

These devotions were written by the good people of Northwoods United Methodist Church. We hope our words help you draw closer to God.

If you want to experience God in a community of grace and find love and peace, you are welcome at Northwoods United Methodist Church.



LIGHT AND DARKNESS

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:4-5)

Years ago my family went on a caving expedition. I was excited to explore a cave that was less traveled, knowing that it would create some challenges as we maneuvered throughout its channels. We were outfitted with all the appropriate safety gear, to include head lamps for adequate lighting. At various places throughout the cave and network of channels, we found tight quarters which revealed deep crevices. Everywhere was extreme darkness, except for the light from our lamps. At one point, as we reached deep into the depths of the cave, our guide directed us to turn off our lamps so we could get a sense of the darkness. The darkness we encountered was complete blackness. I could not see anything, not even my hand as I lifted it to my face. The blackness engulfed me like a heavy shroud. Almost as though it was to consume me. I was relieved when the guide directed us to turn on our lights. I was able to see again – I felt alive. I had not been consumed by the darkness.

Sometimes the world and our lives seem like the cave's darkness. At times we can't find our way through the caves of our existence as we maneuver the challenges of the world. We feel the darkness surround us in our fear, worry, sickness, and difficulties – almost as if it were to consume us. In times like those, we should always remember that Christ is with us – like a head lamp – providing us with life giving light. The world's darkness cannot comprehend this, but we can when we have faith and trust in our Lord. Come out from the darkness and into the light - Live again!!

Prayer -

Lord, You are a loving God - shining with a life giving light. Take away my darkness. Help me to see your light. Let your light permeate every part of me to comfort me and give me peace. Help me to also shine your light onto others. I want to live again in freedom from darkness and trust in you. Thank you for love and light!

Amen





A merciful god

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger forever. (Ps 103: 8-9)

I have done things in my life that I am ashamed of. My thoughts and actions do not always reflect God. This is the case with all of us. God's expectations for us are high, but we sometimes fail him. We may not help someone in need that we have the capacity to help. Our thoughts and actions betray us as we get caught up in the world's priorities (greed, lust, gossip, etc.). We treat someone badly or speak of them harshly. We make judgements when we shouldn't. We think of ourselves, rather than others. All of these things keep us apart from God. As I consider the things I have done in light of this verse, I am comforted to know that God's mercy abounds - He forgives me. He sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins, which serves as a further example of his mercy and grace. God is patient with us, as he waits for us to come to him. God loves us. God loves you!!! He wants you close to him. He is waiting to show you his mercy and love.

Prayer -

Lord, I know your mercy has no limits. Thank you for your patience with me. I am sorry for those times I have failed to live by your standards. Guide me to do better. Help me to be gracious and merciful to others as you are to me.

Amen

DON'T WORRY – BE PEACEFUL

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-8)

Sometimes we are overwhelmed by the friction that life can create. Every day seems to bring new issues to be addressed. With these problems comes the advent of worry and stress. At times our minds take over and conjure up scenarios which cause these concerns to grow further, until we find ourselves on the verge of a self-made crisis. Sometimes the crisis is not fabricated, but real, but concern for things beyond our control causes additional complications, even physical sickness. We worry about our children, relationships, work related problems, personal security, identity theft - on-and-on go the concerns.

At these times, we should take comfort in knowing that God is willing to relieve us of our worries, if we only ask him and trust him. He is ready to listen. If we have faith that he will work for our good than we can enjoy a peace that only he can provide through his son Jesus Christ. If we further focus on our blessings and give thanks, we'll find our worries will not take hold. This goes against the logic of the world, and our desire for control, but the promise is that such a faith in Jesus will guard our hearts and minds.

Prayer -

Lord, Thank you for the many blessings you have given me. Please take my worries and help me to be peaceful - I trust you with them. Guide me in my actions and protect my heart and mind. Give me the strength to focus on Jesus.

Amen



GOD WORKS IN YOU

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputing. (Phil 2:13-14)

Sometimes I find that as I am asked or volunteer to do various things at work, home and church, that I do so with a reluctant attitude, or I may not participate at all. I may also grudgingly participate because I feel pressured to do so. My heart isn't in the endeavor. As a result, I'm not working for God to do his pleasure.

This usually results in my attitude bursting out with negative comments and remarks that are designed to undermine the initiative that I do not agree with. My pride may be blocking the endeavor as I would rather others follow my idea, believing it to be the correct route, rather than going with the decision laid before me. In so doing, I may speak badly of the initiative, idea, or persons – ultimately portraying a poor attitude. My additional friction and strife doesn't help – it hurts. When I stop and think on it, my selfishness is revealed.

God challenges us to work without complaining and to work together. If we do so, all eventually works to please God and the results are good for us. The task becomes pleasurable and not drudgery. When we focus our thoughts on him and his goodness, and not on our selfishness and negativity, then our inner adverse thoughts have no room to grow. The potential to grumble and argue goes away.

God's challenge refers to *doing all things* in this manner. Always do his good pleasure and bask in his will – let God work in you!!!

Prayer -

Lord, Forgive me for those times that I grumble and complain. Help me to focus on your will and please you in all I do. Make me a positive example for others and a positive contributor to your will. Thank you for the chance to do your good pleasure. Work in me Lord!!!!

Amen



God's Good Creation

*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.
(Genesis 1:31a)*

There have been times in my life when I have not done the right thing or my performance on a specific task has not been up to standard. Those times have resulted in me usually thinking negatively about myself. At these times, I've wondered how God, or anyone else, could love me. Although sin should be something we guard against and regret, those memories should not be debilitating or continue to keep us down. We are God's good creation. He has created each of us and knows each of us, and sees us as a valuable part of his creation. When God looks at us, he sees the good he created in us.

We should not let our mistakes keep us down. We should be lifted up by God's love and grace and move forward. When you feel less than God's good creation, remember that he sees you through his loving eyes. Indeed, creating you was very good!!

Prayer -

Lord, I am your creation. When you made me you saw good. Help me to guard my heart against persistent negative thoughts about myself and to remember that you love me. Forgive me of my shortcomings and keep me moving forward toward the things you would have me do.

Amen!



TRANSFORMED, BUT NOT CONFORMED

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

It is easy to get wrapped up into the world and what it offers and exposes us to. It is the tangible and concrete part of our existence, so it can be hard to ignore or keep in its place. As such, the world can carry us away into its many temptations and distractions. We can find ourselves embroiled in earthly issues that take us away from God and our faith. We can guard against this by keeping our minds trained on God and his will for us.

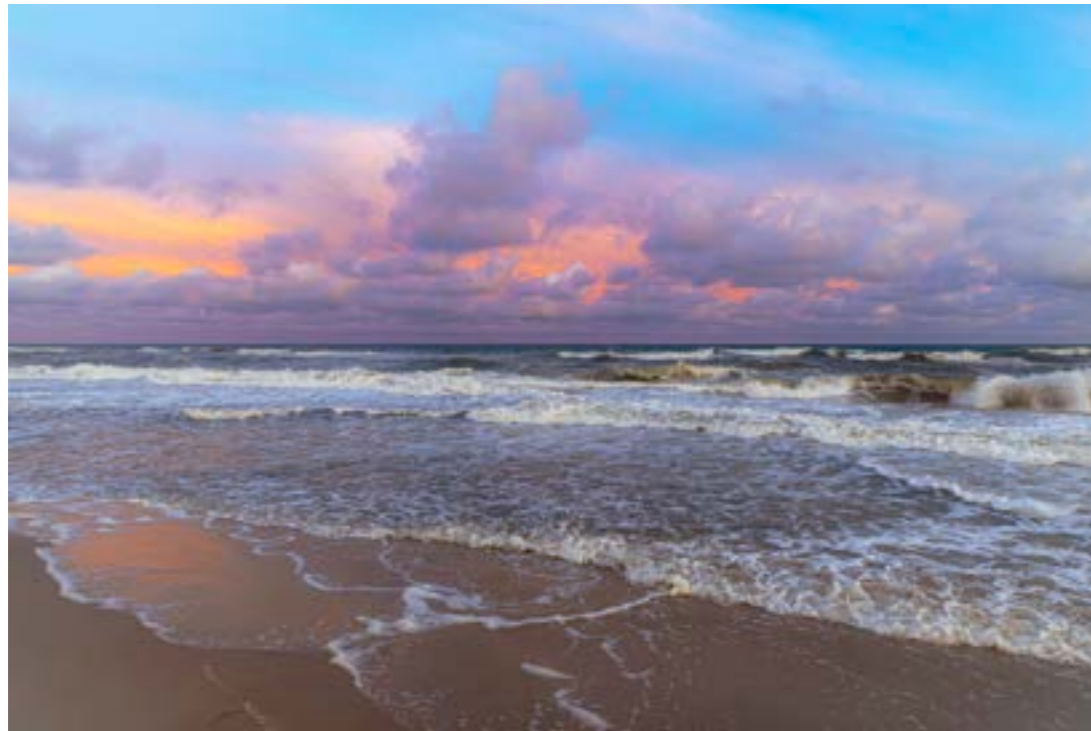
Engaging in prayer, Bible study, worship, and Christian community can combat those things that want to tear us away from God, focusing our minds on what is good, acceptable and perfect. To do so will lead to habitually sound decisions and thoughts – a transformation of our minds. In all things we should critically discern what we think God's will is – testing the many situations and decisions we must make against God's truth.

As you transform your mind you will conform, not to the world, but to God's plan for your life. This is the ultimate goal for all of us. Remember as you live on and walk the earth, do so with a Christ-like mind guiding your steps. In doing this, you will realize God's plan – that which is good, acceptable and perfect.

Prayer -

Lord, Help me to discern your plan and will for my life, and then keep my mind on it. Give me the strength to overcome the temptations of the world that would carry me away from you. I want to see what is good, acceptable and perfect in from you in my life.

Amen



Right vs evil

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12: 17-18)



I was in a movie theater waiting for my son to see a movie. I was confronted by an irrational man that accused me of stealing money from him. Before I knew it, he hit me in the forehead. I tried to talk rationally to him and settle him down, but as I did, he hit me again. Eventually, the movie theater called the police and he was taken away, leaving me with a bruised head. Initially I had thought about returning his strike with one of my own, but something inside me kept me calm. I knew something was not right with the man, and he needed help. I did not want to make the situation worse. I chose right at that moment over evil. I chose peace. This is not to say that defending ourselves is always wrong; however, the situation only impacted me and retaliation was unnecessary. I was not severely hurt in the end.

It seems everywhere we turn we are confronted with choices to make. Do we do what is right, or do we follow the world in rationalizing decisions based upon the situation? Situational ethics seems to be the default solution. In such situations we may often find ourselves even seeking revenge or making a decision that is slanted more towards the evil side of the spectrum rather than the good. In the end, such decisions are focused on us rather than the welfare of others. God expects us to always do good and make peace with everyone.

Prayer -

Lord, I am often tempted to seek revenge and not love. Please forgive me for those times and help me to live at peace with everyone. Help me to be loving to all and to not seek revenge on those who wrong me. Help me to discern what is right and keep me focused on you and doing right.

Amen



John 13:34-35 “I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.” CEB

Every October for the last 20 years, our church has been unloading semitruck loads of pumpkins, gourds, Indian corn etc...

We come together early in the morning or late afternoon, spend 4 or 5 hours working together, laughing, sweating, telling jokes, getting dirty and tired...together. Elderly people, children, men, women, teenagers, military, civilian, people of various ethnic classes, social classes, together! A bystander once said we look like a big, happy family!

The first year when we were deciding if we wanted to do a pumpkin patch we thought it would be too much work and almost decided against having a pumpkin patch. Now, we look forward to it with great anticipation and are eager to do the work together.

We have been humbled and amazed at how the work of the pumpkin patch brings us together and connects us with our community. Even more important is our work with God and as we love one another we can accomplish more than a pumpkin patch, we can touch lives with God's love. We pray as you come to the patch you can feel our love for one another and for you. We also pray as you read these devotions you can experience God's love too!



Proverbs 3:3

Look at all the pumpkins! In the next day's hundreds of people will come to the patch and get pumpkins. A week or so from now, hundreds of pumpkins will be gone...and you will hardly be able to tell it! The pallets will look just as full. But be assured, many pumpkins will be gone. Sometimes we see so much strife...so much evil: ISIS, Ebola, weather extremes, political ads that are not even half truths. We will think that the good things we do mean so little. We will think that our small deeds of love and kindness will mean nothing. But Proverbs tells us, "Don't lose your grip on love and loyalty...earn a reputation for living well in God's eyes and in the eyes of the people." Keep on doing your good work. It matters. Yes, it matters!

PURPOSE IN CREATION

Gen 1:1



My favorite hobby is woodworking. I enjoy making many things out of wood and using various tools. As I shape and cut wood and glue and fasten it to make things, I do so knowing everything I make has a purpose. Some things are pieces of furniture or simply things to enjoy for decoration, but everything is meant to do something. Occasionally, I also use my woodworking gifts to fix wooden items.

As I work with wood I am reminded of the creation story in Genesis. God created everything - He is the master creator!!! He made each of us with a purpose and from time to time, as I do with wood, he can also fix us if we are broken.

Like me, as I finish a project with great care, sanding and staining it and applying the final finish, God is finishing us each and every day. If we listen to him and seek him he will refine us and make us complete. His grace and love for us covers our sins and makes us clean, just as I do the defects in my wood projects.

God created you with a purpose. He will reveal it, and finish you if you open up to him. If you don't know him, talk to him today and realize your purpose.



As a young man with opportunity, I repeatedly made choices which resulted in diminishing possibilities and a lack of hope. By the grace of God, my despair, coupled with a willingness born of desperation, led me to a spiritual path, which in short saved my life.

In reflection today, I know God has always been with me. My life today is full of people who care to help others, expecting nothing in return. I am blessed to be surrounded by those who yearn to know God, by those who want to do God's will. Today there is hope, meaning, and love. Today I want to do God's will,

Thank God!

Psalm 147:4



Have you noticed that, like snowflakes, no two pumpkins are exactly alike? In an age of mass productions, we want things to be the same. Grocery stores, chain restaurants, car makers, retail outlets work very hard to ensure that their food, cars, clothes, designs will all be uniform. You can walk into a McDonalds in California and the burger will taste exactly the same as the one in Maine. It's important that every link of the chain gives the customer the same atmosphere and experience. It's marketing. The customer will go to certain places because he or she knows what's there.

As much as we like things to be the same, nature creates no two people, trees, or pumpkins just alike. God insists on individuality. The church continues to bring different people into the same community of faith, looking our differences as opportunities to be united in Christ. Different pumpkins make a beautiful patch. Different people make a beautiful community. Different souls make a beautiful church. If you're not part of a church, you're most welcome to try ours!

O God, help us to celebrate our differences rather than to qualify them. Amen.



Proverbs [3:13-14](#)

A pumpkin begins...as a flower, like all fruit. But the most beautiful flower will not give birth to a pumpkin unless it is pollinated. Pollination occurs when pollen is transferred from the male part of a flower (the stamen) to the female part (the carpel). This is most often done by bees but it can be done by wind or by water.

Our lives are beautiful. No matter what our circumstances, life can be beautiful in its own way. But to truly have a life that produces good things, we should have that divine spark that turns beauty into goodness... or, in the case of the pumpkin flower, into fruit. The influence of the Christian faith into life has always brought love, peace, and progress.

Life is beautiful. A life of faith becomes, then, more than beautiful. Make your life beautiful with wisdom and knowledge...and then see the fruit it produces.

O God of life and love, make us thankful, hopeful, and – in our own ways – beautiful. Amen.



Romans 12:17 "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone." CEB

One of the questions people ask about the pumpkin patch is "What about theft and vandalism?" In ten years of doing the pumpkin patch, very seldom has this happened. First of all, it's no fun to throw a pumpkin unless you're part of the "punkin' chunkin'" contest that airs on Thanksgiving Day! Secondly, no one really wants to steal from a church and, besides, you steal stuff so you can re-sell it. No one puts a pumpkin under their coat and says, "Pssst! Have I got a deal for you!" Pumpkins don't resonate evil. In fact, the only part of God's created order that resonates evil is the human! But, in the grand scheme, we resonate far more love and peace and harmony than we do evil. Evil is never far away. But love is always...always closer.

O God, help us to see the goodness of living in harmony every day. Amen.



FEAR

Early in our married life my husband was going to be away at OCS for six weeks in the summer. As the time grew closer I became anxious because I did not want to be alone. We had a three month old baby, but that was not the same. I was afraid to be alone especially at night.

During the daylight hours was fine but when the sun went down my mind could conjure up all kinds of scary scenarios to the point I could not sleep. Knowing this could not go on for six weeks I turned to the Psalms for comfort. I read psalms 56:3 "whenever I'm afraid I put my trust in you--in God, whose word I praise. I trust in God; I won't be afraid.

What can mere flesh do to me?" Then again in verse 11 "I trust in God; I won't be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" First I am afraid and then I trust in God. When I trust in God then I will not be afraid. I read those verses every night, committed them to memory and every time I felt fear welling up inside me I would quote those verses.

I was able to make it through those six weeks, sleep well, enjoy time with our son and wait for the days to pass until my husband returned. The following summer he went again, and in our military career there were numerous occasions he had to leave and I was alone. I relied on God and those verses then and even to this day "I trust in God, I will not be afraid."



SEE ALL THE PEOPLE

I enjoy walking. I try to walk everyday for exercise. When I walk on the beach I love to look for seashells. I have spent numerous hours looking for "perfect" seashells. Whole sand dollars, unbroken whelks, the coveted scotch bonnet. I have baskets in my house full of perfect shells.

On one occasion my family was in Myrtle Beach for a wedding.

This particular morning I walked on the beach merely for exercise. I glanced at the shells but today was not for shell hunting it was for burning calories. Besides, those shells were mostly broken, small, imperfect pieces and I did not have time to stop and look for shells. They crunched under my feet as I walked. I trudged ahead for two miles and turned around to head back.

On my way back I looked at the people on the beach. People of all ages, shapes, and sizes. My mind went back to the small, broken, imperfect, seashells. We're there "small" people in my life that I had "stepped" on? Were there broken people that I had ignored? Were there imperfect people that I had passed by?

That morning I did get my exercise and a valuable lesson, 'Lord, open my eyes and my heart, help me to really see the people that cross my path. The neighbors, coworkers, friends, family.

Help me to always share your love.' Amen

Power of Words (James 3:1-12)

V for Vendetta is a dystopian film where a masked vigilante, V, fights against a totalitarian regime in futuristic Britain. Through acts of rebellion, he seeks to inspire citizens to rise up for freedom – to challenge oppression and tyranny.

In V for Vendetta, V says, "Words offer the means to meaning, and for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth."

This line powerfully echoes the sentiment of James 3:1-12, which speaks to the immense influence our words hold.

James compares the tongue to a bit in a horse's mouth or a rudder that steers a ship—small things that control great power. Our words, like the actions of V, can build up or tear down, inspire or destroy.

James warns us that the tongue, though small, can be as dangerous as a spark that sets an entire forest ablaze – it is the strongest muscle in the human body. How many times have careless or hurtful words escalated into conflict or caused deep personal pain? On the other hand, words of truth, justice, and love—spoken with care—can change lives, heal hearts, and spark revolutions of kindness and compassion.

In the film, V's words, spoken with conviction, ignite a movement for change. Similarly, James reminds us that as believers, we are responsible for using our words wisely. We should speak in ways that bring life, not destruction. Just as V carefully chooses his words to challenge oppression and spark hope, we too are called to use our words to build up, encourage, and speak truth in love.

As you reflect on James 3:1-12, consider the power of your own words. How can you use them to bring healing instead of harm? How can you ignite positive change in your world through the gift of language? Remember, your words have the power to bless or curse—choose to bless.

Prayer:

Lord,

Help me to use my words wisely and for good.

Let my speech reflect Your love and truth,

Bringing light and healing to those around me.

Amen.

Understanding Beyond Words (Isaiah 55:8-9)

The movie Arrival follows linguist Louise Banks as she is recruited to communicate with mysterious alien visitors. Through learning their complex language, she uncovers a non-linear perception of time, gaining profound insights into life, choice, and destiny. The film explores themes of communication, humanity, and the nature of time.

In Arrival, Banks is tasked with communicating with an alien species that perceives time differently. As she learns their language, she begins to see life in a new, non-linear way, realizing that understanding and communication go far beyond words. This idea mirrors the deep truth in Isaiah 55:8-9 (NRSV): "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Just as Louise is challenged to step outside her human understanding, we are invited to trust in God's higher ways and thoughts. So often, we try to understand life, suffering, and even God Himself through our limited perspective. Like Louise, who initially sees time as linear and unchangeable, we often feel confined by what we think we know. Yet, as Arrival shows, true understanding requires openness, patience, and a willingness to see beyond the obvious. Isaiah reminds us that God's ways transcend our human logic. We may not always understand why certain things happen or why we are called to walk certain paths, but we are invited to trust in the One whose wisdom surpasses ours.

Louise's journey of discovery, learning to embrace a new perception of time and life, reflects our own spiritual journey. We are called to release control and trust that God sees the bigger picture. As we learn to surrender our limited understanding to God's infinite wisdom, we, too, can begin to see life with new eyes.

Prayer:

Lord,

Help me to trust in Your higher ways and thoughts.

Open my heart to understanding beyond my own,

And grant me peace in the knowledge

That You hold the bigger picture.

Amen.