



**God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Psalm 46:1**

These short devotions were written by Rev. Jeff Harter as a series aired on Facebook during the 2020 Covid-19 crisis. To view videos, produced by CID, corresponding to each devotion, go to www.youtube.com, search CID-LCMS and look for “Chaplain’s Corner” playlist. A link is also provided following each devotion for corresponding video.

May you find in them peace, strength, meaning, confidence, and hope from our ever-present almighty and all-loving God.

To God be the glory!

1. Little Things Aren't Always Little Things
Read Matthew 6:25-34.

Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

"That's no big deal," someone might say when we have lost something that others may consider insignificant. Yet, many of the little things we have grown accustomed to are big deals when they are gone. These may be intangible things such as companionship, independence, or a sense of security and safety. These little things may include the ability to be with loved ones, or to worship and commune with fellow believers. It is natural and normal to feel sad, frustrated, or angry when things are gone. We may feel the need to treasure little things such as mementoes or photographs of loved ones from whom we are separated.

As some of life's little blessings are taken away, we may realize God is teaching us that we don't necessarily need all we want, and that his blessings should never be taken for granted. We can be comforted in knowing that God will give us all we need when we put him first. Besides food, clothing, shelter, love, and medicine, he gives us things that we might have previously considered little. These include cards, letters, telephones, internet, TV, and radio that enable us to stay connected with others as well as be informed and entertained.

When we are able to come together as families, friends, and congregations, we may recall how God cared for us even as we missed those little things. And we may be moved to thank God for his big and little blessings every day.

[LIHP Video 1](#)

2. A Hope That Does Not Disappoint

Read Romans 5:1-5

Romans 5:2,5: “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

Most of our hopes are contingent upon things beyond our control. We may have become acutely aware of this because of our current situation. Our hopes and plans have been interrupted or made impossible. We can’t attend family gatherings, weddings, church services, or even funerals. Our sense of security and safety may feel threatened. We may feel disappointed, frustrated, resentful, and even afraid when we realize that our situation is out of our control.

At times such as this we can thank God that there is one hope which is completely out of our control. That is our hope of salvation in Christ. If our salvation were in our control and up to our own efforts or merit, we would be lost. For then our hope would be based on what we can do.

Praise God that our hope of salvation and eternal life is based on what Christ has already done. He died and rose for us. Jesus said, “It is finished.” Not only is God’s work of redemption complete, but his gracious promises made in the past remain sure in the future. Nothing can cause God to break his promises to provide for us, to forgive us, and to one day bring us to himself in heaven. Our certain hope in Christ will never disappoint.

[LIHP Video 2](#)

3. Blessed Through Mourning

Read Matthew 5:1-12

Matthew 5:4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

I once knew an auto mechanic who refused to cry following the death of his wife. For weeks he was stuck, with his emotions trapped within. Then I noticed one week that he was a different man. I asked him about it. He told me that he had been trying to loosen a rusty bolt. After numerous attempts, he shot it with some WD-40 and then came back to it after the oil had worked for a while. Finally it came loose. When it did, he began to cry. After crying for at least 30 minutes he realized that his tears had done the same for him that the WD-40 had done for the bolt. He could now move forward in his grief. From then on he called tears God’s WD-40 for the soul.

Our tears are a God-given stress reliever not only at times of great loss, but also when we feel overwhelmed with exhaustion, frustration, loneliness, or sadness. After my grandmother cried, she would often say she had a “good cry.” She understood the value of tears. Jesus understands it even better than she did. Hebrews 5:7 tells us that Jesus “*offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears*”.

We need to express all of our emotions honestly to God in prayers, petitions, and even with tears. And we need to share our feelings with others. We can trust that God hears our cries and empathizes with us no matter what we are experiencing. And he responds by giving us comfort, hope, and resources of support.

[LIHP Video 3](#)

4. Bereavement is not a Problem, but a Process **Read Psalm 13**

Psalm 13:2: “How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?”

In Psalm 13:1-2 David boldly expresses that God seems indifferent to his plight. He doesn't attempt to hide his feelings of despair and frustration. In the final verses of the psalm he expresses a joyful anticipation of his deliverance, and a realization that God had been caring for him even in his darkest hours.

Psalm 13 reflects the natural bereavement process when we feel overwhelmed with sadness or frustration due to loss, disappointment, or difficult change. Bereavement includes grief, which is what's happening to us, as well as mourning, which is how we respond and move forward. Bereavement is not a problem to get over. It is a process that we must go through. Allowing ourselves to grieve and mourn is not a sin or a sign of weakness. God already knows what we are experiencing. It makes no sense to try to hide our feelings from him. If we are honest in our prayers to God and in our conversations with others, God will help us find joy, hope, and meaning in any situation.

The Psalmist asks, “How long is this going to last?” The answer is different for each person and each circumstance. A better question is, “How can I utilize available resources and support?” We will find hope, joy, and meaning in life and in death when we allow ourselves to grieve, and as we make use of our God-given resources and support.

[LIHP Video 4](#)

5. Jesus Wept. We Can Too
Read John 11:17-44

John 11:35: “Jesus wept.”

“You shouldn’t cry. You should be happy that your loved one is in heaven.” That is the message that many Christians receive when a loved one has died. That statement isn’t often helpful, for it is only partially true. Jesus wept, even though he knew that in a few minutes he would raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus’ tears give us permission to cry when a loved one has died even though we know that person is in heaven.

We don’t weep for the person who died and has gone to heaven. Rather, we grieve because we have been separated from that special person. After I did the funeral for a faithful lady, her eight-year old granddaughter came up to me and said, “Heaven must be a beautiful place. But I think there is one thing wrong with it: you have to leave to get there.” The words of this child reflect the feeling of many grieving people.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with heaven. But, death brings pain and sorrow into the lives of those who must remain behind. Jesus agrees that separation due to death is wrong. That’s why he came to defeat death. Our tears do not express hopelessness and despair. Jesus’ death and resurrection give us comfort and hope. Because of Jesus, we have the certain hope that we shall one day be with him and with all the saints, including those loved ones whose death brings tears to our eyes now.

[LIHP Video 5](#)

6. Keeping the Children Close to Jesus

Read Mark 10:13-16

Mark 10:14: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Young children find comfort and meaning in consistency and predictability. They may become frightened when their routines, environment, or the people near them change. They may fear that they themselves did something to cause a person to be sick or absent. They may fear that something bad will happen to them or to the people they love. Even if they don't experience the change, they will likely be acutely aware of the anxiety or fear in people near them.

Attempting to shield children from change or loss is normally counterproductive. When lacking appropriate explanations, they will often imagine scenarios that are more frightening than reality. They need comfort and assurance from loved ones. Use age appropriate language, avoiding abstract language or euphemisms. Answer their questions simply and succinctly as they are asked and when they are asked. Children tend to express their grief behaviorally. So anticipate some acting out or regression to outgrown behaviors.

Most importantly, help them to focus on things that are not changing. They are still loved. There will always be people to care for them. And God never changes. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Jesus loves them and has power to protect them. Jesus will watch over loved ones who must be away for a time. And if someone dies, Jesus will carry them to heaven. Nothing can happen to them or their world that Jesus can't handle.

[LIHP Video 6](#)

7. God is in Control

Read Isaiah 55:8-9

Romans 8:28: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Due to our sinful nature, we want to believe we are in control of our lives, our environment, and our destiny. We even try to control other people. When we lose that sense of control we become anxious, afraid, or angry. And we blame others or even God for our problems and pains.

How do we avoid anger, anxiety, fear, and resentment when our sense of security and safety is threatened? We must accept that we are never in control. We can't control the weather, world events, or other people. We can't change the fact that there is sickness and death in our fallen world. We can't change the fact that we and those we love will die.

But our lack of control doesn't mean that we are helpless or hopeless. Our powerful and loving God is in control. He will work in every situation for the benefit of his children who accept two truths: 1) that he wants the best for those who love him; and 2) that he desires to work his will through us.

When we accept these truths, we feel less need for control. We can trust that He who turned Good Friday into Easter will work through any dark and difficult situation to bring about something good. No situation is hopeless. And when God works in us and through us, we are never helpless.

[LIHP Video 7](#)

8. Finding Hope in the Valley of Shadows **Read Psalm 139:1-12**

Psalm 23:4: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.”

We refer to uncertain and frightening times as “dark times.” We don’t like to be in the dark, for it implies uncertainty, doom, and death. We feel vulnerable in the darkness. We prefer to stay in the light. But we can’t, for we live in a dark and fallen world.

We take comfort in knowing that God sees in the dark. Psalm 139 tells us that darkness and the light are both alike to God. We don’t have to see in the dark, because God sees us and sees everything around us. We walk by faith, not by sight. While we are in the darkness we can trust that God may have brought us into the darkness to offer us a time for reflection, repentance, or fervent prayer. He may be working in the darkness to help us grow, or to prepare us for something great.

God doesn’t promise to deliver us from every pain or loss. But he does promise to remain with us always. By faith, we can sense the rod and staff of our loving Shepherd. The rod and staff are God’s Word that guides us, protects us, and delivers us from evil. We can know that God will bring us through the dark times into times of light and joy. And someday he will bring us to the perfect light of heaven.

[LIHP Video 8](#)

9. God's Enduring Presence

Read Psalm 46

Psalm 46:1-2a: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear."

A crisis can be described as a threatening or frightening situation in which our normal support, resources, and coping skills are unavailable or ineffective. We may feel alone, threatened, vulnerable, confused, hopeless, and helpless. Currently some of us may be in crisis as we struggle to find a sense of meaning and normalcy in a seemingly meaningless and abnormal situation.

There are two things we can do when we are in crisis. We can think back to previous difficult or threatening situations and consider how we got through them. Then we can see if the same strategies might help us in the present situation. Secondly, we can reach out to someone. Just knowing we are not alone can help us to move beyond a crisis and empower us to deal effectively with the situation.

God is always present to help us do both of these things. We can remember how God has brought us through previous difficult or painful situations. We can turn to him at any time by praying and reading the Bible. Through his Word and prayer, God offers us peace, hope, forgiveness, strength, direction, and courage.

And God offers us support and resources through others. We may be physically separated from one another, but we are not alone. Through the blessings of social media, we can reach out to people who care. And they can reach out to us.

[LIHP Video 9](#)

**10. Depending on His Strength
 Read Isaiah 40:28-31**

Ephesians 6:10: “Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might.”

We like to think that we are self-sufficient and can take care of ourselves. But that is seldom the case. There are many instances in which my strength is insufficient. I have no power over the weather or world affairs. As hard as I may try, I can't change other people. I make plans and promises, but because of circumstances beyond my control I can't always carry them out. I can't change the fact that I occasionally suffer illness and injury, and that I will someday die. I am reminded by many of life's situations that I need God.

Every day I thank God for his strength. His strength gives me courage to face any situation with confidence. By his strength I can forgive past failures of mine and of others. By the strength of Christ, who rose from death, I can even face death with the certain hope of eternal life.

When our strength fails us, we can thank God. For it is only then that we seek God's strength. When our strength fails, his prevails! God enables us to keep it together even if the world seems to be falling apart. I had a college professor who said, “When the whole world seems to be against you, if God is on your side, you are in the majority.” I thank God for my weaknesses. For, as St. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:10, “When I am weak, then I am strong.”

[LIHP Video 10](#)

**11. Why is only the First Question
Read Ephesians 1:3-14.**

Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

“Why is this happening to me?” is a question we ask when we are suffering pain or loss. There is nothing wrong with asking this question. Even Jesus asked “Why” from the cross. Jesus knew the answer: So we can know that God is always with us and loves us unconditionally.

But getting stuck on “Why?” is counterproductive as it leads us to look backwards with regret, disappointment, frustration, and despair. To move forward, we must ask three other questions: How, what, and where.

The first question we ask of God is: “How are you going to get me through this situation?” By his wisdom, God has allowed us to be in the situation. We must trust that he has power to bring us through it.

The second question we prayerfully ask is: “What do you want me to learn or to do?” God has a purpose for every situation. And he has the power to work in that situation for our benefit or for the benefit of others.

The third question we ask is: “Where do you want me to go from here?” It is said that growth always happens outside the comfort zone. We can trust that by his grace, God will bring us forward from any situation with a renewed sense of meaning, purpose, and hope. And he will lead us in a positive direction.

[LIHP Video 11](#)

12. Safe in the Boat with Jesus
Read Matthew 9:23-27

Matthew 9:26: “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”

“We are all in the same boat” is a statement we might make when we and those with us are experience some difficulty. Jesus and his disciples were literally all in the same boat during a sudden storm on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were understandably afraid. But Jesus was sleeping peacefully in the midst of the storm.

It would seem that Jesus was contradicting God’s promise in Psalm 121 that he will never slumber nor sleep. But that is not so. Jesus was teaching his disciples that as long as they were in the boat with Jesus, they were safe. The boat may be rocked and tossed by the waves and even take on water. But as long as Jesus was in it, it would not sink.

During our painful and frightening times, we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus is in the same boat with us. He understands what we are going through. He knows how often we are hit by the turbulent waves of sickness and injury, of pain and loss, and of death. He knows that we need his assurances.

Jesus’ slumber reminds us of God’s promise in Psalm 4:8 “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” With Jesus nearby, nothing can pull us into the sea of despair or take us away from him. Death itself can’t sink us. For Jesus conquered death and has given us life now and forever in him.

[LIHP Video 12](#)

13. Keeping our Focus
Read Matthew 14:22-33

Matthew 14:30: “When he saw the wind, he was afraid.”

It is important that we keep our focus while we drive. Even a momentary distraction can result in tragedy. We must also keep our focus as we experience problems, difficulties, pain, or loss.

Jesus’ disciple, Peter, discovered this as he walked on the stormy sea toward Jesus. As long as he focused on Jesus he remained on top of the waves and was safe. But when he focused on the storm he began to sink into the turbulent waters. Yet, even as he was sinking, when he again focused on Jesus, our Lord lifted him up and saved him.

The storms of life come in many forms: finances, health, world problems, family and relationships, loss, and death. It is easy to focus on these storms. We need to be aware of them, and of the destruction they can bring into our lives. But, if we focus only on our problems, we will quickly sink into despair as they overwhelm us.

Our focus must remain on Jesus. He can keep us from sinking into the waves of bitterness, resentment, shame, or hopelessness. Sometimes he stills the storm by solving the problem or giving us the means to do so. Sometimes he allows the storm to rage on while he stills our troubled hearts with his words of comfort, peace, and hope. In either case, we can be certain that he can keep us above the waves throughout the storm. If we do start to sink, Jesus will graciously lift us up and hold us close to himself.

[LIHP Video 13](#)

**14. Whose fault is this?
Read Lamentations 3:19-26**

Lamentations 3:33: “He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”

When we are hurting, we often feel the need to blame someone. We might blame the doctors or nurses, the government, law enforcement, family or friends, or strangers. Sometimes we blame ourselves. “How could I be so foolish as to let this happen?” And just as often, we blame God. “How could God do this to me?”

It doesn't always help to place blame. But if we feel the need to, we can blame our very first parents, Adam and Eve. Their sin brought pain, illness, chaos, destruction, and death into the world. God is not happy about this. And he doesn't like it when we suffer. So he did something about it.

He promised that he would always love us, care for us, and never abandon us. He promised to use our misfortunes for our good. Most of all, he promised to come to us physically and fix the mess that mankind had brought upon the world.

Through Jesus, God keeps his promises. Jesus said in John 16:33, “In this world you will have troubles. But take courage. I have overcome the world.” Jesus died and rose so we could have comfort, meaning, forgiveness, peace, strength, and hope in every situation. St. Paul tells us in Romans 8:37 that in everything “we are more than conquerors.” By God's mercy, we can endure and overcome anything. And no matter what misfortunes come upon us, we can always look forward to better things.

[LIHP Video 14](#)

15. Jesus Comes Back for Us
John 20:19-29

John 20:26: “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.””

Poor Thomas. He’s been singled out as the doubter. That’s not fair. All the disciples doubted Christ’s resurrection until they saw him. I think Thomas expressed a defiant doubt because he was upset. He may have thought that, if Jesus did rise, then he missed out on the greatest event since creation. No one likes to miss out on something joyful or exciting, or to feel left out.

On Easter we celebrated that Jesus is alive. Yet, we sometimes doubt him and question whether he is with us, aware of our situation, or even cares. This is especially true when we suffer pain or loss.

Through Thomas Jesus teaches us that he doesn’t want to leave any of his beloved children behind. He is always near. He is aware of our situation and hears our cries. He forgives us for our doubt and defiance. He comforts us in our trials. He works in all situations to bring about something good for us or for others.

No matter what is happening in our lives, Jesus gives us the peace of knowing that he cares for us and will never leave us nor forsake us. And when death takes us from this world, Jesus will come back for us to carry us to heaven where we will enjoy his peace that is now beyond our comprehension.

[LIHP Video 15](#)