

FAITH

ON THE FRONTIER:

a devotional about living the faith in daily life

Reverend Rebecca Weston



Presbyterian Disciples Church



The Ecumenical Parish

To all the saints who have modeled for me
what faith looks like
at home,
in school,
in industry,
in the marketplace,
and out on the ranch.

I am grateful for your witness
to the Good News of Jesus Christ.
You faithfully proclaim it in places I never could.

-RJW



FORWARD

This volume has been prepared as a part of my doctoral work at Fuller Theological Seminary. I was charged with helping the Presbyterian Disciples Church of Pawhuska to articulate their identity during a time of transition following denominational federation and the death of a beloved pastor. Having lost these traditional identity markers, the question became “if we are no longer who we were, who are we now?”

Enter the Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, that all who have faith in Christ share in Christ’s royal priesthood. Thus, every believer has access to God and the responsibility to minister to others. We began by examining all the places in Osage County where church members have influence. It was fascinating to see how varied their interests were and how each person has their own places and spaces where their lives and faith intersect, that is, their own frontiers of faith.

The creation of this devotional has then been an exercise in reflecting on how the members of the Presbyterian Disciples Church see God at work in and through them. One story can never be the sum of a person’s faith, but this work offers a glimpse into the way that this church has been shaped by their shared faith and the ways in which they share that faith with their community. While faith is fostered in the congregation, ultimately, it is lived on the frontiers of daily life.



My basic premise is that the church is the people and that by telling the stories of how the members of the Presbyterian Disciples Church fulfill their roles as priests in living out their daily lives as faithful Christians, we will have created a new way of articulating who they are.

In a way, this devotional is also another means to living out the priestly duty of proclaiming the Good News to those who will listen. May their stories encourage you in the faith. May they open your eyes to the wonderfully diverse ways in which everyone's faith frontier is unique, and yet God is at work in them all. May they inspire you to fully inhabit the space Jesus has saved for you in his royal priesthood.

Mizpah,
Rev. Rebecca Weston
Transitional Pastor, Presbyterian Disciples Church
June 2021-February 2023

Scripture passages are taken from the
New International Version, unless otherwise noted.



“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

-1 Peter 3:15

In elementary school, students regularly use Jesus’ name as a curse. When I was principal and I heard them speak like that, I tried to help them understand that calling on Jesus wasn’t meant to be a bad thing. I would tell them that Jesus is my friend, and I really would like for them to use his name with honor.

Those students looked up to me, so I tried to set a good example for them. I didn’t want them to feel like they were in trouble, but I did want them to think about what they were saying and what it meant. I hope that my respect for Jesus helped them to learn to respect him too.

-Randa Bloomfield

Jesus, your name is above all names. (Phil 2:9) Help us to treat your name with respect and encourage others to do the same. To you belong all the praise and honor and glory now and forever. Amen.



*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.” -Psalm 23:4a (KJV)*

Spending time with someone who doesn't have very many days left to live can be hard, but I feel honored to have been able to do that. I did it for my mom and my dad both. They took care of me when I was little, and I took care of them when they needed me. When my best friend was dying, I sat by his bedside in the hospital. When I wasn't with him, we talked on the phone and watched football together. Just this year, my mentor, the man I looked up to my whole life, was sick and I sat with him almost every day. He told me stories I never heard before and we remembered the old days together. Spending that time together meant a lot to me.

When someone is dying, it gives a lot of comfort to have someone there in the room with them. I hope that by sitting with them, I remind them that they aren't alone and they don't need to be afraid because God with us too.

-John Manning

Jesus, we know you conquered death on the cross, but we still don't know what it will be like. Help us to know deep in our souls that you are always with us, so we don't need to be afraid. Amen.



“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.” -Ephesians 4:29(NRSV)

As an industrial chemical salesman, I spend a lot of time in food processing plants all over the country, where cussing is a normal part of the vocabulary. Over time as people get to know me, they figure out that is not the way I speak. If they ask about it, I tell them I figure there is always another word I can use instead. Sometimes it opens an opportunity for me to tell them about my faith, about how being Christian changes how I live, and the way I talk is one obvious example of that. I try not to say bad words, and I don't tell dirty jokes because when I speak, I want people to hear something positive from me.

My children also know that the way we speak matters to me. As their Dad, I set the family standard and my expectation is that they will be a good influence in their school and with their friends. There are so many people out there whose language can be damaging, and as followers of Jesus Christ, we want to be the people who point others toward the good.

-Jon Grooms

Creator God, it was by your Word that the entirety of creation came into being. (Ps 33:9) As those made in your image, help us to understand that our words too have great power. Give us, O God, the discipline to tame our tongues so that we only speak words that bring life. Amen.



“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” *-Hebrews 13:16*

Our neighbor is an older widow lady and for a long time, I took her trash to her barrel every Monday. Then, the trash company stopped coming out our way and she didn't know what to do. I believe that if you see a need, you should just go ahead and take care of it, so ever since then I have just picked up her trash and I take it to the dump when I take ours.

My parents taught us kids to always do the right thing and helping others is always the right thing to do. I'm glad to be able to help my neighbors and I am glad to know that it makes God happy when I do.

-Bill Renfrow

Jesus, you teach us to love our neighbor. (Rom 13:9b) When we see a neighbor needs a hand, inspire us to share your love by offering to help. Amen.



“Pray without ceasing.”

-1 Thessalonians 5:17(ESV)

A friend recently shared a picture with me on social media of a pair of wizened hands folded in prayer with the caption “Your grandmother’s prayers are covering you still.” The idea warms my heart because my grandmother was truly a woman of prayer. I have early memories of her praying out loud and praying for us by name. As I grew older, whenever I hit a rough patch in life, I knew my grandmother was praying for me.

Now a grandmother myself, I want to be the one who covers people in prayer. My prayers might not always be said out loud, but I do my best to pray without ceasing. I pray for the people I work with. I pray for our schoolchildren. I pray for our church family. I pray for our town. As I pray, I hope that those I love have confidence in my prayers for them the way I did in my grandmother’s.

-LuAnn Christian

Lord, help us to be people of constant prayer. Keep us in good connection with you and advocate for the good of your Kingdom in the lives of those we love. Amen.



“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”
-*John 15:13*

No matter how hot it was, every Memorial Day Weekend, my family would take our annual trip to the Pawhuska Cemetery. I have vivid childhood memories of pulling a wagon full of American flags and white crosses from gravestone to gravestone. Sometimes the dirt was bone dry, and we had to use a mallet to plant anything in it. It was impressed on me that this time and effort was just a small sacrifice we made to honor those who had been willing to sacrifice everything for our sake.

It was my grandfather, Bear Tolson, who started the tradition. He had served in the US Army in WWII, and I think this was his way of remembering and honoring his brothers-in-arms. His generation, the greatest generation, all seem so noble in their willingness to fight for what was right, no matter the cost. Over the years, others have taken an interest in our family tradition. As an Eagle Scout myself, I am especially glad to see the Boy Scouts are out there with us as we honor those who had so much love that they were willing to lay down their lives for us.

-Stuart Tolson

Lord Jesus, it is in your death that we find freedom. Help us to remember that freedom is not free. May we honor all those who follow your example, offering themselves as a sacrifice for the hope of a better world. Amen.



“For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” -Psalm 100:5 (NRSV)

Growing up in Pawhuska meant there were always people looking out for you. For a kid, that might mean having a whole route of people ready to provide cookies. It could also mean the news of a child’s exploits got home before the child did. The common thread is that there was a whole community of adults who were there to faithfully raise a whole generation of kids. They were there for us, watching us grow up, cheering us on at ballgames, just taking a part in our lives. It was like they were living out what the steadfast love of the Lord looked like in real life.

Now, I feel like the roles have reversed. Just as the oldest generation once took care of us, it is now our turn to take care of them. Each new day brings a different way to show them that same steadfast love. That might mean delivering Meals on Wheels, getting on a ladder to change a lightbulb for someone, or driving older family members to the doctor in Tulsa. When they need me, I try to be there for them. Sometimes it can be tough, but most of the time they just crack me up. That oldest generation has my heart. I love them and respect them and want to honor who they are and what they have done for me. Just as their love for me has reflected the steadfast love of the Lord, I want mine to do the same for them.

-Lindy Hudson

God Most High, we bless you for the many ways in which our elders have modeled your love and faithfulness to us. As we pick up the mantle, help us to show that same steadfast love to both the generations that have come before us and the ones that come after, so that every generation will know of your faithfulness. Amen.



“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” -Proverbs 31:8-9

I have always had a heart for children. After retiring from a career in teaching, I was asked to be on the Osage County Post-Adjudication Review Board (PARB) for the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth. That was more than 15 years ago. Every six months, we review all the cases of every child who has been removed from their home by the court so that we can provide impartial recommendations to the judge on behalf of those children. We are given access to all records concerning a child and access to all people involved. Ultimately, we want to make sure they are in a good place and are receiving the services they need.

These kids have already experienced a lot of hardship and they need someone to look out for them. Being a part of PARB means that we are able to speak out for them, to make sure they are protected and supported. By offering impartial monitoring of their cases, we do our best to defend their rights. It seems to me that is what people of faith are supposed to do.

-Carolyn Johnson

O God, you have made every human in your own image. We ask that you help us to see those who might be lost in the shuffle so that we may have compassion for them and always treat them with dignity. Help us to be a voice for the voiceless and to defend those who cannot defend themselves. Where we can, empower us to use our positions of privilege on their behalf. Amen.

.



“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” -1 John 1:7a

You never know who or how God is going to bring someone into your life. I remember the day when this ranch kid from Wyoming with an oversized pickup came into my feed store. She had just moved into the apartments nearby and wanted to ask permission to park in one of my spots. She introduced me to her family, and we got to talking. They were good, faithful people, and we really connected.

Over time we got to know each other better. I checked on her when her truck had a giant gash down the side. Another time, she mentioned the name of the cowboy she was dating and I told her that he was a good one and she should hold onto him. After they were married, a customer was looking for a ranch manager, and I suggested him for the job. They still come into the store from time to time and I am always glad to see them. I know God is in the community that is built between believers, and it has been a joy to walk alongside others on this journey of faith.

-James Allen

Holy Spirit, you build relationships between us in order to bring us to unity in you. Please give us a heart for one another. Help to look out for the interests of others and to always find joy in them. Amen.



“Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.”
-Proverbs 22:6 (NRSV)

I parent the way I was raised. I am grateful for my parents and what they taught me about what it means to be faithful and what a difference having faith makes. As a mom of two boys, I want to teach them those same lessons so that they will have a firm foundation of faith to stand on too. My husband and I know our boys are watching, so we make sure Sunday worship is an important part of our week.

I think the thing that is most important to me is that when they have problems, I want my boys to go to God, to look for answers by reading in the Word, and by taking their struggles to God in prayer. I don't always want to share my struggles with my boys, but I want them to know how to handle their struggles as people of faith, so I love it when we are able to take time as a family to intentionally read the Bible together, to talk about our faith, and to pray. I hope that my husband and I can train our boys as well as my parents trained me because I am so grateful for the gift of faith.

-Hannah Thomas

Father God, we thank you for parents who pass the faith on to the next generation. Help them to prepare children for the joys and hardships of this world, confident that you are their rock and protection. (Ps 18:2) As they live their faith, let it be a model for all with eyes to see and ears to hear. (Prov 20:12) Amen.



“You are the light of the world.”

-Matthew 5:14a

Back when I worked on the casino floor, I had plenty of chances to share my faith with people. I felt like God just sent them to me; he would put them right in front of me, and I couldn't refuse. Sometimes I worried about getting overly involved with people, but you have to be involved so they know they can get some help and go on. So many people are hurting and need to hear that there is hope! They need the light of Christ to touch the darkest places in their life.

My co-workers, especially, knew I would pray for them. They would come to me and ask for prayer when someone was sick, in an accident, or anytime something happened to someone, and they needed prayers. I would always remind them that they are loved and that God is there for them. I was careful not to make them any false promises, but I would add my prayers to their prayers. I believe God answers prayers, so even if I didn't hear that they got the answer they wanted, I believe our prayers brought light into the darkness.

-Sharon Kirk

Jesus, your light shines in the darkness! (John 1:5) You call us out of darkness and into your wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9) Help us to walk in your light. (1 Jn 1:7) Make our light a reflection of your own so that in us, others may see you. Amen.



“For the despondent, every day brings trouble; for the happy heart, life is a continual feast.” -Proverbs 15:15 (NLT)

I like to laugh, and I like to make other people laugh. I’m not really a joke person; my laughter is more spontaneous; it’s a response. Real-life situations make me laugh all the time. Some of it is that I say things others want to say but don’t. I like bloopers and blunders as long as the person doesn’t get hurt. Playful teasing can be fun too, because laughter brings people together.

You set your mood for the day, and I try to be happy. You have to make the best out of situations you have, any situation, because there is too much not to laugh at. I think God wants us to be happy, and I try to be.

-Lonnie Jones

Giver of inexpressible joy, help us to be people who rejoice always. (1 Thess 5:16) Fill us with laughter and give us happy hearts so that we can point people toward the joyful feast you prepare for us. Amen.



“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” -Colossians 1:19-20

I went through a drastic change in my life at age 26. I had spent four years as an infantry officer in the European theater and in the back of my mind, the mission was to destroy the enemy. I spent all of my time teaching young men to kill. Then when I got out of the service, I had to do a 180-degree turn.

I no longer needed to kill or destroy. The blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, helped me make peace. When I got home, I accepted a new mission. I volunteered to teach the high school Sunday school class and I have now been teaching some kind of Bible class for over 60 years. When you're working for the good of the church and God's kingdom, it is easy to do what you feel like God would approve of you doing. You just have to know your mission.

-Dick Allen

Crucified Lord, you are our Commanding Officer. May your church move like a mighty army, united in your mission.¹ Help us to make peace through your blood, working for the reconciliation of the world. Amen.



“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much.”
-Luke 16:10 (ESV)

I do my best to take care of people in the small ways that matter. This year, I have two students I have volunteered to walk to the bus every day. One is blind and the other is disabled. We have paraprofessionals we can ask to help, but I like being able to help them myself. I can't always give these kids as much extra attention in class as I would like because they don't stay in my class all day, but I can give them a positive end of the day and make sure they have a good time. Every day the bus driver smiles and tells me "Thank you." for bringing them. It makes me happy to know we both want these kids to get home safe and happy.

It is the simple acts of kindness and helpfulness to everyone that show God's love. I try to do the little things faithfully and hope that means I am faithful in the ways that matter most.

-Susan Free

Dear Lord, helps us to see the small acts of kindness as ways to show your love. Train us in the little things, so that our hearts are more naturally inclined toward you. Amen.



“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” -1 Corinthians 12:26

I was raised by an abusive father in a church that taught me to be scared of God. I didn't understand why God made this awful world and I certainly didn't understand what people meant when they talked about God's love. It wasn't until I was in my 50s that I got counseling and God led me through it. When that happened, I finally figured out that God loved me and now I feel like I'm living proof of the purpose Christ has for us. My life was changed by God's love, and I feel like my story of faith is truly a love story.

Because of what I have been through, I think I am aware that a lot of people have been through a lot of stuff. I am thankful to have a God who loves me and is there for me, especially when life is hard, and so I try to be there for others. When I hear about their difficulties, I hurt with them and I do my best to let them know they're not alone and that God loves them too.

-Andrea Renfrow

God of compassion, we know that you understand the nature of suffering and the power of suffering for the sake of others. Help us to see those who are hurting and love them the way you do. Amen.



“The laborer deserves to be paid.”

-Luke 10:7b (NRSV)

Every Sunday after church, a group of us goes out to lunch. I love spending time with my church people, and I am glad for every single one of them who comes. We generally go to the same places, so the waitresses have gotten to know us, and they know that we are church people. That weighs heavy on me because I spent 20 years working in food service, and I know that how a table treats the staff and how generously they tip matters. Being good customers can really make a difference in how a church group is viewed.

Tipping may feel like a small thing to some people, but I know the waitresses work hard, and they deserve to be paid. I want these waitresses to have a good impression of church people, so while I am generally a good tipper, on Sundays I tip extra to make sure our table is always covered. It is important for people to have their work acknowledged and I think tipping generously right after we finish worship seems like a natural response to all that God has given us.

-Joel Jackson

Jesus, you call us to be people of sacrifice. Train us, we pray, in the ways we can make small sacrifices daily for the sake of others. Help us to see the hard work and sacrifice our neighbors offer us in their work and inspire us to offer our thanks accordingly. Amen.



“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
-Romans 8:38-39

My faith is my guiding compass. As an employee working in the District Attorney’s office, I have been exposed to the darker side of life, but my faith allows me the confidence that while things may look dim, there is always hope. Daily, people fall, but the promise of God is that when we repent, he will forgive us. He knows we are human, that we will make mistakes, and he has promised that nothing can separate any of us from his love.

I am blessed to work with some very strong Christians, and I think our faith shapes how we approach our work. In our office, we try to wear the white hats and give people a chance. When people are trying to change the behaviors that keep them in the legal system, we try to be their biggest cheerleaders. We want people to get out of the criminal process and make better lives for themselves. When I see that happen, I always thank the God of Second Chances.

-Sheila Tolson

God of Grace, we know that your love chases us. Thank you for giving us the assurance of your love and forgiveness and for putting people in our paths who can remind us of it. Help us to see that we never have an excuse to give up on leading a good life because there is always hope. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.



“You will return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” -Genesis 3:19b

As Christians, we are given “the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life”ⁱⁱ, but when we lay the dead to rest, we hope to honor those we loved in life. Cemetery records, used by historians and genealogists, help us to continue to remember those who came before us for generations to come. I have been engaged by the Pawhuska Historical Society and the Pawhuska Library to sort through the records and to walk and read the graves to confirm the accuracy of the cemetery records and to fill in any blanks we find.

As is tradition, the graves in the Pawhuska City Cemetery face east so that on Resurrection Day, the dead will rise to face their Lord. The oldest grave is from 1846, and new interments continue to this day. Handwritten records of burials have been kept over the years, giving us a window into our history. Discovering that someone like Sybil Bolton, one of the victims of the Osage Reign of Terror, was interred in a different spot in the mausoleum than the one originally purchased for her draws attention to ongoing discord in her family following her death. While these bodies may be perishable, each person laid to rest in the Pawhuska City Cemetery has made their mark on our town and I hope that my work will mean we don’t forget them.

-NancySu Herron

Resurrected Lord, we trust that you have victory over death. By your three days in the tomb, you have made graves a sign of hope for those who trust in you. Help those still living to honor the memories of those who have gone before us, and may those who have departed from this life find their rest in you. Amen.



“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.” -John 13:14

Jesus’ ministry was one of hospitality and inclusion. I didn’t fully understand what that meant until I started cowboying for my current employers. I see it best on the days when we work cattle, when neighbors, friends, and other cowboys all show up to help. Everyone pitches in. While we are not always the fastest at getting it all done, because we take breaks when people are tired and we stop for a good noon meal, that also means everyone has a good time. It is hard work, but I can see how much they appreciate our work. They really want to take care of us, which makes me really want to go to work those days.

I try to live out this same kind of hospitality and inclusion in the places where I can. One of those is when I am coaching my son’s basketball team. I try extra hard to make sure everyone feels included. Some have more skill than others, but everyone on the team matters. When we run drills, we make sure everyone is improving and no one gets left behind. During games, everyone gets playtime. I always hope we win games, but what I really want is for my players to have a good time and grow along the way. It means a lot to me that Jesus is coming along for the journey with us, and how we treat each other along the way is important.

-Tyler Thomas

Jesus, the things you taught and did profoundly changed the social order. You modeled radical hospitality and servant leadership, and you made sure everyone knew that they mattered. May we find ways in our own communities to live out your love in meaningful ways. Amen.



“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”
-Ephesians 2:8:9

I work as a nurse in the emergency room at a level-one trauma center. We get all the worst cases, so every day, I pray that God will protect me, physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally while I am at work. I try to cover myself with God because while the hospital is a place where a lot of healing happens, people also bring all kinds of pain with them. I give all of my patients the best care that I can possibly provide, and yet we have a portion of our patient population who can be really nasty to the hospital staff. On any given day, I might be spat on, hit, or cursed at.

It would be easy to be emotionally dismissive. That is a battle I think a lot of healthcare workers face. It is because of the grace of God, which I have not earned, that I try not to pass judgment. A lot of these people are in scary situations, and so I recognize that these may be emotional reactions in moments of high stress. So many other people have given up on those in our society who are struggling the most, and I don't want to be someone who gives up on them. I know that I can only do so much. I can't change their overall circumstances, but I can give them quality health care, and I can show them the love of God while I do it.

-Sarah Lamsam

Healing God, you see the brokenness in each one of us, and out of your great love you bind us up. Give us eyes to see the brokenness in those who make our lives difficult so that we can extend your grace to them. Let our words and actions bring healing to a hurting world. Amen.



“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”
-Colossians 1:17

You never really know where life will take you! When I left Bartlesville (pop. 35,000) in 1987 to attend college in California, I thought I’d never look back. Bartlesville was way too small for me, after all, and I couldn’t wait to fly free and go live my life. A few years later, through a few twists and turns, I found myself married and having babies on a cattle ranch...west of Pawhuska (pop. 3,500, by the way!) That’s what I get for thinking Bartlesville was too small for me.

In my wildest dreams, I could not have conceived of living the rest of my life in rural Oklahoma---nor could I have imagined the adventure that would unfold in the years since---and I know God is the author of all of it. I look back at the leap of faith I took when I moved from Oklahoma to Los Angeles, and I see the irony that I wound up taking a leap of faith back to Oklahoma...and to an even quieter, more isolated existence than I’d ever known. I knew nothing about country life and was a fish out of water when Ladd and I first married, but I trusted God daily to lead me on the path he had planned. Ten years later, I started writing about my funny (and not-so-funny!) moments in the country, and because of that, I wound up having a job that allows me to connect with so many people I never would have known. By trusting God when my world seemed to get smaller and quieter, my world and perspective wound up expanding in innumerable ways. Again, you never know where life will take you.

As a woman of faith (and a middle child!), I have found that both solitude and sharing joy feed my soul. I start every single day with coffee and the Psalms, seeking the joy of the Lord and praising Him in quiet. I need that time like I need air. Then, in



my interactions with others, I feel called to share joy as much as I can.

Whenever I spend time with other people---whether on a cookbook tour, here in Pawhuska, or at home on the ranch---I always have the hope they go away from our time together feeling a little bit happier—or having laughed a little bit. While I can sometimes gravitate toward staying home and being cozy in my safe cocoon, I have seen how very important it is to get out of my comfort zone and truly connect with other human beings. Each person I meet is a gift. When I look others in the eye and listen to their stories, it’s just a beautiful dose of humanity and I feel called to try my best to make them feel joyful.

Again, there’s truly no way I could have orchestrated all of this years and years ago---but that is part of how I know that God is in it and holding all of it (and, hopefully, me!) together.

-Ree Drummond

Giver of Joy, help us to find our center in you. When you surprise us with new paths, reassure us that you have a plan and a purpose that will work together for the good of those who love you. (Jer 29:11, Rom 8:28) Give us glimpses of your glory in each person we meet and remind us that you are always “the tie that binds”ⁱⁱⁱ us together. Amen.



“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32

I am a recovering gossip. That is what I tell people anytime they start talking about other people around me. I used to throw some pretty hard judgment at people, and I acknowledge that it was because I was in pain. It is really easy, in our society, to start judging others rather than accept how painful this world can be, for ourselves and for everybody else.

In my work as a counselor, I try to provide people with a lens of empathy. I don't always agree with the choices other people make, but it is usually not hard to understand how they got there. It is powerful when we can look at other people and see who they are, see a human being who might be struggling. It is powerful to be able to see someone and acknowledge they have done terrible things, but then to help them work on it. The act of letting go of anger and forgiving people is such a huge thing for both parties. It is so pivotal for the community to have that forgiveness. I know I am grateful for the forgiveness I have received and when given the chance will always point people in the direction of forgiveness.

-Jessica Blackburn

Merciful God, thank you for not abandoning us to our mistakes. Let your desire to forgive us give us the confidence to begin again. May we be as gracious to others as you have been to us, that we may bless even those who have hurt us, and so give you glory. Amen.



“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

-1 Corinthians 3:10-11

For the past ten years, I have served as a kind of property manager for the old First Church Church building. In between parishes, I worked for a contractor, and for a while, I was the property manager at a church conference center, so in my retirement, continuing to care for the building where I served as pastor seems natural.

With a historic building like this you sometimes have to go check on it and I know what things need to be checked on. I always look for water, I do a little electrical and plumbing work, and I enjoy gardening. For me, this is a matter of stewardship. God laid the foundation, those who went before us built the building, and I am doing what I can to take care of it now.

-the Rt. Rev. Mr. Ronald H. Eldridge

Ancient of Days, you teach us to value what has been passed from generation to generation. Teach us to be good stewards of what you have given us, and always to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Amen.



“To whom much is given, much will be required.”

-Luke 12:48b (NRSV)

My mother inscribed this verse in the Bible I was given by my church when I was 12. In my words, we are held responsible for what we are blessed with.

When we first moved to Pawhuska in our 20s, we were blessed with several mentors in town. They invested in me and I, in turn, invested what I could in our town. I am a founding member of the Pawhuska Public Schools Foundation, a member of the church and PEO, and have served on the hospital auxiliary, library board, and the board of education. I believe each of these organizations has made Pawhuska a stronger community. I also did what I could to support my children and their activities. I was perpetually a homeroom mother, a cub scout leader, a VBS teacher, or a Huskie Mom. There was always another chance to volunteer.

As I look back at my years of service, I am grateful I have been able to use my blessings to give back to my community. It is my sincere hope that what I have done has been pleasing to God.

-Linda Priest

Father, we know that every good and perfect gift is from above. (James 1:17) Thank you for the many good gifts you have given us. Please help us to use those gifts in ways that benefit the world you love so much. Amen.



“So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

-2 Corinthians 5:17 (NRSV)

I was raised hard, surrounded by brutality, growing up to be a drug trafficker like my Dad. When I had to bury my little brother, I knew I needed to do something different. I joined the John 3:16 discipleship program and met people who helped others. I couldn't figure out what their angle was until I understood what it meant to have faith. I learned to let go of my old way of life. In Christ, I am a new creation, and I want to help others have that chance too.

All of the barriers I have had in my life are now benefits because I can help people who are struggling to see beyond their current circumstances. My brother was a combat medic, so I am passionate about caring for veterans and helping them keep their families together. I went to school to be a counselor because I care deeply about people who struggle with mental health, substance abuse, and especially homelessness. I know that God saw me and treated me with honor and dignity, and I want to do the same for others.

-Scott Blackburn

Redeeming God, we thank you for the people who show us your will and your way, who guide us on your path to redemption, and who celebrate with us when we become a new creation. Amen.



“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

-Matthew 7:12

I was raised by my grandparents in a tiny town in western Oklahoma. After my grandpa died, Grandma wanted to stay there, but she lived on a tight budget and took a lot of medications. It was by the grace of God and the goodwill of the local pharmacist that allowed her to stay at home. If her medications ran out at the wrong time of the month, they would let her charge them. If she couldn't get out, they would deliver. They even worked with her doctor to make sure the prescriptions were written in a way that would help her afford them. I saw what a difference having a pharmacist who cared made for my grandparents and the people in our town. It was nice to see the care and love that Grandma and Grandpa showed family, friends, and the community come full circle.

Now in my 25th year as a pharmacist myself, I know that when people come into the pharmacy, they are often feeling vulnerable. They are sick or worried about a loved one. They might have just gotten bad news or might be thinking about how to pay for an unexpected expense. I still remember what a difference an attitude of compassion and the willingness to go the extra mile made in my grandmother's care, and so I do my best to take care of my patients with that kind of care too.

-Lori Hamburger

Jesus, you make it sound so simple: treat others the way we want to be treated, and yet living that out requires intentionality every day. Help us to be mindful of what others need from us. Give us hearts of compassion, we pray, so that we are willing to give what we would so gladly receive. Amen.



“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” -Philippians 4:8

I have been directing band for 26 years. I have had my seasons with the big band and winning sweepstakes, but I am at the point in my career when I just really want to teach kids to love music. A lot of kids have been misguided and they bring their turmoil into the classroom. When they are in band, I ask them to set that aside for a little while and just focus on the music. I find that if they can focus on things that are good, it lifts them up.

I do my best to bring the lessons of my faith, the things that help me to be better, into the classroom. I love the small victory in giving kids confidence in what they do. It’s neat to see a kid who doesn’t have much direction find something they love. Maybe it is about creating a spark, maybe it is about a quiet girl blossoming, maybe it is about giving them something they can be successful at. Music is a powerful tool for inspiring us all to look for something better, to be better ourselves, and I love that I can help my students strive for that.

-Jeff Klaessy

God of Wonder, you have filled this world with your beauty. Don’t let us get stuck in the miry clay. Instead, lift our eyes and hearts to that all that is “wise and wonderful”^{iv} and chase after it with joy. Amen.



“And I will still be carrying you when you are old. Your hair will turn gray, and I will still carry you. I made you, and I will carry you to safety.”
-Isaiah 46:4(ERV)

My husband and I have always been blessed with good health, but at 83 and 94 we have had to start to face up to the realities of aging. These days we spend a lot of time going to the doctor and making sure we take care of ourselves. Keeping up with things around the house takes more effort than it ever has. We don't travel the way we used to. My husband has given up his hunting and fishing trips to Canada. But life is all about change and we have to accept life as it comes.

We try to be grateful that we have these years together. Now, we have nice visits over coffee in the morning. We stay up way too late enjoying each other in the evening. We watch the herd of deer that comes through our yard, and we take joy in our three-legged dog. We find comfort when we read our Bibles and especially when we go to church and see the people we know and love. If we don't make it to worship, we know that something is missing. We are so grateful to have loving and supportive children who are always there for us. With the Lord's help, we will make it through whatever may come.

-Dottie Allen

God of the Ages, have mercy on us as we struggle to keep up with all the changes that life brings. Help us to be patient with ourselves and others. Give wisdom and compassion to all the healthcare providers and family members who help us to enjoy our golden years. May we continue to be a blessing to them as they bless us. Amen.



“I will never leave you or forsake you.”

-Hebrews 13:5b (NRSV)

For a long time, I felt insignificant and overwhelmed. I have had times when I have been depressed, once to the point that I was suicidal. At that moment, I told God that I was not going to be okay, and I asked God to help. In my moment of need, God gave me what I needed. I had this powerful sense that I mattered to God. God told me that I am important. He promised that he is not going to give up on me, and with that, my despair was gone. God heard my prayer, and he answered it.

It's easy to let this world get us down. But if we truly believe that we are beloved children of God, it changes the story we tell ourselves. Yes, we have to face hard things, but if we have God at our side, we can trust that he will have the victory. I trust that if I put my confidence in him, he will not let me down.

-Kathy Albarracin

Jesus, we are weak, but you are strong.^v Thank you for giving us your strength to battle our demons, your love to see us through our times of trial, and your peace that surpasses all understanding. (Phil 4:7) Because you fight so hard for us, we know that we matter to you, and that is good news! Thanks be to God! Amen.



“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
-John 3:16

I grew up as part of the John 3:16 Generation, with the Rainbow Man who showed up in the end zone or behind the backstop with the John 3:16 sign. As I look back, it seems strange that so many of us were so busy in our own lives that we didn't apply the simple message he was holding up. I know I was self-serving, wasn't active in church, and didn't practice what I should for a long time. Then, my family was ravaged by cancer on both sides.

Around the same time, I remember walking out of the jail and seeing this lady who would ask me for help off and on. One particular day, she asked me if I was a Christian, and I answered without thinking, “Yes, I am.” It was ironic because even though I hadn't professed that for most of my life, it was so clear to her and to me that it was the truth. I think that the only way I could get through that much tragedy is with faith. Knowing that God loves me and promises eternal life makes all the difference. I recently had my own bout with cancer, and I am grateful I had my faith to help me face it. I feel so blessed beyond what I ever could have deserved.

-Brady Jones

Jesus, the Good News is that you love us enough to die for us and you invite us to live for you. Help us not to lose sight of its importance simply because we have heard it all of our lives. Let it make a difference in who we are and how we live, given the hope we have in you. Amen.



"Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul."

-3 John 1:2 (ESV)

I do what I do because I care. When you work in a caring profession, you do your best to really care about people. As a nurse, I want good for my patients, not just that they would have good health, but that they would have good lives. After all, Jesus came so that we might live abundantly. That kind of concern for someone's well-being isn't something that I can turn off when I leave work or if someone is taken off my patient list. Sometimes that can be hard, but I have also seen some wonderful things happen.

I have one former patient, who even after he was removed from my home health caseload, I continued to visit as a concerned neighbor. He was struggling with multiple physical and mental health concerns and needed more help than he was getting. With the help of the local police department, adult protective services, my pastor, and his best friend, we were able to get him from an unsafe and lonely life circumstance to one where he is safe and has people who can help take care of him and keep him company. I am so glad all those people saw him as more than just a case. Even now, I pray that he will have good health and that all will be well with his soul.^{vi}

-Laura Renfrow

God of Compassion, help us to see others as neighbors who are whole people who may benefit from more than we are expected to give. We add our prayers to those of so many who regularly pray the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."^{vii} Amen.



“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”
-1 John 4:18

Eighteen years ago, I married the love of my life. It is amazing having a husband who loves me and respects me. That is not what I had the first time around. I have known fear, but now I know love. My real life has already been a story of redemption. It wasn't until I was around my current husband's family that I saw how loving a family could be. God brought me out of despair and gave me the family I could never have even imagined.

I recently started volunteering at the Lighthouse in Bartlesville. It is a Christian-based homeless shelter and already I have met and visited with several women who have found safe refuge there as an escape from abusive relationships. I listen to their stories, and I hear how damaging, how helpless and hopeless, their home situations were. One woman described it like being in a well that is round and deep and the walls are wet and slimy. She said that she would try to climb out and just slide back down to the bottom. My heart is on fire to be a part of this organization that is helping them to climb out of fear-filled places and help them learn what love is meant to be.

-LouAnna Allen

O God, you are our refuge and strength, our ever-present help in times of trouble. (Ps 46:1) May your perfect love drive out all fear so that we may love one another as you have loved us. We offer special prayers for all those who have not yet encountered the redemption you have planned for them. Amen.



“There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ.”

-1 Corinthians 12:12 (NIRV)

As a two-time cancer survivor, I live with the confidence that God isn't done with me yet. I know that I still have a part to play, that he still has work for me to do. When I went into remission, I promised God that I would use this extra time he gave me to serve him, so every day, when I see things that need to be done, I do my best to help. That might mean that one day I am stocking shelves at Christ's Cupboard, the next I am substitute teaching up at the school, and the third I am watching my three-year-old grandson. I keep busy because I want to use the time and energy I have to do my part to help others.

My fight with cancer also gave me a new understanding of how important each part of the body is. I know intimately that the whole body is stronger and healthier when every part works the way it should. This is true for both the literal body and the Body of Christ, which is why I do my best to encourage other people to do their part too. When there is some good work to do, I try to include others, to encourage and empower them to do their part faithfully. There is always something someone can do to help. It brings me joy when I see so many people involved in our community, doing their parts, and working together for the good of the Body.

-Nila Thomas

Jesus, we pray for health and wholeness in your Body where every part works the way that it should. Help all the parts of the Body treat the others with care, so that we may hold every part of your Body in honor. Amen.



“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.”
-Hebrews 4:9-10

A good life means having a rhythm of work and rest. Hard work never scared me and there were some seasons when it seemed like all I did was work. But there are also times when you have to set everything down and take some time away. You have to recreate in order to be re-created. For me, that has always meant hunting trips to South Dakota and fishing trips in Canada.

When you’re out in the boat or walking the fields, everything can be so quiet. It is so easy to find peace in nature. There, beside still waters, God really does restore your soul. Being together with friends and family is also part of finding rest. As one of our hunting friends says, “some of the best memories are made even if you don’t pull the trigger.” Now my son is taking his grandson to the farm where we have hunted for years, continuing the tradition of going to worship at a little church out in the country, of spending time together with God in nature, and carrying on that age-old tradition of the rhythm of work and rest that comes as a blessing from God.

-Joe Allen

Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, you teach that the sabbath is made for us. (Mk 2:27) Don’t let us forget the high value you place on rest. Teach us the discipline to set our work down at the appointed time so that we can honor your sabbath and enter into your rest. Amen.



“The Lord is my shepherd.”

-Psalm 23:1a

My family has faced a lot of crises over the years. Our first daughter died at age five from Reyes Syndrome. Then I had two miscarriages. Another daughter bent down to pick a flower right off her front porch and was bit by a prairie rattler. When we got her to the hospital, they didn't think she was going to make it, but on the third day, she pulled through. Our son-in-law had an accident in the shop, and his hand was cut off at the wrist. After a wild drive to the hospital, a helicopter ride to Tulsa, and a major surgery, they were able to save the hand. I lost my husband when our daughter was eight months pregnant. Through each of these traumatic events, our faith helped us to hang on to each other and to God.

Being a Christian doesn't mean life will be easy, but it does mean we can trust in God's care. Without faith, family, and friends, I would be nothing, and I know it. We help each other through the tough moments in life, and we know that God is there too, guiding us along the way.

-Carolyn Helmer

Lord, you are the Good Shepherd. (Jn 10:11) We put our trust in you on the good days, and we rely on you during the dark days. Help us to follow you all of our days. Amen.



“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”
-Psalm 139:13-14

My father died when I was five, and that started my path to becoming a doctor. He was a physician, as was his father before him, which makes me a third-generation small-town doctor. Faith was also instilled in me at a young age, which sets the foundation for why I find such great satisfaction in helping people with their problems.

I am a general practitioner, which means each day is different. Outside of cold and flu season, it is rare that I see the same thing more than once a day. When I first came to Pawhuska, we did surgeries every morning and I still like to be able to do in-office procedures. It’s rewarding to be able to knit someone back together. Until 20 years ago, we were still delivering babies here too. It was always hard work but was a marvelous reminder that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made”. (Ps 139:14) Every day I get to work with God’s most amazing creation, and for this, I give him praise.

-Bob Priest

Almighty God, how awesome are your works! (Ps 66:3) We celebrate that you made us and that you have declared us good, and we weep alongside those who experience pain due to the brokenness of sin in this world. May you continue to guide the hands of all who bring healing to the hurting. Amen.



“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

-Colossians 4:2

I teach second grade in Fairfax, the next town over. Once a week, when my whole school meets for Woodland Wake up, we say the Pledge of Allegiance and then take a moment of silence. I have pulled that practice into my classroom, and it is one of the highlights of my day. The students take turns leading; they even take requests from their classmates for what we should think about during the silence. For many, it becomes a chance to share what is weighing on them. This is usually when we find out that someone’s dog has died. Right now, one girl’s dog, who is blind, is missing, and every day, we hope together that her dog will come home.

I am thankful that my school administrators understand how important this time is. Our “exercise in compassion” becomes, for many of my students and for me, a dedicated time of prayer. Even the students with no church background find great reassurance knowing that others are thinking of them. Sadly, in my career, there have been children who have suffered great tragedy, and this has given us one way to be there for them as they face hard times. Prayer is how we connect with God, and I want all my students to have that as a place to go.

-Marci Hendricks

Holy Spirit, you are our advocate, our comforter, and our encourager. We thank you for the moments in our lives that are dedicated to seeking fellowship with you and with our community. Fill those moments with faith, we pray, that all may know how meaningful that connection can be. Amen.



“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.” -Romans 15:1-2

At the beginning of the school year, the Superintendent of the Vo-Tech asked us what was important to us. My answer was that everyone has value and that we need to lift people up; we need to help people advance. There is a purpose for everybody, and it is important to me to cultivate that in my classroom.

As a diesel instructor, my students are learning to work on tractors, equipment, and trucks. Everyone comes to me from a different place, with their own skillsets, personalities and quirks. I know that not everyone will be a top-notch technician, but everyone needs to have a niche. I make sure my strong students know that they have a responsibility to build up the ones who aren't as skilled because they when they get out into the real world they need to be able to serve a purpose. I want everyone who comes through my classroom to be able to find work.

-Kyle Renfrow

Jesus, you are the Master Craftsman, by whose hand we are all built up. In a world where everyone relies on their equipment, we give you thanks and praise for all of the men and women who keep us moving. What a blessing that with the right training, so many people can find ways to be useful. We ask that you keep them safe while they work and keep us safe while we use what they have created. Amen.



“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”
-Proverbs 11:25

I always keep an extra band-aid with me because, inevitably, someone will need it. If I am around, I never mind giving my son’s friends a ride. When I find a quick and easy recipe that my family loves, you can be sure I will share it. It feels good to be able to share what I have to help make other people’s lives just a little bit better.

God has been so good to me and I know I am blessed. I know how much it means that he is there for me when I need him, and I want to do what I can to pay that forward to others. Then, what’s amazing is that when I am able to do something for someone else, I get this wonderful sense of satisfaction. It feels like a reward for doing good, which is another gift God gives me.

-Angie Klaessy

God, you are the giver of all good things. Help us to acknowledge the source of our blessings and steward those gifts for the good of the world. Amen.



“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” -Exodus 20:8

My mom was a strong influence on me, and she made sure I understood reverence for God. You have to honor your obligation to God, so I try not to work on Sundays. It is important to fully dedicate that day to God. You have to get up, get cleaned up, and go into town. It resets your week. If your week is going bad or something isn't going right, it allows you to have that dedicated time to put God first. Besides, anytime I've ever worked on a Sunday, it never seems to go well. Now, sometimes your ox is in the ditch, and you have to go tend to it. (Lk 14:5) We have had fires on Sunday, and you have to go deal with that. But usually on Sunday, I try to make God a priority.

I also believe that you should give employees the freedom to make that choice, too. I want them to have the option of not going to work on Sunday and not having to worry about their job on that day. I don't like my cowboys to work on Sundays if we can avoid it. The restaurant business isn't easy either, and the staff needs a day of rest. You can't ask someone to do something you don't want to do. I don't want to work on Sunday, so I don't want to ask someone else to work on Sunday. I don't want to have to answer to God saying I made people work on the Sabbath. You read the Bible, and the Bible tells you what you are supposed to do, and then you try to live that out. If you try to live your life according to the plan God lays out for you, it usually works out better.

-Ladd Drummond

Holy God, you speak clearly to us in your Word. Give us the faith to trust what you say and the obedience to do what you say. May our values be shaped by your kingdom, and may all we do glorify you. Amen.



END NOTES

ⁱ Sabine Baring-Gould, “Onward, Christian Soldiers” (No. 644) in *Sing to the Lord* (Kansas City, MO: Lillenas Publishing Company, 1993).

ⁱⁱ The Office of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Common Worship, Pastoral Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2018), 411.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Fawcett, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (No. 677) in *Sing to the Lord* (Kansas City, MO: Lillenas Publishing Company, 1993).

^{iv} Cecil F. Alexander, “All Things Bright and Beautiful” (No. 737) in *Sing to the Lord* (Kansas City, MO: Lillenas Publishing Company, 1993).

^v Anna B. Warner, “Jesus Loves Me” (No. 738) in *Sing to the Lord* (Kansas City, MO: Lillenas Publishing Company, 1993).

^{vi} Horatio G. Spafford, “It Is Well with My Soul” (No. 554) in *Sing to the Lord* (Kansas City, MO: Lillenas Publishing Company, 1993).

^{vii} “The Prayer of Serenity” (No. 628) in *Sing to the Lord* (Kansas City, MO: Lillenas Publishing Company, 1993).



*Here is the church.
Here is the steeple.
Open the doors.
Where are all the people?*

Were you taught this rhyme as a child? In years past, the expectation was that the people would and should be in the church building. But...

***What if we understood the church to be the people of God,
wherever they are?***

In these pages, you will find stories of how the congregation of the Presbyterian Disciples Church embodies the Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, living their faith on the frontier of their daily lives.

“Best devotional ever!”

-REV. COLE WESTON, *HUSBAND OF THE AUTHOR*

“These people are great!”

-LEAH BIGHORSE, *CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR*

Cover photo courtesy of Rebecca Weston, taken at the Tall Grass Prairie.

The Rev. Rebecca Weston is a Presbyterian pastor who has been serving congregations in Eastern Oklahoma since 2008. After spending three years as a mission worker in China, she earned her Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary and is pursuing her Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary. Married to the Rev. Cole Weston, together they have five children.

Presbyterian
Disciples
 Church
The Ecumenical Parish

101 E 12th Street
Pawhuska, OK 74056
918-287-4040
pdc pawhuska@gmail.com