

Preface

I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. *Psalm 9:1*

At Christmas we celebrate the wonder of God showing up two thousand years ago as a tiny baby. We also celebrate the wonder of God's presence with us now. This devotional is written by people from Glenkirk sharing how they have seen God's presence in their lives this past year. The stories illustrate the love, joy, peace, and hope that God offers each one of us this Christmas. It is my hope that the stories shared in the following pages will help you encounter the living God and encourage you to share your story.

I want to thank those who contributed to this work. I appreciate their willingness to share God's presence in whatever circumstances they encountered this past year. Not all of the stories have endings, and yet God was and is still present. I hope you will join me in waiting expectantly for God's continued work in their lives and in ours.

And may God's presence fill you with wonder this Christmas.

Pastor Adam Donner

Sunday, Nov 29 Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!" *Psalm 66:2-3*

The experience for me of seeing God at work was the miracle of my sister's survival from several hours of blood clots stopping her heart and clogging the ventilator. The medical team acknowledging that a miracle had taken place in her recovery during the night was just awesome. An immediate response from me that my church was praying for her was received by the medical team with a positive nod of affirmation. Even though my sister and her family are not believers, this testimony of prayer and faith of others is evident.

In addition, when it became known that only a stem cell infusion would correct her condition, it was determined that my other sister was an excellent match as the stem cell donor. The infusion process has taken place, and her body is accepting the new stem cells at a wonderful rate. God has provided so much--when will she acknowledge His love for her?

Barbara Sykes

Monday, Nov 30

He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. *Psalm 18:16*

The last three years have been extremely traumatic with a series of health issues in my family. Once we regained our composure and thought we may get a reprieve from the emotional roller-coaster, my then 4 ½ year old son was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia on Valentine’s Day 2009. His initial diagnosis was not good – “*IF* he makes it through the weekend...” is the phrase that resonates through my mind every day. I crumbled at the thought of that statement. *IF* - what a horrible word.

As I sat sobbing, I felt a heavy hand touch my shoulder, just as a father would rest his hand to calm a child; so I looked up to see who was there, expecting to see my Grandfather. I looked around--no one was there. *No one...* It was that moment that I realized it was God telling me that everything would be fine. Zacky would be fine, whatever the outcome. A feeling of instant calm fell over me, and I knew everything was going to work out and that God had His plan.

Our apartment flooded two days after the diagnosis, and we were told by the doctor that we had to move out because mold could cause complications with my son’s treatments. Talk about testing faith... But the flood was our new beginning.

We moved in with my grandparents who watched Zacky while he was unable to attend school; and I was able to continue to work so I could keep the insurance. My son is flying through the treatments with no problems and my oldest son is doing amazingly well being the protective big brother. In September I was able to purchase a condo for the three of us. I have had a tremendous outpouring of support from co-workers, family and friends in the way of blood donations, offers of help and shoulders to help me bear the weight. I’ve been blessed with dear friends volunteering their time, skills and labor to help me with remodeling the condo so it’s a clean, healthy environment for us, especially my son. As I take a step back from the last three years and look at the circle of people that have voluntarily stepped up to support me and my children through this amazingly difficult time, I can’t help but feel the grace of God working through each and every one of them every day of my life. I thank God for the tests of faith... It has only made my faith stronger.

Kristen Sillett

Tuesday, Dec 1

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. *Psalm 103:8*

I have always been raised up in a Christian home. I strived for the “right thing” to do. I would act nice, try not to lie, and do what I was told; but I never realized how much more there was in life. So at the age of 12 I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and I would never be the same. However, every now and then I find myself wondering what my life would be like and how I would cope with obstacles without God by my side.

In the past year I have struggled with keeping trust in people. I found it easy to be filled with anger and hate towards them, but it took every ounce of spiritual and emotional strength I had to forgive them. I repeatedly questioned my faith in God, and on occasion I even asked myself if there was a God. I was angry and upset and had no room in my heart to love. There were times where I would break down and surrender to God, but then there were times where no communication with God existed. I did find comfort from my sisters and cousins telling me that they were always going to back me up. But with them off to college now and me having no one else to rely on, God turned my focus back where it belongs – on Him. I re-prioritized my life, and I was able to get back on track with God; and that led me to find the strength to forgive those who had wronged me.

I now know that I can always trust in God and lean on Him when all seems lost. As I look back on this experience, I realize that God never left me; and He used this experience to shape who I am today.

Paige Ferrari

Wednesday, Dec 2

This is what God the LORD says—he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it. *Isaiah 42:5*

A single breath is all it took to create the world of the living around us. I have come to understand that the Lord would like me to ponder the depth of His power which created the air we breathe.

The moment we wake up and take the first breath of air for the day's journey, the moment we tensely hold our breath in anticipation of heartache, excitement or disappointment, or perhaps the moment we breathe a last sigh of the day, we must acknowledge that very breath is God's presence in our very cells. While we are equipped to create children or cause a death, we are not all powerful and cannot create, by sheer determination, the beginning of a life. There is another power with His hand on our pulse and our lungs, and we alone cannot determine what makes these things work. We may manipulate our organs to try to kill the diseases, we may attempt to rid ourselves of the burdens our bodies take on; but we alone cannot stop all ailments, prevent all ills or sincerely determine *when* and *if* we will ever create a new life. The study of life and air and creation is something so intriguing that people receive awards for their pursuit of this knowledge; yet the Lord merely whispers a breath, and IT IS.

Where I have seen God today and in the past year has transformed from looking for signs of Him in the outside world such as in nature, acts of kindness or a smile...but to inside the depths of my being *in Him*. I have been called to search for God in deeper places, because I acknowledge the powerful Creator's presence just by taking that first breath each morning and acknowledging Him as the one and only force in the universe that can possibly create all I see. The mere fact that I am a mother of three living children is a *gift from the Lord*, and *not* because of my ability to create children. I have come to realize I must see God in everything around me and how his presence penetrates my life and allows *everything* to be *so*.

Stacy Dover

Thursday, Dec 3

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song. *Psalms 28:7*

I've been on this cancer healing trip and trial for seven years, and many of you have personally blessed me with your love and support for at least five of them. After nine surgeries, chemo, & radiation treatments, I thought I was doing well until last year when my breast cancer spread to my bones. I'm now in Stage 4 cancer and on continuous treatment. It has been a rough trail, but our Lord Jesus Christ has been with me every step of the way. I've been fortunate enough to have seen and heard Him. He has even brought me back from a deathbed. He has given me blessing after blessing for a life that I need to shout about. "He is with us always!" Jesus was born just so people like you and me will live on to spread His good news.

A few weeks ago, I got the results of my bone scan and it was clear! Praise the Lord! That means that my cancer is staying put and that I will stop IV chemo treatments but stay on my chemo pills. I am just thrilled. I will have scans done every three months; and if they remain free next time, I will be able to maybe stop my chemo pills too. How fabulous. The down side is that I have developed severe arthritis in my shoulders, (why I'm having such bad pain), due to treatments. I was amazed at how bad it got in such a short period of time. I've always had the hand and wrist problem; but now it's in my elbows, shoulders and knees - all areas they will watch for cancer. Anyway, the oncologist wanted to give me morphine pain pills, and I said no. I hate drugs and just don't want them. Anyway, my doctor told me to relax and enjoy the holidays, which I will do for sure. Thank you all for your prayers. They do work. Keep me in them though, just to keep me safe. I love my Lord and know He is the boss and will count His precious healing (doctor says that's probably why I'm still alive). See, even he believes!

Sandie Allan

Friday, Dec 4

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. *Romans 12:6-8*

Like many others at Glenkirk I volunteer to help wherever I can. When there is a need to serve, it is hard for me not to raise my hand. Right now on Sunday mornings I'm teaching 3-5 year olds how much God loves them. On Thursday mornings I'm part of the wonderful Mad Hatters group that makes comfort items for seriously ill young children and lap robes for hospitalized adults. I share the leadership of that group with Kathy Deitrick.

For the last year and a half I've lead the G.A.L.S.(Get a Life Sister) group. Leading a large active group is not my usual role. When Paulette Downing stepped down as leader, I kind of fell into that role. I did it again. I put my hand up.

I thought at first the job was going to be a burden for me, but actually it has turned out to be a blessing. I feel that God has helped me grow spiritually in sensing other people's needs. I am able to encourage some to join our activities and others to feel comfortable. I am able to offer responsibility to those who want to be more involved, and I am able to show concern for those who have been absent or ill. I'm praying that this new awareness is reflected in my everyday life. Our group is about love, friendship and fun. Long live the G.A.L.S.!

Barbara Paulson

Saturday, Dec 5

I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. *Psalms 9:2*

In the beginning of last Summer, I felt the Lord prompting me to help out at Sunday school. When I approached Delfa to see if there was a need for Sunday school, she said, "Yes!" with a big smile on her face and explained to me that some of the regular Sunday school teachers take a break during the Summer time.

God's timing was perfect, and I had the privilege to work with several 3 year-old children on several Sundays. My two children, Victoria (10) and Caleb (6), were my two helpers in the classroom along with one or two other High/Jr.High school helpers. I was a little bit nervous at first, but soon the sweetness of these 3 year-old children warmed my heart. The Lord also opened the door for me to lead those 3-5 years-old children in worship on Sundays as well. I was so blessed every time I saw and heard these children singing and praising the Lord. Victoria and Caleb helped me out doing the motions for the children, and it was very special to me, too.

At the end of the Summer, I told Victoria and Caleb that we would no longer need to help out on Sundays in the 3 year-old class starting from mid-September. To my surprise, they both were so sad and told me how they liked being with those 3 year-old children. They both wanted to continue helping out in the class, and I was so touched by their response! Little did I know that the Lord was preparing my children to be the young helpers in training! I'm thankful for the great experience I had over the Summer and how the Lord made Victoria and Caleb fall in love with the little 3 year-old children. Thank you, Delfa, for encouraging me to continue leading the children in worship on Sundays, and my children and I will commit ourselves to the awesome privilege of worshipping with the other children on Sundays!

Tasha McJunkin

Sunday, Dec 6 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! *1 John 3:1*

One year ago on this exact day, we received the results of a biopsy that indicated that Laura had a re-occurrence of breast cancer in the same breast that we battled five years ago. She had more tests that included mammogram, ultrasound, MRI, PET-CT, and Sono-Cine that did not show any other breast cancer in either breast. She was given the option of just removing the cancer tumor or the whole breast for treatment.

God's Holy Spirit directed us not only to remove the whole breast but also to remove the opposite "healthy" side too. After the mastectomy surgery that removed both breasts, a pathologist doctor examined the tissues and confirmed that the surgeon had indeed removed the cancer. The pathologist also reported that the opposite "healthy" breast contained three more previously undetected breast cancers and were also successfully removed.

By being obedient to God's Spirit, we were able rid Laura's body of breast cancer once and for all--the known and the unknown. How great is our God!

Laura & Gene Bergmann

Monday, Dec 7 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." *Luke 12:25-27*

I love sunflowers; because, for me, there's nothing on earth that portrays life more vividly than the sunflower--not because it *resembles* the sun but because it *follows* the sun. During the course of the day, the sunflower tracks the journey of the sun across the sky like a satellite dish. Wherever there is light, no matter how weak, the sunflower will bend towards it. So you can imagine my delight when my friend Charlene gifted me with a sunflower pin, and it wasn't even my birthday. What made it even more precious was that she didn't even know that I was a sunflower person. Coincidence? Perhaps . . .

But a month later, one Sunday morning, the same Charlene came walking down the Sunday School corridor carrying a bouquet of sunflowers in a ceramic water sprinkler with sunflowers painted all over it and handed it to me. What really took my breath away was that earlier that morning, as I was on my way to church, I debated whether to stop by Ralph's for a bunch of sunflowers which I thought would look pretty on our Welcome table. But I was running late, so I decided to do it some other Sunday. I rationalized, no one would miss it. So when Charlene gave me the pot of sunflowers, I felt goose bumps all over me as I knew that this time it was not a coincidence at all. Our all-knowing, all-seeing and loving Father knew that I desired to have a pot of sunflowers on the Welcome table that Sunday, and He made it happen through Charlene. It was a powerful reminder to me that I need not worry about tomorrow; because if God in His omnipotence can take care of a pot of sunflowers on a Welcome Table, how much more will He be able to take care of the million and one other matters with which we concern ourselves. This was not the first or the last time that the Lord has providentially provided for me as I serve Him.

Delfa Matic

Tuesday, Dec 8

Jesus said, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." *Luke 22:42*

In the last seven years I have struggled with infertility, with multiple miscarriages, and three failed cycles of In Vitro Fertilization. They all led my husband and me down the long and unpredictable journey of adoption, first internationally and now domestically, where we have been these last three years.

This past September, as I was learning about Hosea's struggle-filled life in order that God could use him for a specific purpose, it made me ask myself..."What if God was calling for me to wait on Motherhood because He wanted to use me someplace else?" God knew, "that" other place was NOT where I wanted to be. Yet, "that" place was the exact place where God could show His love and bring His comfort to those who are hurting.

God helped me to see that HAD God spared me from all the struggles and given me a child seven years ago, I never would have been able to EXACTLY identify with and relate to someone who specifically needed to hear of God's love and provision as she walks down the painful road of infertility and miscarriages. Last Summer, as I listened to a close friend weep after losing two babies and after eight cycles of failed In Vitro, I realized that she was that specific person who God brought with whom I could identify. She was that specific woman who God brought for me to show His love and comfort by saying to her... "I know-how- it hurts." "But ...God cares about you in the midst of these unthinkable situations and despite the unspeakable pain you are going through right now."

It has taken a long seven years, but now I can openly share and Thank the Lord for the gift of infertility; and in the midst of the pain brought by it, God allowed me to be part His Kingdom--right here and right now.

Gus Richer

Wednesday, Dec 9

The LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor. *Isaiah 61:1*

It was amazing to see God at work at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Chinle, AZ last summer. Pastor Constance has worked really hard to make this church a safe place for the Navajo people to come and ask about Jesus without judging their cultural practices. Instead, Trinity has gone through great efforts to learn and embrace the cultural practices of the Navajo people and incorporate the teachings of Jesus into their lives.

The VBS in July was amazing to say the least. There were over 100 kids served during the week-long program, and every day the energy and excitement of the program just grew and grew. Songs were sung, games were played, and relationships were formed. Personally, my favorite time of every day was the time that I got to share the gospel message and stories from the Bible through story time. Sharing the word of God has never been an easy or comfortable thing for me to do. However, I really feel as though God gave me the words and the passion to deliver his message in such a way that the kids were receptive and wholeheartedly interested. I know that my ability to speak in front of large groups is severely lacking, and it is really by the grace of God alone that I was able to find my voice for his message.

Chinle is a place where poverty and alcoholism limits the opportunities of our Native American brothers and sisters. However, there is hope for each and every one of them because the God of heaven loves them. I am so thankful that God was able to use me to reach out to them and pray that He continues to expand his kingdom among the Navajo people.

Michael Ibarra

Thursday, Dec 10 *Jesus said, "I will send the Counselor to you." John 16:7*

One week into my ABC group this fall we were challenged to have a Holy Spirit mindset and to set aside time to ask God to guide us in both the big and little decisions of our busy life. One of the readings that week was from John 16: 7-11. Jesus is telling his disciples that He will be leaving them but that the Holy Spirit will be there with them. The Holy Spirit is named as the Comforter, the Greek word is Paraclete and is also interpreted as an Encourager or Advocate.

In my job as a school district administrator I frequently deal with situations where I must trust God's guidance. That week I was leading a follow-up meeting with staff and parents to discuss their child. The previous meeting had not gone well, with heated and hurt feelings on both "sides" of the table. The parents were represented by a legal advocate that took the meeting to an adversarial level. I had discussed the issues with my boss, peers, and trusted friends; and we did not see any simple solutions. The best choice for the student was one that both the parents and school did not want.

As I prayed for calm and direction to find a way to solve the situation and support the staff, I remembered that the Holy Spirit was our Comforter, Encourager and Advocate. I was praying daily that week to better hear the Holy Spirit speaking to me and guiding me. During the meeting I was able to remain calm and help the team to stay focused on decisions that were in the best interest of the child. At one point the family and their advocate left the meeting to discuss the situation. When they returned to the meeting, both sides were able to express their interest in doing what was best for the child; and tears were shed and there were promises to go forward with new trust. They decided on a solution to the issues that was in the child's best interest. I truly felt the Holy Spirit, my Advocate, during this stressful meeting guiding all parties.

Last Christmas in our sermon series, we learned that we "are not alone," that God is with us. This has stayed with me to encourage me to know and pray to hear the guiding of the Holy Spirit, God with us, throughout my day.

Christine Smith

Friday, Dec 11 *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Psalm 119:105*

Many years ago, the mother of one of my child's classmates invited me to a bible study. She told me how wonderful it was and how much she was learning. I listened and thought to myself, Bible study is for people who don't have anything better to do with their time.

Life went on and I achieved most of my career and financial goals that I had set for myself. What an emptiness I felt when I thought, is this it? There must be something more. I read many philosophy books, self-help books, Christian writings, etc. in the searching and seeking. Then one day it dawned on me that I had never read the Bible in the same manner, searching and seeking for answers.

I received a newsletter from the church where I had grown up as a child that informed me that one of my former Sunday school teachers had passed away. I had admired Mr. Mark Zimmer and was saddened to hear of his death. I felt compelled to give back the caring and the nurturing I had gotten from him. I knew that it was my turn to be a Sunday school teacher. I had never taught anyone about Jesus before. In fact, I had not spent much time getting to know Him. I spent most of my energy the first year in Sunday school doing crafts with the kids and preparing treats for them. When I started teaching the lessons, I found myself reading the Bible more closely and carefully. Line by line I discovered that the seemingly simple text was actually rich with meaning that spoke directly to me. The children are curious and ask the same questions I have asked while preparing for the lessons. I practice on my daughter and husband before I inflict it on the children, because my husband does not attend church. I am the only Sunday school lesson my husband has heard. When I don't act in accordance with these lessons, my husband knows; and I am a bad witness for Jesus. My selfishness is exposed and I am compelled to change not only my actions but my priorities.

God is showing me that there is nothing more important than studying his Word and then trying my best to obey his Word. How could I have been more wrong? It took more than forty years for me to realize this important and eternal truth. The challenges of my life have not gone away. The biggest difference now is that I am beginning to know and am learning to trust in the Word of God who said He is the Word.

Gi Lee

Saturday, Dec 12 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. *Revelation 3:20*

This year has been a difficult and challenging year, but I feel like God has been watching over my family and me. So many times throughout this year we have been lost for answers, prayed, and soon answers became clear. To start the year off we were living in apartments that were about \$500 more than what we could afford. We were able to find a brand new apartment which was about \$500 less. Roughly six months later it felt like we were still having trouble catching up after being so behind. Our apartment managers knocked on our door one night and said “we made a mistake, your rent is actually less than what we first agreed.” The rent dropped another \$200. How often do you get a rent decrease? It feels like someone is saying “here I am, look at what I can do, I won’t let you go,” and it feels amazing.

I have been preparing for Fire Academy. The problem is, how do I financially do it? I have to take almost four months off work. The academy costs money too. I have a full time job; will my job be held, especially in these difficult times? So many unanswered questions and so many obstacles. I applied for financial aid, but I had heard from so many people that financial aid was getting cut. My financial aid account stated I was getting \$700. This amount was simply not enough. Academy costs \$2,800, and I had to support a family for 14 weeks. One day I just was scrambling for ideas and stressed, so I checked my account one more time. The total on my financial aid account was exactly what I had calculated my need would be for the cost of academy and most of the 14 weeks. My employer said they would hold my position while I was gone so that I have a place to come back to between fire academy and getting hired with a fire department. Thank you God for not letting go of us. Thank you for taking care of us when we don’t know where to go, what to do, or how we are going to do it. Thank you.

Dave Collard

Sunday, Dec 13 The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. *John 1:14*

After unsuccessful attempts to conceive a second child, we prayerfully decided to adopt a baby from South Korea. After 14 months of going through the international adoption process, we finally received travel clearance to go get Lily at the end of July. There is no doubt in our minds that God had this special child waiting for us the whole time.

There was a big reason why we chose South Korea. Thirty-five years ago, Marci, at sixteen months old, was adopted out of an orphanage from this same country. While on this trip, along with Marci’s dad and our daughter, Lindsay, we were able to visit her orphanage and meet her Christian caretakers. Although many years have passed, it only took a few baby pictures of Marci for them to recognize her and once again call her by her baby Korean name. Obviously, this was a very emotional reunion, and we thank God for the opportunity to give them a few gifts, go out for lunch with them, and tell them how thankful we were that they cared for and loved “Youni-kim.”

We are so thankful for all the thoughts and prayers from our friends and family during this process. God truly answered these prayers and blessed us with an incredible trip and a precious daughter. We thank God for giving our family this opportunity to come full circle with this adoption.

Ryan Reinstra

Monday, Dec 14

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. *Proverbs 3:5-6*

God and prayer has been a huge part of my life in the past year. A year ago I fell while rock climbing and was seriously injured. I landed on my head breaking my neck. If it wasn't for God's grace, a great deal of prayer and my helmet, the outcome would have been very different. In the first few days after the fall, my parents were in the hospital day and night praying with my college friends and family. They said, "we could feel the power of prayer" from our church family, my Aunt's church in Virginia and the hundreds of people in the Concordia system praying for me.

I spent a week in the hospital with my condition worsening at first; then it was God that pulled me out of the coma that I was in and healed me enough so I could leave. He gave me the strength to go back to school two weeks after the accident, and I was able to finish school on time, graduating in May. In four months from the accident the doctor cleared me and said that I had made a full recovery. I love to be extremely active now. I have spent much of my time training for triathlons and other similar races. I have even started climbing again.

God has been leading me through all these steps in my life. Many things have changed for me since the accident. I was extremely self-reliant and self-sufficient before I fell. The accident made me rely more on God and others. It has also given me a realization about how much God is in control. I don't worry about the small things anymore. He's got it covered. I don't know why certain things happen, but I am sure in my faith that God has a plan for me and that all things happen to give me hope and a future.

Trevor Mathews

Tuesday, Dec 15

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. *Psalms 40:1*

For me 2009 has been a year of waiting. God's working in the events of my life this past year has been slow and sometimes unseen. His time is not my time.

In the case of our backyard, we had three prior engineers that mostly took money from us with no help and no solution to our backyard slippage problem. We spoke to several engineers who would not even tackle our problem. Friends at Glenkirk had been praying along with us about this problem. A friend, who knew our problem for many years, just happened to mention this engineering friend; he could have told us about him earlier, but the time wasn't right yet. The engineer was an honest busy man used to doing huge construction projects. We not only found him, but he had some down time to help us. In every instance of the dangerous and expensive construction he did his best to offer us a fair price. We got to show him the love of Jesus in many instances during his time here...by prayer, kind deeds, and welcoming him into our home.

For seven months my husband and I have lived in limbo waiting and wondering when our house would sell. I am very active in our community and at Glenkirk and have continued to live day by day doing my leadership jobs not knowing how long I would be here to accomplish them. I've heard that if God wants you to move, he would sell your house quickly...or maybe the price was set too high. I can't see why God wouldn't want us near my daughter, her husband, and three children where we could help. We have dropped the price of our home twice and have made significant changes to make a better appearance. We have worked very hard for ten open houses. I think God is working in this, but his answer is not yet...I have other plans for you right now. But through all of this I know "God will never leave me nor forsake me and He will accomplish those things that concern me."

Lynda Siminske

Wednesday, Dec 16 Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. *Psalms 77:19*

I accepted Jesus as my Savior as a child but couldn't foresee the losses and challenges that would test that early decision. I lost my seven year old son, Brett, in a school busing accident in 1975. This tragedy in my family precipitated the dissolution of my marriage. I was without hope. In 1985 my son, Greg, contracted the HIV virus. Greg, after accepting Jesus into his heart, passed away Jan 22, 1995. My faith in Jesus failed utterly, and I was consumed with anger.

However, in 2003 my wife and I started going to church at Glenkirk. With that decision, I turned around and saw that Jesus was holding out his loving arms to me and had always been there. Jesus was only waiting for me to embrace and accept his "unconditional and unending love." Jesus gave me a reason for living a life with Him as my Savior and Lord.

On February 8, 2008, I lost my daughter, Terri, who was 53, from a debilitating immune disorder. With this latest tragedy, however, I was able to understand that Jesus was holding me in his arms; and through prayer, faith and the help of my family and church, I was able to trust Jesus. I have come to understand that Jesus in my Savior, and he in control of my life. I can now thank him for giving me my children that I lost for as many years as I had them and for my children and grand-children that I have today. When Jesus and I are walking together and I only saw "one set of footprints," I now realize that was because "Jesus was carrying me."

Virgil Bearman

Thursday, Dec 17 This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. *Isaiah 48:17*"

There it was on the \$1 table of used books at the APU library, a book with the word SIN emblazoned on the cover in 3-inch high letters. I didn't know at the time why it caught my eye, but I bought it. It is a minor book compared to others by J. Keith Miller. It told the story of how he first came to grips with his addiction. It was used by God to show me mine.

Within a few years after coming to Christ in 1982, I had joined a small group Bible study, Evangelism Explosion, a Bible study at work, a Sunday school class, Kirkmen, Session, prison ministry, adult education committee, evangelism committee, etc. until I could not do one more thing. It was painful to say no to any ministry opportunity. Even after retirement in 2005, I quickly filled all spare time with ministry. When my wife, Kathy, pointed out that I was working harder in retirement than before, I would just say, "But I am doing what I want to do, now." After reading this book, the problem was visible if not clear. I listed out all the things I was doing and asked God how to cut back. It wasn't easy. J. Keith Miller's video based training class called Hunger for Healing helped.

The daily prayer Mr. Miller recommends is: "Lord, please show me your will for my life and give me the power to carry it out." I prayed this prayer for several months. Then it began to change to its present form: "Lord, please show me your will for this life you have given me, and bless me with power that I do not have within myself to carry it out."

I feel God's blessings more than ever before. Perhaps I am "doing" less, but it seems that just as much or more is getting done.

Finally, there are spaces in my life for family, recreation, and, yes, for God.

Gerry Hawkins

Friday, Dec 18 Many, of Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which you have done. *Psalm 40:5*

Because of our life circumstances, my sisters and I have been called to pray. We “meet” by telephone each week to pray for our “nation,” “clans,” and individuals. It has only been in laying down ourselves, our ways, our desires, our total lives to God that we have learned that we cannot fix anything on our own; but our God can, in His way, His timing, and using His vessels.

We have seen at work: Housing provided, faithfulness in tithing, career changes, unholy alliances broken, substance abuse delivered, financial needs met, a mother reunited with her family, protection (spiritual, emotional and physical), spiritual gifts now being used, public profession of faith through baptism, truth exposed (employee), lost things found, ungodly plans shattered, classes provided for students, the birth of two healthy babies, and relationships restored.

<u>Where there was</u>	<u>God changed it to</u>
Rejection	Acceptance
Unforgiveness	Mercy
Sickness	Health
Luke warmth	Faithfulness
Bitterness	Love

To paraphrase Rick Warren – life is not peaks and valleys but more like railroad tracks with positive and negative things traveling parallel through our lives. But we have chosen to walk those tracks with our Savior because he is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

Joyce Johnson

Saturday, Dec 19 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. *1Peter 2:9*

A little over a year ago when Betsy called and said she and Jim had discussed the possibility of my taking over for George Eastman as Pastoral Associate for the Seniors, I was kind of taken by surprise and initially thought of all the reasons why it probably wouldn’t work—Karen’s and my travel schedule, our heavy involvement in the Homeless Shelter Ministry for almost six months of the year, and my disdain for writing (i.e., the monthly newsletter). If putting out a newsletter was part of the job requirement, then I definitely was OUT. But God apparently had His own idea of how this would all work together—and, with His help, it has!

I love talking with people; and as I began making calls on seniors who were hospitalized, in rehabilitation centers, or shut-ins, I felt the call of God in my life. As I served His sheep, I became ever so much more aware of how much for which I have to be thankful; and I was reminded that each day is a precious gift from God. As the apostle Paul so aptly put it, “To live is Christ; to die is gain.”

Another important way that I’ve seen God working through the Seniors Ministry is that I get to enjoy *Karen’s* newsletter each month. What started out as a somewhat timid “I’ll do the newsletter,” because she knew how much I enjoyed talking with people and ministering to them, has ended up being a genuine passion for her—for seniors active in our activities, but especially for those who are unable to attend church or be actively involved. I know, from the feedback I’ve gotten from seniors I visit, that they love receiving it. Time after time I have them tell me that they read it cover to cover and pass it on to their friends and relatives. This enthusiasm is encouraging and heartwarming to see.

It never ceases to amaze me how amazing God is!

Roger McClain

Sunday, Dec 20 I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD. *Psalm 27:13-14*

An expression came to mind out of the blue the other day. I was puzzled at why I thought of it. It is the expression, "sitting in the catbird seat." I googled it and found one definition was to be in an advantageous position and another was to be in the baseball dugout. I haven't experienced the dugout thing, though those close to me have wanted to see some miracles from there; but I feel very privileged that I have been in a catbird seat here at Glenkirk. The front desk in the office of Glenkirk is a wonderful perch to experience the Lord at work. He is active everyday in so many ways with so many variations of his children young and old. And He has been bringing new people into His family fellowship here.

I've seen Him work through the Pastors as they study and write devos and small group materials and bring us challenging and insightful sermons. I love how they work together with our Worship and Music staff to allow our Worship to be fresh and meaningful every week. I've see Him working in leaders, teachers and servers who faithfully meet and pray faithfully for His will in every decision, and they serve faithfully in so many ministries taking place here.

But the real fantastic fun is seeing Him at work helping young mothers find a group to share their concerns, teens having fun on a Gorilla Hunt event and being taught God's perspective for their stressful morphing from childhood into independence. What joy to look into the face of an AWANA kid memorizing God's word and having that in their mental computer to pull up when they're scared of the dark or are treated badly by a school friend. What a joy to have a special friend come to our small group and in tears express her thanks for someone inviting her to our church through a casual conversation at the carwash. Now she's found a church family, a small group sisterhood, and instruction in God's Word to sustain her and give her joy and peace in Jesus all the time.

The secret is to show up and ask God to work in you. He will and then you will be in the catbird seat of your life seeing Him work in you! I'll be watching and praising the Lord too!

Jackie Anderson

Monday, Dec 21 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. *Romans 12:12*

In 2007 I was diagnosed with Stage IV Metastatic Breast Cancer. For the past two years I have maintained an active life with my family and have taken oral medication to keep the cancer from traveling further. This past September I was given the devastating news that the cancer had spread to my liver and the next step would be chemotherapy.

I left the doctor's office feeling empty and unsatisfied. Where was the miracle? Where was God? Why do I have to go through this? I have dedicated my remaining days to sharing my faith through a Blog that God gave me after being diagnosed. Doesn't God want me to be healthy and strong so I can continue my ministry and have a powerful testimony of healing?

God has gifted me in ways too numerous to count, and one of those gifts is a very wise friend. I drove to her house angry and confused. After I cried my bitter tears of disappointment, she gave me a visual I will never forget. She asked, "Sandy, who is in the driver's seat?"

It took a second to realize that I had pushed God out of the driver's seat. I was driving. Well, I don't like the road He has chosen! He wants to take the long way with lights and pedestrian crossings. I want to take the freeway! He has some soft "Trust and Obey" music playing on the radio. I want to rock out to "Healing Rain!" He wants the windows down. I'm worried about my hair!

Like a good girl, I have climbed into the back seat. It is not about me, right? But at least I know I have a safe driver. He is a God that heals, and His timing is best. God loves me and wrote an entire book about it. I can be really disappointed at how things have turned out; he understands. He forgives me even though I don't deserve it.

Sandy Boulware

Tuesday, Dec 22

When they had seen Jesus, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. *Luke 2:17-18*

God has shown me this year the way to true joy and contentment in my life--that is by giving to others and helping God's children in ways he has opened up to me through Glenkirk Church.

I used to be the last person to volunteer my time. I always felt I was justified, as I was a very busy working single mother. "I can't do it" were the first words from my mouth. After years of this behavior, I have changed about 180 degrees. I now find myself wanting to volunteer all the time. I have found the true joy of the two greatest commandments. Mark 12:28-31 says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself." God has instilled this in me with the Holy Spirit. I know it must be that which has created such a change in me.

Life now has been enriched for me greatly after learning that reaching out to others truly brings joy and happiness to me. I have found that Lay Counseling and working as a counselor at Shepherd's Pantry are my mission areas, and they leave me feeling blessed each time I serve. By touching the lives of others, I realize what a blessing that is for me. When someone tells me I have made a difference in his/her life, there is nothing better. I have witnessed such suffering, faith, and human courage in my work. When people are in dire straits, and still have so much faith knowing that God will provide, how can I have less faith??

Now I realize that nothing is more important to me than to help others, and in doing so, to possibly have a small role in bringing another person to Christ and salvation. I will never forget the sermon Jim gave this year in which we each were given a small piece of polished glass. My most frequent prayer is: Lord, let your light shine through me.

Candy Roy

Wednesday, Dec 23 Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. *Philippians 1:6*

One cold Christmas many, many years ago, Mary must have pondered in her heart, asking why have I been so blessed? Her blessing became our Lord and Savior. We are all now blessed with abundant grace. God has answered my prayers over the past year by helping my children become closer to who He wants them to be.

I feel the Lord blessed me in ways I could never have imagined by giving me four children. They are grown young adults now. I can look back on family memories that I cherish. Although, as parents we worry, fret and stew over our children as they grow. Even though it tells us in *Philippians 4:6*, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God," we still worry. Over the past year I have prayed, Lord guide their ways. I know they have to stumble, but protect them.

My point is, no matter what, never give up; and continue to pray for them. Turn them over to the Lord. I have seen the amazing ways He will use them and teach them. The Lord will guide them and protect them just as He does us every single day.

Karen Clark

Thursday, Dec 24

On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. *Matthew 2:11*

I have a good friend who has been recovering from brain cancer and related surgery the past two years. He is a former pastor, a very thoughtful, talented, articulate, even-keeled man. But, given the location of the tumor and the extensive surgery required, he has been unable to work the past two years, has suffered from periodic seizures and frequent debilitating migraine headaches; and he has had struggles with his memory and managing his emotions. As well, he has been unable to work and is at great risk of losing his home.

We were pretty good friends before this season of his illness—we coached together, and our sons were good friends. And we had some meaningful differences—politics, our nationalities, even how we viewed aspects of our Christian faith. But through the process of spending more and more time with my friend the past two years, we have grown together as brothers, shared meaningful fellowship and tears, and reflected upon God’s wonder and goodness; our focus has been increasingly upon what we have in common, not the differences. Despite all of the challenges of his disease and recovery, my friend has stayed close to God. He has dwelled less and less on what he has lost—some memory, energy, savings and ability to earn income—and more and more upon how God is all that he really needs.

In late September I learned that I was going to lose my job, which happened in early November. I left a company and position I loved and had worked hard at for six rewarding years. I didn’t want to leave and was very surprised by the news. But God prepared me. I have the powerful example of my friend and brother in Christ; I didn’t know originally why God brought us closer together during my friend’s season of struggle, but I have a pretty good idea why now. I don’t know what God has in store for me next, but He promises that it will be for my good (Romans 8:28). Sometimes the Lord has to take something away, even something “good,” so that He can provide something even better.

Steve Sharp

The Christmas Story

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

Luke 2