



**“May you live in interesting times.”**

You may have heard the above quote and thought, “I would rather have life be a little more uninteresting!” Certainly 2020 may have been a bit too interesting for most if not all of us. Will 2021 be better? How can we approach the new year with any kind of confidence?

Perhaps the following verses, found with the help of a trusty concordance, will be encouraging. They are listed under the corresponding thoughts / topics.

**Forgetting the past.** A year is full of mistakes, lost opportunities, errors of judgment, and numerous “I should have, I could have, and I would have.” But we can’t do much about the past and it is not productive to dwell on it.

Paul writes in Philippians #:13-14: “...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are left behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

**Remember God’s care and provision.** While we can leave our own mistakes in the dustbin of 2020, we should still remind ourselves of what God has done.

Psalm 105:5: “Remember His marvelous works that He hath done; His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth.”

Psalm 108:2: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”

Psalm 68:19: “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.

**A spiritual check-up.** The beginning of a new year is a good time for a “spiritual exam.” Some questions to consider: How is my relationship with Jesus? Am I closer to Him now than in the past? What might I do in the coming year to strengthen my faith?

Lamentations 3:40: “Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord.”

Psalm 26:2: “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.”

**A spirit of thankfulness.** It is easy to thank the Lord when everything is going well, but what happens when a loved one dies? A job is lost? A Covid lockdown occurs? We can still be thankful for God’s great gift of His son and the salvation available to us through His sacrifice on the cross.

Colossians 2: 6-7: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”

**Prayer.** Let us unite together and make a commitment to pray for each other in 2021!!

Luke 18:1: “And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.”



## The Handsaker's are having a baby

In lieu of a baby shower, We are going to shower them in diapers.

### A Covid -19 Diaper Shower

Starting January 10th, if you would like to join us,  
a playpen will be in the narthex to collect the Diapers or Baby Wipes  
**Diapers of any size, and or fragrance free baby wipes**

**Monday, January 18, 9 to 4 PM Mercy Mat making class**

**Come any time, stay for lunch, ( bring a bag lunch)**

The mats provide a comfortable cushion for homeless people to place blankets or sleeping bags on, they will be given to the Chum Program.

**Questions? Or if you would like to start making them on your own before the scheduled class Please see Brenda Alanen.**

*All are welcome to join us, your help is needed.*

*To make a mat or help by getting bags ready for crafters.*



**Wee Care Sewers meet the first Thursday of the month 9:00 am**

**Questions? Please see Kathy Mohler**

**WMF Ladies Bible Study Guides are available in the office.**

**They meet the last Thursday of the month, 1:30 pm**

**Questions? See Janet Johnson**

**Annual Reports Due - January 31**

# From the Pastor's Desk

## How were your returns this year?

By Pr. David Handsaker

It is almost impossible to avoid financial news in our society. Some people love to watch the markets, to try and pick the winning stocks. Others are interested in the stock market only insofar as their retirement accounts are tied to it and they are carefully planning for retirement. Still others, view all things market related as undecipherable gibberish, instead choosing to hire a profession to manage any retirement planning they engage in.

Whichever category you fall in with regards to you finances, there are returns that you should follow closely. How have your spiritual returns been this year? As believers we long to see those long-term gains that have made the stock market one of the most significant wealth creating vehicles in the history of mankind. We know that we have spiritual dips and bumps along the way. The stock market had its plunge this past spring and the recession of 2008 and we realize that our spiritual life has these moments as well. Times in our lives where we fall into sin and we may become quite entangled with it. However long or short these times are we can look back and see God's grace carrying us through them. Every believer longs for continued growth in sanctification. We long to be rid of our sinful nature. To serve God without the weight of sin. In short, we place our trust in the upward trend. We can see the results of the upward trend in the saints who have gone before us, who have mentored us, and who have taught us. We see how their lives have become conformed to Christ. Perfection was never reached in this life, but even so, we long for the upward trend. The recovering alcoholic who hasn't touched a drink in 20 years. The man whose temper threatened to tear apart his marriage, who now loves to serve his wife in humility. God's grace changes us. How do your returns look this year? Another year of the upward trend or a year wasted on negative returns?

As much as we long for the upward trend in our sanctification we must also not fall victim to the idea that our spiritual returns will carry us into earthly retirement. That the upward trend will eventually carry us to a point where we no longer have to fear spiritual poverty or bankruptcy. It is easy for us to reject the teaching of total sanctification, the teaching that we can get to a point in which we will no longer sin here on earth, yet we are often fall to despair when the truth that we confess plays out in our lives. We confess that we will never be rid of sin in this life and then are tempted to despair when we find that we have sinned again.

The life of a believer is filled with spiritual highs. Mountaintop experiences. For me, the biggest tops have been at retreats and conferences such as the Free Lutheran Youth (FLY) Convention. These spiritual highs are times of great learning and spiritual refreshment. They come in every size, from the mountaintop variety to the speed bump. They can spring from deep intakes of God's word, such as a conference, and these spiritual highs can come from even the tiniest interaction with God's grace. But we confess that the Christian life is not lived solely on the mountain tops. The Christian life is also lived in the deep valleys of our sin. Times when we are tempted to look back at our mountaintops and feel the despair of having lost it all. Economists and sociologists who have studied the interaction between the unemployment rate and suicides have found the two to be closely linked. Losing a job or of facing economic ruin will always tempt us to despair. A despair that some fall victim to.



When we find ourselves in the valley of sin and look back to the mountaintops in our life the devil whispers to you “you’ve lost it all, give up, you’ll never get that intimacy with God back, or it’s not worth the effort to climb back up there.” In that same place God stands beside you with the cross. Inviting you to confess your failures that brought you down from the mountain or plunging off the cliff and to receive forgiveness.

The graph of a believer’s life is one which will have mountain tops and it will also have many times when the line returns to zero. Spiritual poverty is unavoidable in this life. Never look lightly on your sin, but also never despair in the valley. The cross of Christ is on the mountain tops of life and also right there in the valleys. God’s grace only ever comes to those who come to him with nothing. Those who come looking for mercy for the first time, for the millionth time, and every time in between. So do not despair in what you have lost. God’s grace is the only way to reach the heights of Heaven, and it comes to the believer equally on the spiritual mountain and in the valley of sin. It comes from the riches of Christ’s grace.

We look for spiritual returns as God’s grace changes our hearts and helps us to see sin as vile as God does. Seeing the truth makes it possible to live the upward trend in this life. Equally true is the fact that your sin will drag you off your mountaintops and back into the valley. You do not need a mountaintop to please God, Jesus provides freely that which you cannot. Pay attention to your returns. Strive to be rid of the sin that so easily entangles us in this life, but do not despair when find yourself in spiritual poverty again at the foot of the cross. God loves the believer’s good works. He loves to see the upward trend in your life, but God saves because of the riches of mercy available to us at the cross for the sake of Jesus.

*"The LORD BLESS you and KEEP you;  
the LORD make his face SHINE on you  
and be GRACIOUS to you;  
the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you PEACE."  
NUMBERS 6:24-26*

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