 vision—not in hindsight but in foresight. We must clearly see *that His Divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence* (2 Peter 1:3-4). In other words, our hindsight excuses won’t work.

“But God, I just didn’t see the need to follow all your word.”

“But God, I just thought that church can’t be that important.”

“But God, I thought you’d understand why it’s hard to forgive.”

“But God, I thought believing was all I had to do.”

“But God, I thought you’d want me to enjoy my possessions.”

“But God, I thought it’s okay if I worshipped in my own way.”

God knows how we’ve used, or not used, the 20/20 vision He has given to us in His word.

So, how is your eyesight? Does it need to be corrected? I know my eyes constantly need a check-up. Do you need a check-up, too? May our 20/20 vision of our past cause us to trust the 20/20 vision of everything concerning life and godliness. Then, in foresight, we will see our excellent reward, and we will not have to make or rely on any more excuses.

MARCH 30, 2013
ALISON HAWKINS-KEOGH

When I was young, I really wanted to be somebody... probably because I felt so incredibly insecure. I so desperately wanted to be seen and to count. Failing was not an option, and perfectionism started following me during my young adult life causing so much unnecessary anguish.

Chapters have passed and I certainly can't pretend I haven't had a full range of the human experience. It is quite amazing where this trail has led. Everything has shifted through the years, like they do for us all, from girlhood to young womanhood to now travelling through middle age. I can accept my bad days with more ease and hopefully have learned to forgive others more readily, and, interestingly enough, find I am actually able to forgive myself.

We come into being... letting go and trusting... allowing ourselves to be the God version... the one whom the Spirit flows effortlessly through, without interruption... without stubborn roadblocks. We become this place of the Heart... unencumbered by the ego, the place of Grace, Compassion, Love, and Acceptance, not only for ourselves but for others, a place where bad behavior in others can truly be seen for what it is and can remind us in the empty moments of our own.

More recently I have found myself staring at a particular sign in my mind's eye. Humility—this is the quiet sleeper of a big one, isn't it? It's a deeper surrendering of the self that few people manage but in short bursts.

One good thing about getting older is that you have the advantage of looking back and seeing where the path started, and it kind of builds your faith; I guess I do still want to be somebody:

- somebody who explores and praises God and all that He is all the days of my life
- somebody who lives a useful life that actually adds to this world rather than takes away or settles in apathy
- somebody who loves the people around me and allows herself to be loved by the people around me
- somebody who fights for what is right in this world and can't help but live in deeper gratitude with the passing years

So my whisper in God's ear, this Lenten season for us all as I find His footsteps toward Light, is "Help us all peel away just one more layer... for now... truly awaking ...to The God version of ourselves.....so that we can all be 'somebody,' The Somebody whom Almighty God created."

Walk in Peace.

MARCH 31, 2013—EASTER SUNDAY
ROBERT M. BOCK, SENIOR PASTOR

*F*or the past six weeks our Elders have written daily meditations on the theme *Stay Awake and Be Changed!* The possibility for spiritual growth and change is greater during the Lenten Season than at any other time in the year. During this Holy Season we have had the opportunity to journey with Jesus as He “set His face toward Jerusalem.” From the triumphant entry into the Holy City on Palm Sunday to the Passover Feast in the upper room, from the sleeping disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane to Jesus’ arrest, from Peter’s denial—three times in one night—to Jesus’ trial, from His crucifixion to the borrowed tomb, from the darkness of despair to the sunrise and joy of the resurrection, there is no time in our lives in which we can change more than during Lent.

On Easter we recognize the greatest change imaginable—the change from death to life. The Gospel stories tell us that on that first morning of the week a few of Jesus’ closest friends and family went to the tomb to prepare His body for a proper Jewish burial. When they reached the tomb the giant stone covering the entrance had been rolled away. The Gospel accounts differ in detail but not in conclusion. Jesus was not dead! In fact His dead body, which had been placed in the tomb late Friday afternoon, was gone. Jesus was very much alive, visible, talking, walking, giving instructions, and breaking bread with His disciples.

“Oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting?”

To understand the beauty of those poetic questions we must “Stay Awake.” We do not change when we are sleeping. We do not change when the world is passing us by and we are sitting in a stupor, day dreaming and not paying attention. Change means staying awake, wide awake, with no distractions! The process of change is the process of becoming different. In reality it is becoming new! A new creation in Christ!

The resurrection did not slip quietly by unnoticed. It occurred with a bang. One account says an earthquake so powerful that it moved the enormous stone covering the tomb took place. It may have come in the darkness of night, but it came to awaken the world to the dawn, the eternal dawn of eternal life.

Stay awake—and watch the sun rise. Stay awake—and greet the risen Son!

Pastor Bob



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