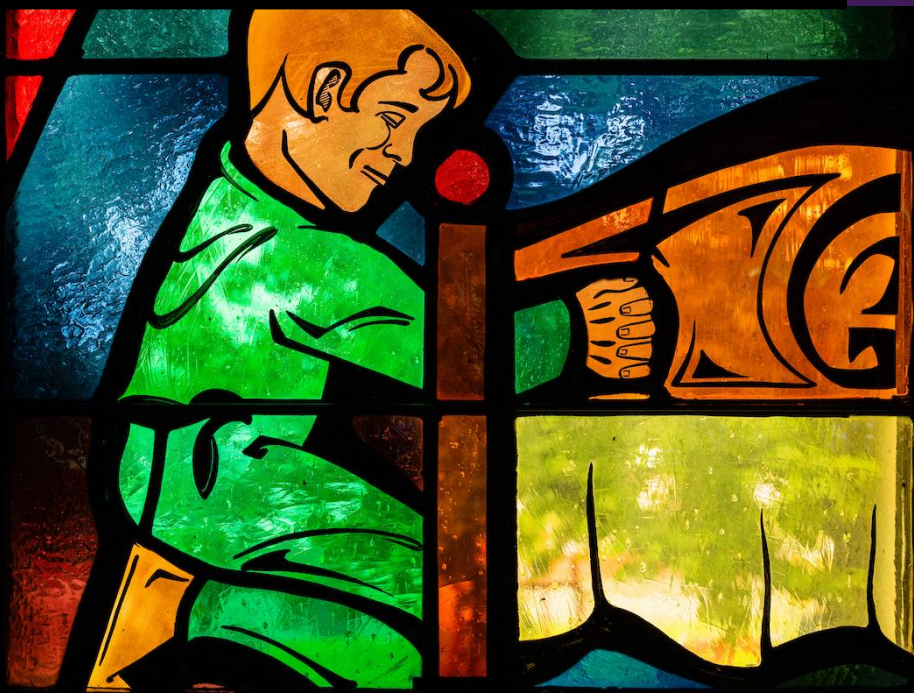


# Pray



Matthew Lorfeld

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# PRAY

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*A Lenten Prayer Devotional for St. John Lutheran Church.*

Grace to you in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

In January our church leadership got together for training and began the first steps toward working on our strategic plan. It was suggested by one of the elders that before everything, that we as a congregation begin with a time of prayer. It is my hope that this little devotional and prayer guide help you to this end. New devotions will be available each Wednesday throughout Lent.

In Christ,

Pastor Matthew Lorfeld



# Ash Wednesday

“... when you pray”

Matthew 6:7-13

Jesus simply assumes that we will pray. For the Christian, prayer is like breathing. It is the daily respiration of Faith. Yet, I have found prayer to be a challenging habit to get in to. Why is this?

The simple answer is sin; my sin, and the sin in the world around me. There are so many things in life vying for my attention; distracting me with worries, with things to covet, with little idols that call out for my worship.

Ash Wednesday begins our Lenten journey. This journey is not only one that goes to the Cross and empty Tomb, but also to the baptismal font. It is there that we are united with Christ in a death like His and in a resurrection like His (Romans 6:3-5). The beginning of this journey we are reminded of our sin and its result: our mortality: “Remember, you are dust, and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19).

Sin isn't some outside force that we can blame though. It is personal. It comes from us, and it comes from our first parents by way of original sin. At its core, sin is idolatry. An idol is something other than the One, True, Triune God that we put our fear, love, and trust in above other things. The heart, as Calvin said, is truly an idol factory.

Instead of ignoring or explaining away our sin, we turn to the Lord in Faith. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Today, your prayer journey starts with repentance. God is faithful and just and has forgiven your sin (1 John 1:9).

# February 15, 2024

## Pray for the Holy Spirit

John 14:15-17; [14:25-27]; 16:13-15

We don't often talk about the Holy Spirit. In part, this is because He is always pointing us to focus on Christ. It is good, however, to remember that Jesus gives the Third Person of the Trinity to us as a gift from the Father.

The Holy Spirit is given to Christians through the Gospel. So we are not praying for something that we lack, rather, we are praying that we would recognize the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, and pray that we would be changed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

We are united with Christ in our Baptism through His incarnation. In Baptism the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the Father and the Son, is given to us and dwells with us (Acts 2:38, 1 Corinthians 6:19).

Jesus attaches promises to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is by the Holy Spirit that we join Jesus in prayer. When Jesus teaches us to pray, He says, "When you pray, say this: Our Father..." The very first word of the Lord's prayer, "Our" means that through the work of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of Jesus Christ, we pray **WITH** Jesus. You are never alone in your prayer.

As the temple of God, you are a holy person. It is in and through your words and deeds that God carries out His heavenly reign. Today pray that the Holy Spirit would change you, that your prayers these next weeks would be joined with Christ, that you would be given the words to speak in prayer and to your neighbor, and that through your words, God's Word would be proclaimed so that others may know Jesus.

# February 16, 2024

## Colossians 1:1-8

### Pray for your congregation.

As members of a local church, we are part of a spiritual family—a community bound together by faith, love, and hope. Just as we lift our personal needs to God, we must also intercede for our congregation. Throughout this devotional series, my hope is that your prayers and your focus turn from inward to outward.

Thank the Lord for the gift of faith. Pray that the gospel continues to touch hearts within our church, leading them to believe in Jesus.

Pray that our congregation remains focused on heavenly treasures rather than fleeting pleasures. Pray that our eyes may be fixed on our hope of everlasting life in Jesus Christ. This hope will sustain us through thick and thin, through peaceful times and in adversity.

Ask God to deepen our love for one another. Sometimes we find this difficult because of past sins and the hurt that results from sin. We will discuss the ministry of reconciliation given to the Church on a later day, but today we set this intention front and center.

Some times I find it useful to simply open our church directory and go down the list. If you know of something in particular to pray for, pray that. If you do not know the person, ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to get to know them. You can even give that person a call and ask how you can pray for them.

Remember, your brothers and sisters in Christ need prayer just as much as you do. Make it a habit to lift our congregation up in prayer. Pray especially for those you may find difficult.

# February 17, 2024

## Hebrews 13:15-18

### Pray for your pastor

It is hard to ask for help. This is just as true for pastors as it is for everyone else. So it is also hard to ask for prayers. Yet, in numerous places in the New Testament, the Apostles ask the Church to pray for them (Romans 15:30, Ephesians 6:19, Colossians 4:3, 2 Thessalonians 3:1). It is with this example, that I ask you today to pray for your pastor.

First, pray that our pastor remains rooted in God's Word. May he draw strength from the Scriptures, finding wisdom to lead with discernment. As he prepares sermons, may the Holy Spirit guide his thoughts and words.

Pray for his spiritual health. Our pastor faces battles unseen—the spiritual warfare that rages against God's work. May he stay connected to the Vine, bearing fruit even in challenging seasons.

Pray for his family. Pray for their unity, joy, and protection. Ask God to grant them quality time together, shielding them from burnout and discouragement.

**Courage and Boldness:** Our pastor stands at the crossroads of truth and culture. Pray that he boldly proclaims the gospel, unafraid of opposition. May he be a beacon of light, unwavering in his commitment to Christ.

**Encouragement:** Reach out to him with words of appreciation. Let him know that his labor is not in vain. A simple note or a heartfelt conversation can uplift his spirit. And above all, pray for him consistently.

Remember, our pastor carries burdens we may never fully comprehend. His heart beats for the flock, and his knees bend in prayer for us. Let us reciprocate by lifting him before the throne of grace, knowing that our prayers make a difference.

# February 18, 2024

## Pray to be delivered from temptation – Matthew 6:13

We are taught in the Small Catechism that when we pray, “lead us not into temptation” that God tempts no one, but that in praying this we ask “that God would guard and keep us so that he devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.”

Often, we think of temptation only in terms of behavior. Scripture teaches us that there is much more to temptation. False belief, which comes from false doctrine, drives us away from God and the assurance of our salvation. This then leads to despair. When we think, “woe is me,” we are forgetting to trust in the Lord.

Our faith is grounded in the teaching that in His incarnation, Jesus assumed all that there is to be a human. He faced the devil's temptation in the wilderness. Yet, where we fail, Christ has overcome. His obedience to God and His not falling into temptation is imputed to you and is yours.

Not only that, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, as a new person in Christ, Jesus has given you a way of escape: “No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Today, pray for the strength to resist temptation and give thanks for the forgiveness that you have received in Christ who has perfectly resisted temptation for you.



# February 19, 2024

## Pray for your work – 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

One summer break when I was a Seminary Student, I attended a retreat at a Lutheran Monastery in Oxford, Michigan. A Lutheran Monastery you say? That seems like a bit of a contradiction. Luther and our Lutheran confessions sure have a lot to say about monasticism, especially about vows and the false idea that there is certain work that is more holy than others. The monks at this monastery tried to keep what was good, but leaving out that which was contrary to Scripture.

The day at St. Augustine's House Lutheran Monastery was one of prayer and work. Throughout the day, seven times, in fact, we would gather in the chapel for prayer, hearing God's Word, singing, and preaching. Some services were only a few minutes long, others were almost an hour. What struck me was how work was placed in the context of prayer and prayer in the context of work.

In prayer, we would be drawn outside of our self-centeredness as we prayed for the sick, the poor, the lonely, those who lead, our friends, and even our enemies. We would ask that God would bless our neighbor through the work that we do. In this way, as Luther wrote:

The prince should think: Christ has served me and made everything to follow him; therefore, I should also serve my neighbor, protect him and everything that belongs to him. That is why God has given me this office, and I have it that I might serve him...The same is true for shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor. When a Christian does not serve the other, God is not present; that is not Christian living.

Today pray for your work. Whether that is your paid occupation, or whatever task the Lord sets your hands to do, that you may serve your neighbor in love.

# February 20, 2024

## Pray for your neighborhood – Luke 7:1-10

“And who is my neighbor?” the rich man replied, seeking to justify himself (Luke 10:29). Jesus proceeds to answer this question by telling the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. In it, the one who proved to be the neighbor was the one who showed mercy.

Unlike the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan regarded the man who had been robbed, beaten, and left for dead as his neighbor. Simply put, the neighbor is someone that God puts into your life.

Somehow, I think we have forgotten that our actual neighbor, the person that lives in close proximity to us, is also our neighbor. 23 years ago, Robert Putnam authored a book called “Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community.” In it, Putnam shows how we have become increasingly disconnected from one another and our communities. This was true, 23 years ago, it is even more true in this post-“social distancing” world. Many of us, can’t even name our neighbors.

It's time we change that. Prayer is essential to this task. If you know your neighbors, that is wonderful. Pray for them, by name. If you don't, I'm not going to ask that you go door to door introducing yourself (though that's not a terrible idea). Start with simply praying for your neighborhood. When you go for a walk in the community, pray for the people at each household. God the Holy Spirit knows their needs. Pray that they would come to know Jesus and know Him even more. If walking isn't your thing, go for a drive and pray as you go.

# February 21, 2024

## 1 Timothy 2:1-2

### Pray for the leaders of this community

When we think of politics, we often think about the things we see on national news: the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court. We will focus our prayer on these on a later day. Today, I'd like you to focus your prayer on those who lead in this community.

These are not all political positions, but many are. Examples of our community leaders are our township and county boards, school principals and superintendents, school boards, judges

The more local a leader is, the more their policies and decisions affect your daily life. Sometimes we agree with these policies and decisions, sometimes we don't. Our community leaders need your prayers.

St. Peter directs Christians: "Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good." - 1 Peter 2:13-14

St. Paul urges young pastor Timothy to instruct Christians that: "petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." - 1 Timothy 2:1-2

Today pray for the leaders in our community who make, administer, and judge our laws.