

Your Dialogue with God in the Hospital



ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Your church away from home.

This prayer booklet is dedicated to Lyle Luehmann, my chaplain partner for many years here at Mayo. Lyle has made over 5,000 hospital visits through the years, more visits than many pastors make in their whole career. Lyle's compassion, dedication, and strength of faith have greatly impacted many people in the hospital. I thank the Lord for him, his work, and his friendship. Pastor Brian Kom.

The picture on the front of this booklet is the logo for Ascension's "Church away from home" ministry. It's our mission to be an out of town WELS member's church away from home while they are here in Rochester.

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About this booklet

For many years I've had the privilege of visiting WELS members at Mayo Clinic and Mayo's hospitals. Mayo is recognized around the world as the Supreme Court of medicine. If other doctors and hospitals are stymied, it's time to go to Mayo. If no one else holds out hope, it's time to go to Mayo. If someone needs a final opinion, it's time to go to Mayo.

Indeed, Mayo is a very special place. I've seen so many medical miracles at Mayo that it's almost become commonplace. I myself had successful cancer surgery at Mayo just months after I graduated from our seminary. But, of course, Mayo is not the Supreme Court of medicine. Our Lord, the One who created the human body on the sixth day of creation, is the ultimate Physician. He's the One who holds life and death in His hands. This booklet is meant to strengthen a patient's relationship with their Lord. Pastor Brian Kom

Overview of this Booklet

Your conversation with God

This booklet features an old fashioned and time-honored approach to ministering to people who are in the hospital. When we are in the hospital our hearts are full of fear, worry, and uncertainty. Like the psalmists of old we pour out our hearts to the Lord. And, like God's people of all generations, we listen carefully for God's response as we find it in His Word. What else is that but a dialogue? It's my prayer that you find this book of prayers, devotions and Scripture uplifting and helpful.

Using this booklet

The format of this booklet is simple. For each "hospital situation" I've included a few of my thoughts in italics, a prayer, and a list of Bible passages appropriate to that situation. Before each passage I've included a devotional thought for the passage that follows. This is our dialogue with God. At the end of the booklet I've listed a few tips I've picked up about being a patient in the hospital.

A note about finding the perfect passage for a situation

Not too long ago someone mentioned to me that after making so many hospital visits I must know the perfect passage for any situation. It's certainly true that certain passages fit certain situations very well. At the same time, we need to remember that God's Word itself fits every situation.

When I was a vicar (a student pastor for a year) my bishop (the pastor in charge of the vicar), Pastor Arno Wolfgramm, went to the hospital every Monday. The other pastor at the church went to the hospital on Wednesday while I went on Friday. In general, Pastor Wolfgramm used the Gospel lesson for the week as he made his visits. There's a lot of wisdom in that. We don't fit God's Word to our lives as much as we fit our lives to God's Word.

For example, let's say that a pastor is working through the life and ministry of Elisha in a summer sermon series. The sermon text for the week is 2 Kings 6:1-7, the account of a prophet dropping a borrowed ax head into the water. Elisha miraculously made the iron ax head float! Now imagine that the pastor visits someone in the hospital only to find that the nurses are having a difficult time starting an IV because the patient's veins have collapsed because of dehydration. What could a floating ax head possibly have to do with problems starting an IV line? More than you would think! The obvious lesson is that God is powerful; He can make an iron ax head float and can certainly help the medical staff to start an IV. That IV line is something to pray about! But there's something more. I'm sure the prophets would have had trouble paying for a new ax head ... but at the same time one ax head isn't exactly a matter of life and death. God is not only concerned with the "big things"; He's concerned with every aspect of His children's lives, even an ax head and, yes, even an IV line.

I pray that you'll find the suggested Bible readings in this booklet helpful to your specific situation, but I also pray that you'll continue your normal Bible reading and apply every part of God's Word to your situation.

What this booklet is not

This book is not meant to be a substitute for contact with your fellow Christians. When we go through tough times, the devil tries to isolate us from God and from other Christians. Then he is free to trap us with his temptations. A hospitalization is precisely the time when we need contact with our fellow Christians. Be sure to reach out to your Christian friends and family members, your pastor, and your "church away from home" at Ascension!

All Scripture references are from the 1984 edition of the NIV.

Prayers and Scripture

1. When first admitted to the hospital

Many years ago, I was admitted to St. Mary's hospital to undergo cancer surgery. When I checked in I was overwhelmed by how many people there were waiting for surgery! That was on top of being overwhelmed by my needing surgery. Trust me, the first uncertain moments in the hospital can often be the hardest. As you begin your hospitalization make sure that you are on solid spiritual ground. Bring your fears, anxieties and questions to the Lord in prayer. Remember who you are: a forgiven, beloved child of God. Your Savior will certainly not abandon you in your time of need. Pick a promise from God's Word to think about during your first day in the hospital; go back to it over and over again. And give me a call; I'd love to visit you while you are in the hospital!

Dear Heavenly Father, my heart is full of questions, concerns, and uncertainty. As I am admitted to the hospital I realize that things are out of my control ... and that's disconcerting! I need medical care that can only be given in the hospital. Lord, I put myself into Your hands, knowing that You are my loving Good Shepherd who has led me to this point in my life. I don't know what's going to happen but You do ... and You love me. Let me rest securely in that knowledge. Richly bless the nurses, doctors and other medical professionals as they treat me. Guide them as they seek my good. Help me to treat them with respect and honesty as they do their work. Lord, I also pray for my loved ones. They are probably just as concerned as I am, or even more so. Remind them that I am in Your hands. Finally, Lord, I ask You to keep my faith strong while I'm in the hospital. The devil will attack me while I'm down. But You are stronger than the devil and have promised to never leave me nor forsake me. I will hold You to that promise while I'm hospitalized. Thank You, Lord, for answering this prayer. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

God's Word to Consider

When we come to the hospital it's time to pray. This passage tells us to pray boldly. Note what God's throne is called: "the throne of grace". Remember: God dearly loves you! He has forgiven you. He has made you His child. All those truths allow us to pray boldly and give us the confidence we need to face the future.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

This next passage deserves to be read slowly and pondered. Use it as you sit in the waiting room before being admitted! The passage does a wonderful job mixing our petitions and God's promises.

"Hear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. Hear my prayer, O LORD; listen to my cry for mercy. In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me." (Psalm 86:1-7)

Note that in Psalm 91 God talks about sending His holy angels to protect us. This psalm reminds us that we rest in God's powerful, loving hands.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. If you make the Most High

your dwelling— even the LORD, who is my refuge— then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. “Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.”” (Psalm 91)

Are you ready for the battle? No, there won't be a battle with the doctors or nurses. I'm not even talking about a battle with disease or pain. Hospitals are fertile ground for the devil and his temptations. He will want to isolate you from your fellow Christians, fill your mind with worst case scenarios, and doubt God's promises. Put on the full armor of God!

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:10–18, NIV84)

2. When waiting for the doctors

Sometimes I think that 95% of healthcare is waiting! A patient waits for a procedure or test and then waits again for the results. People wait for a meal to arrive or a nurse to respond to the call light. Medicines take time to work so we have to wait for that too. But the hardest waiting of all involves waiting for the doctor to arrive. If we are waiting for the doctor to give a diagnosis or report, it might even seem that we are waiting for God to arrive to tell us whether we are going to live or die. Doctors are tremendous blessings from the Lord and can do amazing things but they are not God. God is one Person we don't ever have to wait for. He's with you right now with His power, promises and presence.

Dear Heavenly Father, please give me patience during my hospitalization. It's hard to wait for anything but it's especially hard to wait for things that could be a matter of life and death. Remind me that when I wait in the hospital it's a chance for me to wait for You. The Psalmist says, *Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.* In my life I have learned that Your ways are not my ways and that Your time schedule isn't necessarily my time schedule. Help me to put all things into Your hands, including the pace at which everything happens in the hospital. Remind me that I am safe in Your loving hands. I don't have to wait for Your love at all! Give the doctors skill, knowledge and insight as they do their important work. Let my brief time with them be beneficial. Help them to give me clear answers to my questions and concerns. Guide them so that they notice little details that could give them answers to their questions. Let them work well with my nurses. And, Lord, as I wait for my doctors to come in, remind me that while they are very important and are gifts from You, they are not God. Only You hold my life in Your hands. Only You decide matters of life and death. Help me to listen respectfully to the doctors because they are Your representatives. But remind me that You are God. I pray this in the name of Jesus; Amen.

God's Word to consider

Be sure that you aren't waiting only for the doctors; "wait for the Lord"! When the Psalmist talks about waiting for the Lord he is inviting us to trust that the Lord will "come through for us" and will do what's best for us.

Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD. (Psalm 27:14)

Don't just sit around watching TV or twiddling your thumbs while you wait for the doctors! Do something productive; in fact, go ahead and do the most important thing you can do: praise the Lord. Praising the Lord for His blessings helps us to trust in Him for future blessings. It also reminds us that we are in His hands, not ultimately in the doctors' hands.

"Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary." (Psalm 96:1–6)

If the Lord isn't involved in something it will come to ruin. Thank the Lord for the good work of the doctors. But also trust that the Lord is the One who is guiding your hospitalization and health care.

"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain." (Psalm 127:1)

"Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— the LORD, who remains faithful forever." (Psalm 146:3–6)

3. When asking “why”

Did you know that there is a technical name for “why questions” and the whole question about why bad things happen? Philosophers call it “theodicy”. People write academic books about it. People sit in classrooms and debate it. But those are the wrong places to wrestle with the question. The question of why bad things happen becomes most poignant in the hospital. When a child struggles to survive cancer or a young parent clings to life after a serious car accident, then the question “why” overpowers us. In such a situation it’s foolish and dangerous to try to answer the question “why”. It’s foolish and dangerous because God has not answered the question in His Word. So what are we to do? We look at what God has told us in His Word. He has told us that He loves us. He has told us that Jesus suffered all the punishment for our sins; the problems and trials of life are NOT punishment for anything we have done. He has told us that God will use all things – even terrible things – for our good.

Dear Heavenly Father, You clearly tell me in Your Word that You love me completely and that You are all powerful. That presents a problem when bad things happen. If You love me, why would You allow evil into my life? If you are all powerful, why don’t You keep evil from me? Lord, I feel these “why questions” deep in my heart because the pain I feel is so great. Lord, teach me anew to trust You with my whole heart. Every day help me to lay aside these “why questions” and to focus on the truths You tell me in Your unchanging Word. There I see that You dearly love me, without condition and without limit. There I see that Jesus took the punishment that I deserve for my sins. Tell me again and again that the punishment for my sins is 100% finished. You can and will use everything that happens to me for my good and the good of Your kingdom. Plant that truth deeply in my heart and mind. Lord, asking “why questions” points me backward. Instead turn my attention toward the future, a future filled with forgiveness, joy, peace and heaven itself. Father in heaven, I lay all my “why questions” at the foot of the cross. You used the greatest injustice in the history of the world, the

crucifixion of Jesus, for the ultimate good. I trust in Your loving ability to still do that today. In Jesus' name I put myself into Your hands. Amen.

God's Word to consider

When we get stuck on the "why question" we begin to focus on ourselves instead of on the Lord or others. We might even begin to think that we are unique in our "unfair" situation. Not a chance! God's people have been asking "why?" and "how long?" for a long, long time. Notice how our quotation from Psalm 13 ends. The psalmist, David, follows up his questions with a confession of faith. Ask "why questions" if you must, but be quick to confess your faith in our loving God.

"O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long?" (Psalm 6:1–3)

"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me." (Psalm 13:1–6)

You are in pretty good company as you ask a why question. Psalm 22 foretells what the Messiah would experience and even say. Recall Jesus crying out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Was this an intellectual "why question"? Maybe, maybe not. Perhaps it was a cry from the bottom of Jesus' heart in the midst of incredible suffering. A short time later Jesus would commit his soul to His Heavenly Father. Trust your Heavenly Father. Commit your way to Him even if you can't understand what's going on. Because Jesus was forsaken by God in the cross, we will never be forsaken.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.” (Psalm 22:1–5)

This Psalm tells us exactly what to do when we are frustrated about our suffering. We wonder if the Lord has rejected us. What did the Psalmist do? He remembered the loving deeds of the Lord from days gone by. He meditated on God’s mighty deeds. That’s the answer! When you are stuck in frustration and “why questions” let your mind go back to the loving things God has done in the past, beginning with the love He showed to you on the cross. When you focus on the love of your Lord, the frustrations and “why questions” become less and less powerful.

“I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired: “Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?” Then I thought, “To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High.” I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.” (Psalm 77:1–12)

God has big shoulders. He can handle your “why questions”. We need to be careful, however, that “why questions” don’t turn into complaints and accusations against God. That’s what happened in the prophet Jeremiah’s heart. And how did God reply? Did He say, “Oh, that’s OK, Jeremiah. It will be OK in the end.” Not at all. He told Jeremiah to repent of his sinful complaining. More than that, He promised that He would rescue Jeremiah and would save him. One way to make sure your questioning doesn’t turn into accusations against God is to talk with people. Tell your fellow Christians (or pastor, or chaplain) what you are thinking and feeling. That will help you sort through your thoughts and give wise people a chance to advise you.

“Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails? Therefore this is what the LORD says: “If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them. I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you,” declares the LORD. “I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel.”” (Jeremiah 15:18–21)

4. When feeling guilty

Do you remember the phrase “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop”? An idle mind makes a pretty good workshop for the devil too. And in the hospital it’s very easy for a mind to become idle. You can only watch TV for so long. You can only visit with family members for so long. And the nights seem to take forever! On top of that, it’s part of our sinful human nature to think that when bad things happen we must have done something wrong. Put all that together and you have a recipe for disaster. Having said all that, we need to remember that guilt is not a bad thing. It’s a vivid reminder that we are sinful. The big question is what we do with our guilt. Do we bring it to the Lord in a confession of sins and ask Him to forgive us? Or do we wallow in our guilt and hang on to it?

When I visit people in the hospital, I’m of little help to someone physically. I can’t weigh in on why someone’s blood pressure is so low, why someone’s immune system isn’t recovering after cancer treatment, or why even the strongest medication won’t touch the terrible pain someone is feeling. But I’m an expert on dealing with guilt because God’s Word has equipped all of us to be experts in that area. Be sure to apply everything the Bible says to your own heart.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of guilt. If I never felt guilty about anything I would quickly lose sight of my need for forgiveness. Like any other gift that You give, the devil can turn something good into something bad. The devil can so focus me on my guilt that I can begin to wonder if I’m worthy of Your love. Banish such foolish thoughts from my heart, Lord. Of course, I’m unworthy of Your love; that’s the whole point of my guilt! Constantly reassure me that when Jesus said on the cross “It is finished” He meant it. My sins have been completely paid for by Your Son’s suffering and death. My salvation has been guaranteed by His resurrection from the dead. God made a precious promise to me when I was baptized. By Your grace I am a child of God. As I am in the hospital the devil will continue to attack that bedrock truth. Give me the strength to fight against those

attacks. Let me rest securely in what Your unchanging Word says: *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) I pray this in the name of Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

These first three passages remind us of an all-important truth. Our forgiveness does not depend on us. God forgives us because He is a forgiving God. God loves us because He is a loving God. It's for the sake of His name (not ours) that we are forgiven.

“Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.” (Psalm 25:6–7)

“For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.” (Psalm 25:11)

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” (Psalm 51:1–2)

Is there snow on the ground right now? If not, imagine what your yard at home looks like the day after a snow storm. If the sun is shining, you might not even be able to look at the snow because it would be so bright. That's what your heart looks like in God's eyes! You have a pure heart! The psalmist directs us to pray for the joy that results from our salvation.

“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” (Psalm 51:7–12)

This is a famous passage for a good reason! Your salvation and forgiveness are gifts from God. You have been forgiven!

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8–10)

Part of the power of guilt is the threat of punishment. This powerful passage assures you that there is no more punishment (condemnation) left. Jesus took it all on the cross. There’s simply no more punishment left for you. Praise the Lord!

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1–4)

Jesus was stricken, smitten and afflicted in your place. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. Those Biblical truths assure you that your guilt and sin have been taken away. You are at peace with God!

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:3–6)

There is but one antidote to guilt: Jesus Christ. Jesus says that He is the way, the truth and the life. If you are struggling with guilt focus your heart on Jesus and what He has done for you.

“Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”” (John 14:5–7)

Do you feel guilty? Are you sinful? Join the club! Everyone has sinned and fallen short of what God demands of us. But also know that God has declared you “not guilty”. Don’t trust what you are feeling; trust in God’s solemn declaration based on what your Savior has done for you. You are “not guilty”; your sin has been taken away!

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:21–24)

5. When waiting for surgery

We already talked about waiting in the hospital. Waiting for doctors, nurses, or medication is one thing; waiting for surgery is a whole other thing.

Over the years I've sat with quite a few families as they waited for their loved one to be taken away for surgery. I think this is the toughest waiting that happens in the hospital, much tougher than waiting after surgery has finally begun. That's because everyone knows that these might be the last moments spent with the patient. My advice always is to acknowledge out loud what everyone is already thinking. Be open about your feelings with one another. Tell each other that you love them. Remind them that if something terrible happens during the operation that you will see each other again in heaven. My experience is that once those important conversations are over it's much easier to wait. Then the discussion about Uncle Roy's tractor problems thirty years ago doesn't seem awkward and forced. The story is funny again!

Dear Heavenly Father, as I wait to be taken down to the operating room I put myself into Your hands completely. Every surgery is serious because there is always risk. I know that no matter what happens I'll be fine. If You choose that I not come out of this surgery I know that I'll wake up in heaven. You have forgiven my sins and won a place in heaven for me. If the surgery is a success, then I'll be able to continue to serve You here in this world. Give me the peace that passes all human understanding, the peace that comes from knowing that I'm Your child. Lord, I ask that You bless everyone involved in my surgery. Let them use their skills to Your glory and my good. Step in and be my great Physician. Help me to recover quickly from the anesthesia. Finally, Lord, I also pray for my family members and friends who will be waiting, worrying and praying during my surgery. Give them the same peace that You give me. Remind them that I am in Your hands. Help the time to pass quickly for them. Again, Heavenly Father, I put

myself into Your hands, trusting that You love me and will use this surgery for my good. I pray this in the name of my Savior. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

The apple of our eye is the pupil of our eye. If a speck of dust gets close to our pupil our eyelid snaps shut with remarkable speed. Our body protects the "apple of our eye" at all costs. Likewise the Lord guards His beloved children. He hides us in the shadow of his wings. Keep that in mind as you wait for surgery!

"Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings"
(Psalm 17:8)

Remember that your surgery depends on the Lord! He is your refuge and rock; in other words, He holds you in the palm of His powerful and loving hands.

"Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." (Psalm 62:5–8)

The psalmist calls on the Israelites to put their trust in the Lord because of His unfailing love and redemption (buying us back from our sin). Your trust in the Lord before surgery is not a "blind trust". We trust in the Lord because He has done great things in the past for us. He has a good track record. Trust the Lord!

"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins." (Psalm 130:5–8)

Which is easier? To forgive someone or to heal them? The teachers of the law were right that only God can forgive sins. They were wrong in not realizing that Jesus was the Son of God! A doctor can bring healing to someone, but he or she cannot bring forgiveness to someone. A doctor can remove someone's appendix; but he or she cannot remove anyone's sins. Only God can do that. As you wait for surgery pray that God will use the doctors to bring you healing. But also take comfort and find peace in the fact that God has already done something harder and more glorious than giving you physical healing. He has forgiven your sins and brought you into His family. That's ultimately more important than the success of any surgery.

“Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!” Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” Then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.” (Matthew 9:1–8)

6. When bad news is received

When my doctor told me that I had cancer she said, “I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that you have cancer. The good news is that it’s treatable”. I didn’t hear the “good news” very clearly. My mind got stuck on the word “cancer”.

It’s never pleasant to receive bad news. In the hospital it can be horrible and literally life threatening. When Jesus promised that nothing could snatch us out of His hand, one of the things He was talking about is bad news in the hospital. No matter what a doctor says, you are still in Jesus’ hands. Everything else might change but that will not.

Dear Heavenly Father, my mind is reeling right now because I just received news I didn’t want to hear. Lord, I don’t quite know what to do. I feel helpless, numb, and maybe even angry. I dearly need Your assurance that You are here, that You love me, and that You will not abandon me. Bring me back to Your Son’s promise that nothing – absolutely nothing – can snatch me out of His hands. In these next hours give me the strength that I’ll need to reassure my friends and family that Your love is still strong and that You still have good and gracious plans for me. Let me comfort them with the same comfort You give to me. And, Lord, in the dark moments that are sure to come, put people into my life to encourage me. Help me to be open and honest about my feelings and fears as I talk to my Christian friends, my family, and my pastor. Be my Good Shepherd as You lead me in the way You want me to go. I rest securely in Your love and forgiveness. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

God’s Word to consider:

When we receive bad news, it can feel like we’ve been shaken off our moorings and that we are floating lose in the ocean. This reading from Psalm 31 is one of my favorites. It’s filled with strong words: rock, refuge, and fortress. God is dependable! We can commit ourselves to Him.

“In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.” (Psalm 31:1–5)

Martin Luther received lots of bad news in his life and ministry. Perhaps that’s why Psalm 46 was one of his favorite psalms! Even though the earth give way and the mountains quake (that would be really bad news!) we don’t have to fear. God is here with us and will help us.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.” (Psalm 46:1–5, NIV84)

Bad news quickly produces fear in our hearts. Jesus tells us not to worry. This is no empty command; He gives us good reason for not worrying. We can look at our world to see how God cares even for the smallest of creatures. We are His children and can be sure He will take care of us much more carefully than he does the birds!

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 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. If that is how God clothes the grass

of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!" (Luke 12:22–28)

Paul received some jarring news on his way to Damascus. Remember that he was sure that he was serving God by persecuting the followers of Jesus. In fact, he was on his way to kill more Christians in Damascus. He was knocked to the ground by a light from heaven. A voice asked him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When Paul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" the answer came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." I wonder if Paul thought, "This is not good!" In the end, the Lord worked this painful experience out for good in Paul's life. Paul would become one of the greatest missionaries the world has ever seen. Paul remembered this painful event as the beginning of his relationship with his Savior Jesus Christ. God promises that He will work all things out for your good. Even the bad news you've just received will be used for good by the Lord.

"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'" (Acts 9:1–6)

There is so much in this section from Romans 5. We have peace with God! We gain access to God's grace through faith. God has demonstrated His love to us in Christ. But also look at the middle section of these verses. God promises that He will use our present sufferings to build perseverance, character and hope in us. You have just received bad news. Rejoice that God has promised to use that bad news to produce perseverance, character and hope in your heart.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access

by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:1–8)

You are a conqueror Paul says. Nothing – not death nor life, neither angels nor demons, nor the present nor the future, or any bad news you might receive in the hospital - will be able to separate you from the love of Christ. Praise the Lord.!

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:28–39)

7. When good news is received

When you hear good news what is your first reaction? It's to share the good news with family and friends or to thank the Lord for His blessing. A hospital, even more so than a church building, is often a "place of prayer." Here in the hospital people are in desperate need of help. Make sure the hospital is still a place of prayer now that you have received good news. Be quick to thank your great Physician!

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You! You have chosen to answer my prayers and the prayers of many others in the way we wanted You to. I thank and praise You for that. As I share this good news with others in my life, let me make this an opportunity to glorify You. Lord, thank You for the good work of the nurses, doctors, and other medical personnel. Use their work to bless many others in this hospital. As I look back on this hospitalization and my good outcome let me use this as another example of Your love for me, love that found full expression when Jesus gave His life for me on the cross. I also pray that You will remind me that this good news is not the best news in my life; the very best news I've ever heard is that I've been forgiven by the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Again, Lord, I thank You for the good news I have received. In Jesus' name; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Sarah was crystal clear about the source of her good news. It was the Lord who had given her and Zechariah a child. In fact, she was very open about her joy! She laughed!

"Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”” (Genesis 21:1–7)

Moses sang a song to the Lord in his joy at good news. What will your song to the Lord look like?

“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: “I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.” (Exodus 15:1–2)

David was bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. His heart was filled with joy and thanksgiving. He called on the people to remember the wonders God had done. Take note of the joy you feel at the good news you’ve received so you can remember this day for a long time. God has answered your prayers in the way you wanted and has blessed you.

“Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, O descendants of Israel his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones.” (1 Chronicles 16:8–13)

Psalm 117 is a wonderful hymn of praise. Notice that the Psalm says two things about God’s love: it’s great and it endures forever.

“Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD.” (Psalm 117)

Job fell to the ground and worshiped the Lord. What good news had he heard? None. He had just heard that his children had died and his fortune was lost. Today as you celebrate the good news you've received take a step back and remember that the news will not always be good. There will come a day when the news isn't good. There will come a day when you are dying. You can worship the Lord even then. God's name is to be praised even then. You are in God's hands; He gives and He takes away. He knows just what we need and when we need it.

“At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”” (Job 1:20–21)

Let this Psalm be on your lips and in your heart!

“I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.” (Psalm 9:1–2)

Ten men were healed from leprosy. Only one returned to speak words of praise and thanksgiving. Ten people will be released from Mayo tomorrow. Where will their lives take them? How many will respond with words of praise and thanksgiving?”

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:11-19)

8. When they can't get the IV in

I'm glad that I'm not a phlebotomist. Among other things, a phlebotomist's job is to start IV lines for patients. Here at Mayo, in some areas, especially the ICU, the patient's nurse typically starts the IV. If the nurse can't successfully start the IV in two or three tries then they call in the specialist, the phlebotomist. Perhaps a patient is dehydrated and their veins have begun to collapse. Perhaps the patient has had so many IVs in the past that their arm just won't support another one. Perhaps the patient is a little baby whose veins are tiny. The process of getting the IV in can be terrifying and painful for patients.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the many medications that You have given to the medical profession to help the human body. I ask You to guide the medical staff as they work to insert an IV line into my body so they can give me those medications. There are many uncomfortable and painful experiences in the hospital. The insertion of an IV line can be especially difficult because it's so vivid and personal. Someone is trying to stick a needle into one of my blood vessels! Let the process go smoothly, Lord. Give the staff expertise as they do their important work. As I am thinking about blood vessels and bleeding let my mind wander back thousands of years to Mount Calvary where Jesus was crucified. There were no medical personnel on hand when Jesus was put on the cross, no nurse to monitor pain when the soldiers put the nails in His hands and feet. All this He did so my sins could be washed away and I could be His child. As I go through this "IV ordeal" remind me of the great love that Jesus has for me. It's in His name that I pray; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

God is the creator of the universe. He is the One who created dry land and put the seas in their place. And God also cares about every detail in your life, including the IV that the staff are working to put in your body. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.”
(Psalm 24:1–2)

Why would you rejoice when the medical staff is having trouble putting in an IV? Good question! Paul says that we are to rejoice always because the Lord is near with His love. We can put all things – including the placement of an IV – into God’s hands. Paul adds that God’s peace transcends all understanding. God’s peace is powerful and profound enough to handle any troubles or trials that come up in the hospital. His peace can actually guard our hearts and minds.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 4:4–7)

9. When the doctors have no answers

Mayo is exceedingly good at figuring out what's wrong with someone. Oftentimes the doctors test, test and test some more so to make sure they know exactly what's going on. It's a rare occasion when they can't diagnose someone's ailment. It's rare but it does happen. Besides that, it sometimes takes a while to come up with the diagnosis. Why is it so hard to not know what's wrong? We human beings hate uncertainty. If we don't know what's wrong, we often get frustrated and impatient. Besides that, we know that the doctors need to figure out what's wrong before they can come up with a treatment plan.

Dear Heavenly Father, I came to the hospital to find out what's physically wrong with me. The doctors have run their tests, poking and prodding me along the way. Yet despite their best efforts they have no answers. Forgive me for my sinful impatience, doubts, and fear. It's so hard not to know, Lord. Renew my trust in You and Your will for my life. Remind me that You know exactly what's going on inside my body. You have counted the very hairs on my head and know me intimately. Not only are there no surprises to You, there is nothing that You cannot handle. With a heart full of confidence in You I again pray that You will bless the work of the doctors, nurses and staff members as they work to diagnose what's wrong with me. Give me the patience that I dearly need to handle the uncertainty in my life right now. Also guide my family members through this difficult time. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

[It's incredibly frustrating when the doctors can't come up with answers despite all their tests and procedures. At times like this a person doesn't know where to turn. Of course we turn to the Lord, our strength and fortress. We take refuge in Him.

“I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:1–2)

Just as no king is saved by the size of his army no person is saved by doctors. It's the Lord who is the great Physician. We turn to the Lord at all times, especially when human helpers come up short. The exact point of these verses is to put your trust in the Lord, not in human beings. Know that you are in God's hands and that He is your help and shield.

“No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.” (Psalm 33:16–22)

Notice that the Psalm doesn't say that knowledge is the beginning of wisdom. It's the fear (respect, awe, love) of God that is highly prized. The doctors might not have the answers you seek. You still have the wisdom that is most important. You know that you are a sinner who has been saved by the grace of God. Thank the Lord that He has worked that wisdom in your heart.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.” (Psalm 111:10)

The doctors might not know what's wrong but the Lord does. There are no secrets from Him.

“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.” (Psalm 139:1–3)

Doctors often have to say, “I don't know” or “Maybe”. That's understandable but difficult to hear. What a tremendous blessing that when we go to the Lord to ask for forgiveness, for assurance, and for peace His answer in Christ is always “Yes!” and our response is “Amen!”

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1:20)

10. When the pain just won't go away

Over the years I've visited many people with unique health problems. One man came to Mayo because he had woken up one morning unable to move his neck; his head was almost resting on his shoulder. But that wasn't the worst of his condition. The pain that he was feeling was almost unbearable. By the time he came to Mayo the pain had worsened and would not respond to any pain medication. I don't recall the official diagnosis, but I do remember what the diagnosis is commonly called: "the suicide disease". The doctors said that a large percentage of people with this disease kill themselves because the pain is so overwhelming. The doctors said that the pain was worse than childbirth and even an amputation. For three days and three nights the man laid in bed in excruciating pain, unable to talk, open his eyes or do anything other than clench his teeth. I visited him, had devotions with him and prayed with him. Finally, on the fourth day the pain relented. I asked him how he had withstood the onslaught of pain. His answer? "I kept thinking about the pain that Jesus went through on the cross to forgive my sins. My pain was nothing compared to His pain." I still stand in awe of that man's faith.

Pain brings most everyone to their knees because it's so all encompassing. There are many pain medications but all of them have side effects. Pain brings with it anger, frustration, a short temper, self-centeredness, and a temptation to despair. It's a serious situation to be sure.

Dear Heavenly Father, like the psalmists of old I cry out to you from the depths. Unrelenting pain has brought me to my knees, Lord. I have nowhere else to turn. All human help has failed me. I plead with You to take my pain away. I know that You can do all things because You are the Lord of the universe and the creator of all things, including the human body. I also know that You love me with a love I cannot fathom. It's so hard for me to put those two truths together in my mind. Your power is as great as Your love and yet I am suffering. Lord, help me to trust in You without question. If pain is Your will for me right now then I accept it. But

Lord, if this is Your will, then I will need Your power and wisdom to withstand this pain. I boldly ask that You give me the strength that I need to bear up under Your hand. Lord, Your Word tells me that You know what pain is like. In fact, Your Son gave His life for me on the cross to make me Your child. The pain He felt is even greater than the pain I am feeling right now. I have a Savior who can sympathize with what I am going through because He also suffered here in this world. Let that give me the faith I need to keep going. Lord, You have promised that You will not let me be tempted beyond what I can bear. I hold You to that promise. I pray this in Jesus' name; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

The book of Hebrews tells us that we have a Great High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses. He battled the same trials and temptations that we do ... without sinning. We have a Friend who knows what we are going through. More than that, we have a Savior who can help us in our time of need.

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14–16)

God has promised that He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear with His help. Now is the time to hold God to that promise with all your heart.

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

11. When family and friends are despairing

I've always thought that a serious illness is just as tough ... if not tougher ... on the patient's loved ones than on the patient him or herself. Loved ones not only think about the actual illness (which the patient does); they also consider what life would be like without the patient. They desperately want to help the one they love but are, for the most part, absolutely helpless. Loved ones try their best to appear strong for the patient but their worry and despair are bound to show through. Patients see that and add that to their own already difficult situation.

Dear Heavenly Father, I've been thinking about myself quite a bit lately because I've been sick. Now that I'm in the hospital that's even more true. Doctors, nurses and other medical personnel come into my room at all hours asking me for my medical history, for information about my present condition, and what my plans are. My family and friends are focused on me as well. They come to visit me, call me, and send me cards. So many people are helping me to carry my burdens, Lord. I plead with You, Heavenly Father, for the strength of faith and the stamina to help my loved ones to carry the burden that they are now carrying. I can see the worry in their faces and hear the anxiety in their voices. I know that they want more than anything else to help me. I also know that they are helpless. Use me to remind them that I have You to carry my burdens and that You will carry their burdens as well. Help me to be clear and powerful in my confession of faith in You and Your love. Help me to reassure them that my future is bright whether I remain here in this world or go to my heavenly home. If there are longstanding issues that need to be dealt with, give me the courage to take the lead in working through them. If there are difficult discussions that have to happen, give me the wisdom to have them. Most of all, let me point my loved ones to the cross of Your Son. There all of us find forgiveness, joy, peace and hope. As they are constantly committing me to Your loving and powerful hands, I now commit them to Your care and protection as well. I pray these things in the name of my Savior. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Despair is nothing new for God's people. Notice what this Psalm says about those who are brokenhearted and crushed in spirit: the Lord is close to them. The Lord is close to your family and friends right now as they are worried about you. It's not ultimately your job to uphold them; it's God's job.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18)

The first part of this Psalm is a call to praise the Lord. But note what it says at the end of our reading: God has compassion on His children. God is not only taking care of you right now He's also taking care of your loved ones. Remind those you love of that wonderful truth!

“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:1–14)

During the months before Jesus' birth Joseph also faced a tough situation. He thought that his fiancé had cheated on him. Talk about something that would cause you to despair! Yet the Lord was there for Joseph, eventually telling him what really happened. In other words, God took care of Joseph. The Lord will also take care of your family and friends in His own time and in His own way.

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.” When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.” (Matthew 1:18–24)

12. When all hope seems to be gone

Hospitals are places of hope. The hospital staff bring years of medical knowledge to bear on each patient. Amazing technology promises to do the impossible. New drugs and medical procedures are developed all the time. Often the doctors say that they will try this drug first and if that doesn't help then there are two others to try.

I once visited someone who was told four times that a certain medicine was the last option. When the so-called last option didn't work it turned out that there was a new, experimental drug that just came out. And so it went.

But what happens when there are no more options? What happens when the doctors have no more procedures to try? What happens when the pharmacy cupboard is empty? What happens when all hope seems to be gone? Then, of course, it's time to turn again to the One who is all about hope, sure and certain hope: our Lord and Savior.

Dear Heavenly Father, I came to the hospital with fear and trepidation, but also with hope. During my days in the hospital the doctors have talked less and less about my getting better. It seems that they have reached the end of their knowledge and ability to help. Remind me, Lord, that the doctors are not God. They are your servants, able to do only what You allow them to. You are in charge of my life ... not the doctors, not my family, and not even me! You are a God of hope, miracles, and loving power. Indeed, with You there is no such thing as a hopeless situation. You can still bring me healing and strength. I know that You can heal me by speaking one powerful word. I put myself into Your hands, confident of Your power and wisdom. Lord, it might very well be Your will that I won't get better. Give me the strength of faith to come to grips with that fact. Fill my heart with a firm trust in Your love for me and with an appreciation for Your wisdom. But most of all, Lord, remind me that even if I don't get better I still have an abundance of hope. My sure and certain hope is that I am going to spend an eternity with You in heaven. My hope is sure and certain because Your Son

gave His life on the cross to guarantee my forgiveness. Fill my heart with joy, the joy that comes from the hope I have in You. I pray this in the name of Jesus; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Although Psalm 23 could be quoted in most sections of this booklet, it perhaps fits best in this segment. When all hope seems to be gone, it's important to remember that our Good Shepherd is leading us in the way that we should go. No, our hope is not gone. The One who gives us hope is directly in front of us leading the way. The psalm assures us that even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death our Good Shepherd is leading the way.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." (Psalm 23)

The context of these verses includes the words "though my father and mother forsake me" and "false witnesses rise up against me breathing out violence". It's not a happy time for the psalmist. Yet he confesses that he remains confident in the goodness of the Lord. He encourages us to be strong and take heart in the Lord.

"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)

When all hope is gone, we don't feel blessed. And yet the psalmist tells us that because we are forgiven and our sins are covered then we are blessed. In other words, the Lord has taken care of our biggest need. We aren't hopeless at all; we have the confidence that that we are God's children.

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.” (Psalm 32:1–2)

These words were written during a dark chapter in God's people's history. The Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and carried off many Israelites to Babylon. God came to Isaiah to make an important promise: a promise that He would bring His people back home. As God was making that promise, He also promised a greater Rescuer, the Messiah. These verses are a prophecy of John the Baptist. More than that, they are words of pure comfort.

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” (Isaiah 40:1–8)

This is one of the “servant songs” in the book of Isaiah, verses that are words and concepts that the Messiah would talk about during His ministry. Notice that the Messiah will not break the bruised reed nor snuff out a smoldering candle.

Do you feel like a reed that's about to break or a candle that's about to go out? Take comfort. Your Savior will not leave you. He will not let you fall. That's His promise to you right now in the hospital.

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.” 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: “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”” (Isaiah 42:1–9)

These words from 2 Corinthians are pure gold to a heart that is wavering. Paul tells us that our weakness shows God's strength. The fact that we remain faithful in the midst of suffering shows God's great glory. Paul also tells us that God renews us day by day. Note that God gives us what we need every day, and sometimes we receive from the Lord no more than what we need for that day. But that's OK because our times of trouble remind us that this old earth isn't our home. We look forward to the eternal glory of heaven.

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake,

so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:7–18)

13. When receiving a transplant

Many years ago I had thyroid cancer. Until you've heard the words, "You have cancer", it's difficult to understand the emotions involved. The same thing is probably more true when it comes to receiving a transplant, especially a transplant that was possible because someone else died.

I have never had a transplant and am not qualified to write about receiving one. All I can work with is what I've heard others say. I've heard others talk about the guilt associated with receiving a transplant. I've heard others talk about how hard it is to wait for a transplant. I've heard about others talk about the worry they feel about possible rejection issues. Those are weighty issues indeed. Those are issues we can bring to the Lord in prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for the amazing advances in medicine that allow an organ from one person's body to be transplanted into another body. I don't thank You for that in a general way but in a personal way; I am receiving a transplant. Lord, waiting for the transplant has not been easy but You have now brought me to this point. For that I praise You. I pray that You will guide the doctors as they perform the delicate operation to give me this transplant. Let me recover from the surgery quickly, Lord. Bless the people who will be helping me to manage the risk of rejection and infection. Remind me daily that I am in Your hands. Lord, the whole idea of receiving a transplant can be a difficult one when the person donating the organ has died. Let me rest in the knowledge that You are the author of life and death. You are the one who creates human life and are the One who calls people out of this world. You are the One who has given me this new opportunity for life here in this world. Lord, as I ponder my upcoming transplant surgery remind me that I have already had a transplant, a heart transplant in particular. You took my stony, sinful heart and gave a me a new heart, a heart that's been forgiven, a heart that beats for You. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

It's simply amazing that the technology exists to take an organ from one body and transplant it into another body. The doctors and scientists who have discovered and refined this process are blessings from the Lord. But don't forget the One who made everything in the first place, including the organs that are being transplanted: God Himself.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

Are you receiving a transplant? There are many thoughts and emotions associated with a transplant. Let the biggest emotion and thought be thanksgiving to the Lord.

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever. To him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever." (Psalm 136:1-4)

Remember that this will be your second transplant. The following passage tells us that God has given us a new heart, a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. St. Paul tells us that we were dead in our sins until the Holy Spirit made us alive in Christ. We have a new heart, a heart of faith.

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20)

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)

14. When the hospital stay is long

One of the most striking things about making hospital visits is watching the almost primal urge that people have to leave the hospital. Time and time again I've seen people who are still seriously ill wanting to go home "right now". Over and over again I've heard patients try to convince their doctors to let them go home sooner than the doctors are comfortable with.

It's fashionable today to blame those "greedy insurance companies" for making people leave the hospital too soon. But more often than not, it's the patients themselves who are pulling the trigger on their release. People want to be back home in familiar surroundings with their own stuff, their own friends and family, and in their own bed. And who can blame them? Long hospital stays are tough on everyone.

Dear Heavenly Father, please hurry up and give me patience! That's how I feel, Lord, as this hospital stay drags on. I know that this is where I need to be but it's so hard to be patient, to stay positive, and to wait. Lord, give the doctors and medical staff knowledge and skill as they treat me. Bless their efforts on my behalf. Let the medical treatment that I'm receiving give me strength and healing. If there are uncertainties in my condition, give the doctors sharp analytical skill to figure out the answers to the questions we are asking. Lord, I also ask that You will work powerfully in my heart and soul. Waiting is one of the hardest things that human beings do. It's tempting to become impatient, to lash out at people, and to become withdrawn. Keep the devil and his temptations far from me. Strengthen my faith with Your Word that assures me of Your love, Your forgiveness, and Your wisdom. Remind, me, Lord, that I am in Your hands. This hospital stay will end when it's Your will for it to end. Until then help me to be patient and positive. I pray all this in the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Few things are more discouraging than thinking you are going to leave the hospital on a certain day only to find out your dismissal has been delayed for some reason. The Psalm verse below asks a pointed question: "Why are you so downcast? Why so disturbed?" We might feel like saying, "Because I'm stuck in the hospital! The Psalm writer cuts us off at the pass when he tells us to put our hope in God. Even though your dismissal has been delayed, God is still God and He still loves you dearly.

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." (Psalm 42:5)

What a great confession: 'My heart is steadfast, O God!' Make that confession your confession today as you wait to be discharged from the hospital. Rejoice in the great love that the Lord has for you.

"My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul. Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and let your glory be over all the earth. Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered." (Psalm 108:1–6)

These verses are a prophecy of God's rescue of His Old Testament people as well as a prophecy of his rescue of His people on Judgment Day. Are you stuck in the hospital longer than you wanted? Rejoice that you won't be stuck with this sinful world on the Last Day. There is a Rescuer coming for you! And that Rescuer knows where you are right now and what you are dealing with.

"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our

God. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." (Isaiah 35)

Since you will be in the hospital an extra day or two you have time to read these profound and comforting verses a few times. Don't rush. Let your heart be filled with the confidence that comes from knowing the Lord. We can depend on Him for salvation just as we depend on bread for nourishment.

"Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down

from heaven'?" "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'" (John 6:35–51)

15. When a child is born

Congratulations on the birth of your child. Visiting a family who has just had a healthy baby is one of the few “happy hospital visits” a pastor gets to make. I’m sure that you are incredibly thankful that your baby is healthy. What a tremendous blessing from the Lord as well as an opportunity to praise Him. But your joy might be tempered a bit by the realization that you will soon be taking your newborn baby home. There won’t be a nurse to help you change a diaper or a doctor to answer your medical questions. You’ll be on your own! Perhaps, as you hold your child, your mind flashes forward to the challenges you’ll face in the coming years. That’s enough to cause a mild panic attack! Remember: the Lord has given you this blessing and He will also give you the wisdom, faith and stamina needed to care for this blessing.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for blessing us with a healthy child. That is not something we take for granted. Again, thank You for this amazing blessing from Your gracious hand. Lord, this is just the first blessing that we will need in the coming years. We’ll need a faith that trusts that this child is in Your hands. We’ll need wisdom to raise this child to know You as their Savior. We’ll need courage to raise our child to do Your will, not the will of this sinful world. We’ll need energy and stamina for the rigors of parenthood. We’ll need good health to be here for this child for years to come. We’ll need Christian friends to come along side us to encourage and help us. Lord, we plead with You to bless us in all these ways. Lord, we thank You for the blessing of baptism by which You offer and grant the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Motivate us to bring our child to the saving waters of baptism as soon as possible. Remind us daily that the first responsibility of Christians parents is to lead our child closer to You. Lord, make us faithful stewards of this incredible blessing You have entrusted us with. We commit ourselves to being the kind of parents You want us to be. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Have you thought about when you are going to have your newborn child baptized? Peter reminds us of the incredible blessings associated with baptism. He makes this bold statement: 'Baptism now saves you.' The Holy Spirit has promised to work through the water and the Word in holy baptism to give and strengthen faith. Don't make your child wait to receive this blessing. The question isn't: "When is a convenient time for my relatives to be in church to see the baptism?" The question is: "When is the soonest I can bring my child to the saving waters of baptism?"

In it (the ark) only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him." (1 Peter 3:20–22)

Parents, you are in for the ride of your life! Challenges, blessings and new experiences will meet you at every turn for the next few decades, God-willing.

One of the biggest blessings of having children is that you will be able to learn from them. Jesus told His disciples that people need to become like little children to enter the kingdom of God. Children receive gifts with a willing and trusting heart. You'll see that in your child in the coming years. Use them as a role model. That's exactly how you want to feel and act toward your Heavenly Father.

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me." (Matthew 18:1–5)

Jesus served His Father even when He was a child. Your child will be able to serve the Lord at a very young age as well. Be sure to encourage that!

“Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2:41–52)

[You have a big job in front of you! You are responsible for that little baby you’ll be taking home from the hospital in a day or two. Never forget that it’s an incredibly important job. Jesus Himself has a special place in His heart for children. He even said that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.]

“Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.” (Matthew 19:13–15)

16. When a child is sick

Nurses are truly the backbone of the hospital. They stay with the patients long after the doctors have breezed in and out with their news of the day. Nurses do the heavy lifting (sometimes literally) when it comes to patient care. Nowhere is that more true than in the pediatric units at Mayo. Several pediatric nurses I know wake up at home in the middle of the night wondering how a particular child is doing and can't sleep well until they call to find out. Caring for or visiting an elderly relative can be emotionally draining ... but at least the person has lived a full life. Whenever a child is in the hospital the emotions are ratcheted up. If you are reading this in the hospital with your sick child by your side you know just how true it is. No doubt you have been storming the gates of heaven in prayer for a long time already. Know that others have as well. And know that your Father in heaven hears those prayers.

Dear Heavenly Father, this is so difficult. It's so difficult that I don't think I can endure it any longer. Lord, I plead with You that You will bring healing to my child (grandchild, etc.). It's difficult enough when an adult is in the hospital; at least they have coping skills to handle the stresses involved. Children haven't developed those skills yet. Everything must seem foreign and even frightening to my child. They are used to looking to adults for solutions to their problems; this problem is so difficult that there aren't any easy solutions. That's what's brought us to the hospital. Work in my child a childlike faith, a faith that trusts in You without question. Let my child rest on the bedrock truths of Your Word: Your love is faithful, Your power is absolute and Your grace is sufficient. Help all of us – and especially my child – to know that we are in Your hands and that You love us dearly. Lord, bless the work that the nurses and doctors do on behalf of my child. They are no doubt emotionally invested in the situation too. Comfort them even as You sharpen their skills. Lord, I commend my child to Your care, knowing that You will do what's best for them. I pray this in the name of the Good Shepherd; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

As you read this Psalm, you'll wonder why I chose it for a section about dealing with the sickness of a child. In the midst of your worry be sure to praise God for the blessings He has given you. This might not seem like the most natural time to praise God but it's an important time. Praising God causes you to count your blessings. As you count your blessings you'll gain confidence that God knows what He's doing and will continue to bless you in the best ways possible.

"A psalm. For giving thanks. Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." (Psalm 100)

Not only does this psalm of Solomon tell us that children are a blessing from the Lord it also tells us where our confidence needs to be. It's not the doctors and nurses who can bring healing to your child, it's the Lord. Keep pleading with the Lord for health and healing.

"A song of ascents. Of Solomon. Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves. Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate." (Psalm 127)

The following section of Scripture is beautiful. The Israelites thought that God had forsaken them as they were suffering. That wasn't true at all. In fact, God told them that His love for them was even stronger than the love that a mother has for her children. God also painted a picture for them when He told them that He had

engraved their name on His hand. Imagine if I wrote your child's name on my hand with a permanent marker. I'd think about your child every time I picked something up, typed, or otherwise used my hands. What a beautiful picture of the fact that God is always thinking about you and your child. And when He thinks of you He loves you with a love that is even stronger than your love for your child.

“But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.”
“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.” (Isaiah 49:14–16)

17. When a child is dying

Many years ago, I received an urgent call from a pastor out of the area. A child in the congregation he served was dying in one of the Mayo hospitals. She had been seriously ill with cancer for some time and had been rushed to Mayo for a last chance emergency surgery. The surgery had not gone well. I spent hours with the little girl's parents before and after she was called home to heaven. When I left the hospital, I stood in the parking ramp with absolutely no idea where I had parked. The intense emotion of the last hours had erased my memory of the first part of the day. The little girl's parents perhaps had an opposite reaction; no doubt they never forgot a single detail of that horrible day. The final hours of a child's life are holy ground as much as the ground where Moses met God in burning bush was holy ground. Those final hours are holy ground because God is there. God is there in the midst of debilitating, mind-numbing grief and sorrow. God is there to take one of His children home to heaven even as He's there to care for the child's family at the hardest point in their lives.

Dear Heavenly Father, I cry out to You from the deepest part of my heart. It seems like my heart has broken; every breath I take is a struggle. My child is dying, Lord. There are so many things I want to say or even shout to You right now. But at this very moment I ask one thing. Keep my child in Your loving, powerful hands as they are at the end of their life. With every fiber of my being I want to take them home right now. They have so much of life to live yet: going to school, making friends, falling in love, having a family of their own, and so many other things. But that's not Your will for them. Instead You will be taking them home, home to heaven. Pound that truth into my heart and mind, Lord. The reality of the situation is that my child is going to heaven. Let that powerful fact tower over everything else I think and feel in the coming days. Even as I feel anger, loneliness, betrayal, and unbearable sorrow bring me back again and again to my child's home in heaven. Remind me that You are not my enemy, the one who stole my child from my arms. You – more than anyone else – know what I'm going through. So many years ago You watched Your Child suffer and die so that

my child could live forever in heaven. Lord, I need You now more than at any other point in my life. I put myself and my family into Your hands. It's in Jesus' name that I pray. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

God said that one result of David's sins of adultery and murder would be the death of the child he had with Bathsheba. David fasted and prayed that the Lord would not take the child from him. He was in so much distress that his servants were worried that he would do something rash when he found out that the child was dead. Instead, when David heard that his son was dead, he washed, changed his clothes, and ate. Most importantly, he worshiped the Lord. When his servants questioned his actions, David told them that there was now nothing he could do. But he also added something important. He confessed that he would go to his son later. Never forget that you will go to see your child again in heaven. You have that sure and certain comfort.

“On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, “While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate.” David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. “Is the child dead?” he asked. “Yes,” they replied, “he is dead.” Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. His servants asked him, “Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!” He answered, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”” (2 Samuel 12:18–23)

This psalm tells us that the Lord knit us together even when we were in the womb. The Lord knit your child together in the womb and loves them dearly. It seems that the Lord ordained only a small number of days for your child. We don't know why. But we do know that your child is precious to the Lord. Soon your child will be safely home with the Lord.

“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. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!” (Psalm 139:13–17)

Our thoughts are not God’s thoughts. His ways are not our ways. Just as we trust that His grace has brought us into His family so we trust that the Lord’s love is in operation at this most difficult time.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8–9)

Paul pleaded with the Lord to take away his “thorn in the flesh” (some problem the Bible doesn’t identify). God told him no. He also promised Paul that His grace was sufficient for Paul. You have been pleading for the life of your child. It seems that the Lord is saying “no” to your prayers. His grace will be sufficient for you, even at this dark time.

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:8–10)

18. When in isolation

Obviously there are two basic reasons why someone is in isolation in the hospital. Either you are very sick yourself and there's a danger in getting other people sick or your immune system is weak and there's a danger you could get sick from contacting other people. Neither is a good situation. In the time of Luther there was a debate among Catholic scholars whether or not God was in dark and dirty places like a ditch or dung heap. Luther commented that God was indeed everywhere and that His presence in the dark and dirty places was important because it could very well happen that a horse could buck him off and he would end up in a ditch! Luther was thankful that the Lord would be there with him. Your hospital room isn't dark and dirty but it's comforting to know that God is there with You with His love and power.

Dear Heavenly Father, it's difficult to be alone because I depend on others for encouragement and companionship. All this is made worse because I'm not feeling well. My mind so quickly goes to worst-case scenarios. Lord, You have promised to send me the Counselor, One who comes alongside me to fill me with hope, joy and peace. Send me Your Holy Spirit in rich measure so I can be sure of Your presence in my life. I know You are here with me because You are everywhere! You are also here with Your promises and loving care. Lord, as I sit here by myself let my thoughts drift back 2,000 years to the time when Jesus was truly all alone on the cross. He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" You had forsaken Jesus because You were punishing Him for my sins. Because You forsook Jesus I can be sure that You will never forsake me. Your love will never leave me because I have been forgiven and made one of Your dear children. Let that be my comfort and strength as I am in the hospital. Lord, I also ask You to comfort my family and friends who want to be here with me but can't. Remind them that I'm not alone at all but am confident of Your gracious presence. Let my time of isolation pass quickly so I can again spend time with the people that I love. I pray these things in the name of the One who promised to be with me always. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

You might smile a bit when you read the first words of this Bible passage. God tells you to be still. You might be thinking, "I'm in isolation. What else am I going to do?" Of course, God is talking about trusting in Him. We can trust in Him because we know that the Lord Almighty is with us, even when we are in isolation.

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." (Psalm 46:10–11)

This psalm is a call to praise the Lord but it's more. The psalm tells us that God is near to all who call on Him. In other words, you aren't in isolation at all! The Lord is with you. He is watching over you in love.

"The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever." (Psalm 145:9–21)

The next three readings are examples of God's people being isolated. In reality they were not isolated at all. God was with them in powerful ways.

God was with Daniel's three friends in the fire.

“Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” They replied, “Certainly, O king.” He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.” (Daniel 3:19–27)

God was with Daniel in the lion's den.

“Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, “Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.” So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!” A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being

brought to him. And he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king." The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God." (Daniel 6:15–23)

God was with Jonah in the great fish.

"From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD." And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land." (Jonah 2:1–10)

Jesus isolated Himself so He could have quiet time to pray. Are you using your time alone to pray? Be bold and expansive with your prayers! Pray for the members of your church family, for missionaries, for the government, and for everyone else you can think of!

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”” (Mark 1:35–38)

19. When there are no visitors

There are few things as sad as when a hospital patient says, "Pastor Kom, no one has been here to see me since You saw me yesterday. No one even called me." Typically, the reason there are no visitors is that home is a long way away. Often family members flock to Rochester after a medical emergency but as a hospital stay stretches past the first week it's tough for everyone to be away from responsibilities at home. Other times there aren't many visitors because the patient is quite old and all their contemporaries are already in heaven. And, unfortunately, family conflicts can spill over into the hospital. Whatever the reason, it's tough to be in the hospital without any visitors.

Dear Heavenly Father, it's tough to be by myself in the hospital. In my loneliness it's easy for me to assume that people aren't thinking about me, that they don't care about me, and that they are too busy to be bothered with my hospitalization. Those thoughts quickly cause me to become sad and angry and can even rob me of my desire to get better. Correct my thinking, Lord! Help me to take the words and actions of others in the kindest possible way, even as I'm in the hospital. Cause telephone, e-mail and text message contacts to be as meaningful as possible. Lord, help me to be faithful in praying for my family and friends during this time of increased stress and worry. Comfort my loved ones with the knowledge that I'm in a good place here at Mayo and in an even better place as I'm in Your hands. You have promised to use all things for the good of those who love You. Let my hospitalization be a blessing to me and my loved ones, drawing us closer together and closer to You. I humbly ask You to move my loved ones to be faithful in visiting me. Finally, Lord, remind me that I am never alone because You are here with Your love, protection, and forgiveness. I commend myself to Your care, confident that You will guide and bless me. In the name of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ I pray; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

This psalm section is a prayer for help from God. It's hard enough to be in the hospital but it's even harder to be alone in the hospital. Now is the time to remember that the Lord is attentive to you. Take your concerns to the Lord!

“Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly.” (Psalm 102:1–2)

Trusting in the Lord rather than human beings is a common theme in the psalms. You might not be around very many people right now but the Lord is with you. And that's better than a whole host of people!

“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.” (Psalm 118:8–9)

The Lord does not leave you alone! In fact, He's a shepherd who comes looking for His lambs when they are lost and alone. Thank the Lord for His care and protection. Rest in His loving arms.

“ ‘For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.’ ” (Ezekiel 34:11–16)

When a person spends lots of time alone the devil can have a field day. We human beings typically don't do well by ourselves. In the last chapter of his letter to the Philippians Paul encourages us to think about good things! Read over this passage a few times and then pray that the Lord will give you the discipline needed to think about God pleasing things.

“Finally, brothers, 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. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8–9)

20. When there are too many visitors

I've never been sure whether it's worse to have too many or too few visitors in the hospital! Obviously you are in the hospital because you are sick and not feeling well. Having friends and loved ones at your side or sitting in the waiting room certainly assures a person that they are cared for. But it also adds some stress to the situation. You are wearing a flimsy gown that makes modesty a challenge. You are tired and your attention span is short. The nurses keep coming in to give you medication and to take your vital signs. Sometimes there is just a lot going on! When I had my cancer surgery many years ago I still remember the evening after my surgery. My room was full of visitors, people who loved me. I was so thankful that they were there. But after a little while my dad must have noticed it was all a bit much and everyone left. It was so nice to watch a sporting event on TV by myself and drift off to sleep

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving me so many people who love me! My family and friends mean so much to me, especially as I'm going through a difficult situation. Lord, remind them that I need some quiet time to rest and recuperate. Use the nursing staff to monitor the number of visitors I have and to ask people to leave when necessary. And, Lord, give me the courage to ask people to leave if need be. Remind them that I still love them but that I also need to have some quiet time too. Put my mind at ease that they will take things in a kind way. And, Lord, help people back home strike a good balance between keeping in contact with me but not overwhelming me with phone calls. Give me someone who can be a gatekeeper of sorts, inviting people into my room at the right time and clearing the room when that needs to happen. I pray this in the name of Your Son; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Right now you are wishing that you would have fewer visitors, and with good reason. But at the same time be sure to thank the Lord that He's given you people who care about you enough to visit you in the hospital! And then politely thank them for coming, tell them that you love them, and ask them to leave!

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.” (Psalm 118:)

21. When death is imminent

Mr. Ron Reinke was a Sunday School teacher, elder, and all around faithful Christian in the congregation where I grew up. I still remember him telling me that he told his own children that if they were ever in an accident and were dying that they should focus all their attention on Jesus because the devil would be tempting them to think about everything and anything else. That's wise advice from a seasoned Christian. The only thing I'd add is to trust that Jesus is focused on you! It's not so much that we hold on to Jesus as it is that Jesus holds on to us. We do well to repeat the prayer of Jesus: "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." Many years ago I was with a retired pastor shortly before he died. He smiled at me and said, "Brian, this should be exciting." Indeed, heaven is an exciting home.

Dear Heavenly Father, I commend myself to Your loving care as I end my time on this earth. I rest in Your grace, knowing that You have fully forgiven me because of Your Son's suffering and death on the cross. I confess that my faith is in Him and that I have life in His name. Keep the devil far from me in these next hours and days. Help me to fix my eyes on Jesus, my Savior. Lord, I know that I am going home to heaven. I commend my family and friends to Your loving care as I leave them. Comfort them with the sure and certain knowledge that I am going to heaven because I am Your child. Keep them strong in the faith, Lord. Remind them that the only thing that truly matters in this world is knowing and trusting in Your Son as the Savior. Put people into their lives to guide them in the ways they should go ... because I won't be there to guide them. Lord, I also pray that You would guide them in the days and weeks after I go to heaven. They will need to make a lot of decisions in the midst of their grief. Help them to make those decisions in a spirit of love for each other. Keep them from hard feelings and arguments. Again, Lord, I put myself into Your hands, trusting completely in Your forgiving love. I pray this in the name of Jesus; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Joshua spoke these words to the Israelites before he died. Right now may be the last time you'll be able to speak to your loved ones. What Godly advice do you want to give them? You can be sure that they will remember what you say. Don't waste this important opportunity that the Lord is giving you.

“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.” (Joshua 23:6)

“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”” (Joshua 24:15)

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. (Proverbs 4:1)

Job's friends were lacking in their understanding of God's ways. Job took the opportunity to confess his faith in their presence. Job confessed that he would see the Lord with his very own eyes. Remember, this was in the middle of all his trials! This knowledge of the resurrection gave Job great joy. He said that his heart yearned within him. Imagine, you are about to see the Lord! Amazing!

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25–27)

Isaiah's description of the new heavens and the new earth are always worth reading, especially in the days before you go there! There will be peace in heaven. You have a taste of that peace right now in the forgiveness of sins won for you on the cross.

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. “Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.” (Isaiah 65:17–25)

The last journey the Good Shepherd will lead you on is the journey home to heaven. Thank the Lord that you have a Good Shepherd who was willing to lay down His life for you.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:11–15)

You aren’t going to die. I don’t care what the doctors just told you. You aren’t going to die. Rather you will be living in a different place. Jesus makes that bold

promise to all who believe in Him. Your soul will go to heaven even as your body dies. Your soul – who you are – will not die. How wonderful is that!

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”” (John 11:21–27)

Is your heart troubled right now? No doubt it is. Death is scary because human beings were never meant to die. Besides that, you’ve never died before and death is an unknown. Jesus tells us not to let our hearts be troubled. Why? Because we have a home in heaven waiting for us. Jesus is going to return to bring us to that wonderful home.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”” (John 14:1–4)

Your body is not in good shape right now. But that will change on the last day. Your body will be raised from the dead and made new. In fact, it will be better than new! It will be a powerful, glorious body. Look forward to that day!

“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15:42–44)

Paul's confession is bold, isn't it? This can be your confession too. Death is lurking nearby. You can mock death just as Paul did. Death ultimately has no hold over you. Your Savior defeated death when He rose from the dead. Indeed, thanks be to God for giving us this great victory!

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:55–58)

Paul told the Thessalonians what would happen on the last day. At this moment it seems that you will not be alive when Jesus returns on the last day. That means that you will be part of the multitude of believers who will rise on the last day and meet the Lord in the air. Be encouraged by these words. Encourage your loved ones with these words.

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

You are probably the most sinful person you know ... because you know all the sins that swirl around in your heart. How can you go to heaven? Simply because Christ came into this world to save sinners!

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:15–17)

When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy he was in prison for the last time. He was at the end of his life. Soon he would die for his faith. Paul confessed that he had fought the good fight and finished the race. That’s true for you as well. And what comes next? You will receive the crown of righteousness, awarded by the Lord to all who believe.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:6–8)

John’s vision of heaven is beautiful. Note that those who are in heaven are in white robes, robes that had been washed clean by the blood of the lamb. There is a white robe waiting for you in heaven. There will be no more hunger, thirst, tears or sadness. In other words, there will be no more problems. And what is this time right now called? This is the time of tribulation. You are in a time of tribulation right now but you will soon be rescued from it.

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” All the angels were standing around the throne and around the

elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."" (Revelation 7:9–17)

22. When the hospital staff isn't helpful

No organization – not even the Mayo hospital system – is perfect. That's because there are no perfect human beings and because we live in a sinful world. Add to that the fact that health problems are stressful and that patients and their families are usually at their wits' end and you have a recipe for disaster! If you are at the point of getting upset at the hospital staff here's a quick "to do" list to go through before you say anything:

- *Remember that the doctors and nurses are human beings and can make mistakes.*
- *Remember that you are a human being and have made lots of mistakes.*
- *Consider the possibility that your own frustrations and illness have contributed to your frustration.*
- *Pray for patience and humility, acknowledging that you are in a difficult, stressful situation.*
- *Write down the concerns that you have.*

As calmly and rationally as you can, explain your concerns to your nurse or doctor. Give them time to explain why they did what they did and to give you further information. If you can't get any resolution, ask to talk with a patient advocate. You'll want to be kind and humble but at the same time there are serious issues to deal with. Be direct and firm.

Dear Heavenly Father, I'm frustrated. I'm frustrated at things that the medical staff has done or said. Whether I realize it or not, I'm also frustrated that I'm sick and need to be in the hospital. Remind me that there's a good chance that the doctors and nurses might be frustrated too. Lord, I ask for Your help as I prepare to address these matters with the doctors and nurses. Give me humility and patience, remind me to give the doctors and nurses the respect they deserve as Your representatives sent to help me. But at the same time, help me to be direct and firm. Give me the ability to clearly and carefully tell them what's on my heart

and mind so together we can look for solutions. Work in the hearts and minds of the doctors and nurses so they can patiently and lovingly listen to me and properly address my concerns. Remind them and me that we are all working toward the same goals. Lord, thank You for the medical personnel that You have given me but I ask You to step into my situation and be my Great Physician. I pray these things in the name of Jesus; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

The hospital staff are not your main helper; the Lord is. You are dependent on them to be sure, but you are ultimately dependent on the Lord. Be quick to bring your concerns and cares to the Lord!

“Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.” (Psalm 70:5)

The next two Scripture readings talk about our enemies. I'm not suggesting at all that the hospital staff are your enemies! But even if they were, the Lord tells you to treat them with love. Be firm when you bring your concerns to the staff, but do so in love.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43–48)

“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it

back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:27–36)

You are to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel no matter what happens. Please keep that in mind as you voice concerns to your doctor or nurse. You represent the Lord to those around you. Be sure to act like it.

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27)

23. When the nights are long (no sleep)

If you want to have a lively conversation with someone in the hospital just ask them if they are getting good sleep. [That's second only to asking how the hospital food is!] Very few people sleep well in the hospital because they are in a strange bed, because they are sick, because the nurses come in to get vital signs, and because there are strange noises in the hospital. It's a miracle that anyone gets any sleep as a patient! One of my most vivid memories of my hospital stay after cancer surgery was waking up during the night and not wanting to open my eyes to look at the clock. I would lay there and pray, "Lord, please let it be morning." Alas, it was only 45 minutes after the last time I had awakened! The nights go on so long in the hospital.

Dear Heavenly Father, as I ponder the long nights I'm spending in the hospital turn my heart to a long night that Your Son spent so long ago. On Maundy Thursday Jesus met with His disciples in the upper room to teach them and to institute the Lord's Supper. After that He led them to the Garden of Gethsemane to pour out His heart in prayer to His Father. As the evening wore on Judas arrived with a detachment of soldiers who would arrest Him. An illegal nighttime trial before the Sanhedrin happened before He was taken to Pontius Pilate the next day. It would seem that Jesus got no sleep at all that last night of His life. He went without sleep that night and then suffered and died the next day because of His great love for me, love that is still working on my behalf today. Lord, as I lie awake at night in the hospital remind me over and over again that I am not alone. My Savior is at my side through the watches of the night. You promise me in Your Word that You will not slumber nor sleep; You are on the job at all times! When I can't sleep, show me that I can use this quiet time to pray for myself and others, to prayerfully review the events of the previous day, and to bring Your Word to mind. As anxiety builds within me because I can't sleep, fill me with the peace that passes all understanding. I am at peace because I am Your child and You are my God. I pray in Jesus' name; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

An inability to sleep in the hospital can quickly cause real distress! King David directs you to bring your concern to the Lord.

“Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.” (Psalm 4:1)

The psalmist says that he kept his eyes open through the watches of the night so that he could meditate on God's promises. The “watches of the night” were shift changes for guards – just as the hospital nurses change shifts at regular intervals. You obviously aren't choosing to stay up through the shift changes of the night, but you can do the same thing that the psalmist did. Use the time to pray and to meditate on God's promises.

“I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees. I call out to you; save me and I will keep your statutes. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises. Hear my voice in accordance with your love; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your laws.” (Psalm 119:145–149)

24. When things back home aren't going well

Farmers don't like being in the hospital. I suppose no one likes being in the hospital, but that's especially true of farmers! Farmers are used to being outdoors and are the most active people in our culture. Being confined to a hospital room is tough stuff for them! Making matters worse for busy farmers is that farm work doesn't stop just because they are in the hospital. When a farm problem comes up they are not available to fix it. Obviously that makes matters worse.

But farmers certainly aren't the only ones who worry about how things are going back home. With cell phones and email patients learn instantly about work issues, disobedient children, bills that are piling up, and even disagreements at church. Times like this call for trust. First it calls for trust in the Lord that He can handle the challenges back home without you! And, second, it calls for trust in the people who are left behind, trust that God can use them to do His will. Times like this also call for fervent prayer!

Dear Heavenly Father, it's hard to be away from home under any circumstances but this "trip away" has been really tough. I'm in the hospital because I have health problems and to make matters worse there are problems at home. I feel so completely helpless, Lord. This hymn verse is especially fitting right now:

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide
The darkness deepens Lord, with me abide
When other helpers fail and comforts flee
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me

Lord, You truly are the Help of the helpless. And now, in my time of need, I ask You to do two things for me. I ask You to take care of things back home for me. I can't be there, Lord, so I need You to step into the situation. Bring peace where there is conflict, healing where there is disfunction, and solutions where there are problems. Use my family and friends to step in where and when I can't. Lord, I also ask You to remind those closest to me that I am in Your hands. They are

worried about me right now and are feeling extra stress because I'm sick. That anxiety and stress causes other problems. Lord, remind them that You dearly love me and are going to do what's best for me. Also remind them that You love them as well and that Your Son is their Good Shepherd, ready and able to lead them wisely and well. Help all of us to look to the cross for absolute assurance that the biggest problem of all – our sin and guilt – has been solved once and for all by the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. It's in His name that I pray. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

One thing that can go wrong at home is family strife. Joseph's family had strife on every front. Joseph's brothers even sold him into slavery! Joseph forgave his brothers because he saw God's hand at work in his life. They had intended to harm Joseph but God has worked things out for their good. As you keep track of things at home you might notice family strife. Encourage your loved ones to deal with family strife as Joseph did: with wisdom and forgiveness.

“Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.” (Genesis 45:3–8)

“But Joseph said to them, “Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will

provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.” (Genesis 50:19–21)

Moses’ family had its fair share of strife as well. Here we see that Aaron, Moses’ brother, and Miriam, Moses’ sister, rebelled against Moses and the Lord. God judged Miriam harshly but had mercy on her at Moses’ request. Again, grace and forgiveness bring healing to feuding families.

“Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. “Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the LORD heard this. (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, “Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you.” So the three of them came out. Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, he said, “Listen to my words: “When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy;” ... So Moses cried out to the LORD, “O God, please heal her!” (Numbers 12:1–10, 13)

Have you been praying for your loved ones back home? Be sure to do that! And what should you pray? You’ll find no better pattern than Paul’s prayer for the Colossian Christians.

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order

that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:9–14)

David had it exactly right. What a blessing Christian unity is!

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.” (Psalm 133)

Note: Anointing oil flowed down on Aaron when he was commissioned to be the high priest. Christian fellowship and unity is like that oil flowing over us, blessing all who share in that unity. Christian fellowship is as refreshing as a heavy dew that waters plants and brings life to dry ground.

25. When it's morning

Everyone once in a while someone in the hospital tells me that when they woke up that morning they had forgotten that they were in the hospital. They woke up ready to “get at it” only to realize that they couldn’t even get out of bed by themselves. Talk about a letdown. Mornings are busy places in Mayo hospitals because the doctors and their teams are making rounds. Nurses are reviewing any tests or procedures planned for the day. Housekeeping usually stops by to take out the garbage and clean the room. And your friendly neighborhood WELS chaplain will stop by as well.

Everyone is hard at work ... except you, the patient! In fact, you seem to be at the mercy of everyone else. Be sure to take a moment every morning in the hospital to count your blessings and to put things into God’s hands for the day. Those simple acts of worship help set the tone for the day because they help you to remember that it’s not just the doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and your family members who are busy. Your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is on the job too. Many Lutherans begin their day with Luther’s morning prayer. It’s an excellent prayer for the hospital.

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Lord, I know that you are here with me in the hospital today. I commend myself to Your care. I know that You will use whatever happens to me today for my good and Your glory. Help me to be a faithful witness of Your love today to everyone who enters my room. Lord, I humbly pray that You would grant me strength and healing so I can continue to serve You in this world. Let me accept Your will – whatever it may be – with joy and thanksgiving. I pray these things in the name of Your Son. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

This verse should be written on the arm of all believers! We bring our prayers to the Lord in the morning and then wait to see how He will answer them during the day. As the old hymn says, "With the Lord begin your task." Start your day in the hospital by bringing everything to the Lord in prayer.

"In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation." (Psalm 5:3)

The morning is an excellent time to pray but it's also a great time to praise the Lord. As you begin your day be sure to praise the Lord for the blessings of the previous day. As you have opportunity make it clear to those around you that you are praising the Lord for His blessings!

"Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;" (Psalm 95:1–6)

Paul began his great letter to the Romans with the words below. Read them carefully. How can you apply the first words of Paul's letter to the first hours of your day?

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to

belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:1–7)

Have you ever considered having a theme for the day, something that you keep in mind the whole day through? If so, this verse will be an excellent theme for any day, even days spent in the hospital. Memorize this verse and go back to it throughout the day. Put Paul’s words into practice. It will change your day!

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)

26. When it's night

Nighttime can be lonely and scary in the hospital. The day is filled with activity, visitors, procedures. At night there's no one else in the room. You are alone with your thoughts and sleep often does not come easily. To make matters worse, you might not be entirely sure that you will wake up in the morning if you are critically ill. This old children's prayer is in order:

*Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
If I should die before I 'wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

Many years ago, I visited a single mother and her very ill little girl in the hospital at 9 or 10 PM every night. The mother had trouble being in the hospital during the day because she had to work. The little girl didn't want to sleep because she wanted to see her mother. Those were some of the best hospital visits I've ever made in my life. The hospital was quiet and the atmosphere lent itself to talking about important, eternal matters. As you are all by yourself in the hospital room at night remember that you are most certainly not alone. Jesus is in the room with you. He wants to hear your needs, your worries, and your hopes. And He wants to send you His Holy Spirit to give you the peace that passes all understanding, peace that comes from knowing that you are a child of God.

[Luther's Evening Prayer] In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Lord, You know what it's like to be alone at night. On Maundy Thursday night You were in the Garden of Gethsemane praying. The disciples repeatedly fell asleep, leaving You alone. But You were not alone. Your Heavenly Father heard Your prayers and sent the holy angels to strengthen You. Tonight as I prepare to go to

sleep remind me that I am not alone. You are with me. Your holy angels are on duty to watch over me. Lord, I put myself into Your hands this night, knowing full well that I am in Your hands. Thank You for loving me so much that You forgave all of my sins. If I do not wake up in this hospital room tomorrow morning I know that I will be waking up in heaven, finally able to see You face to face. I pray this in the name of Jesus; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Reciting the following verse is a great way to end the day! I lie down to sleep in peace because the Lord makes us dwell in safety. We could apply it to the hospital this way: I lie down to sleep in peace because the Lord holds me in His hands and will care for me in the best way possible.

“I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:8)

It's always time to give thanks to the Lord but night time is an especially fitting time. Give thanks to the Lord for the blessings He's given you during the day. Finish your day by counting your blessings.

“Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, O descendants of Abraham his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,” (Psalm 105:1–8)

Go ahead and fall asleep; God won't doze off! That's one of the messages of Psalm 121. God watches over you as you sleep, especially while you are in the hospital! Put yourself into His hands as you drift off to sleep tonight.

"I lift up my eyes to the hills— where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you— the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." (Psalm 121:1–8)

The evening sacrifice must have been a beautiful sight in Jerusalem. I can just imagine priest and people alike watching the smoke from the sacrifice billow up toward heaven as evening turned into night. The psalmist says that our prayers can be like the evening sacrifice, billowing up toward heaven as evening turns into night. Make good use of the last moments of the day in the hospital.

"O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice." (Psalm 141:1–2)

27. When you have an opportunity to witness

A retired pastor who is a good friend of mine had major heart surgery at Mayo and was in the hospital for a week. On one of the last days of his hospitalization he told me that God had just presented him with one of the best witnessing experiences of his life. A nurse, who knew he was caring for a retired pastor, confided in him that he hadn't been in church for a long time. The pastor was able to have a heart to heart conversation with the nurse, a conversation the nurse truly appreciated.

Not all witnessing opportunities are as extensive or dramatic. It's easy to think about only yourself when you are in the hospital. After all, you are sick and everyone else is focus on you! Resist that temptation. Remember that the doctors, nurses and technicians that are caring for you have lives of their own. Perhaps one of them is going through a difficult time. Perhaps one of them has just experienced something joyful. Most importantly, perhaps one of them needs some spiritual encouragement. Let them see you reading your Bible and praying. As you have opportunity, get to know them a bit. Confess that you are in God's hands. Be kind to them. In other words, let your light shine!

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing me to the hospital so skilled and knowledgeable people can care for me. Thank You for their work, Lord. As they are a blessing to me let me also be a blessing to them. Remind me to be kind to them even though I'm not at my best. Help me to treat them with respect and concern. Lord, give me opportunities to thank them, encourage them, and even to witness to them. You have told me to let my light shine. That command holds true even when I'm in the hospital. Again, Lord, thank You for the doctors, nurses and technicians. I put myself into Your hands because You are my great Physician. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Letting your light shine doesn't have to include a long spiritual discourse. It can be as simple as praying in someone's presence or being kind to them. The Mayo hospital system even helps you to let your light shine. In every room there is either a crucifix or a picture of Jesus. Perhaps you could mention to your nurse that you appreciate that artwork!

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Obviously you aren't at your best when you are in the hospital. That doesn't mean that you can't witness to others. There was once an Israelite girl who was taken captive and brought to a foreign country. She could have let despair over her situation blind her to the opportunities around her. Instead she used the opportunity God gave her to tell a foreign general about God and His prophet.

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. “By all means, go,” the king of Aram replied. “I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. (2 Kings 5:1-5)

28. When receiving a blood transfusion

Every now and then, when Mayo is at her patient capacity, a call will go out to Mayo's employees that blood supplies are getting low. Doctors, nurses and staff members quickly become blood donors to save lives. As if performing operations, starting IVs, administering medicine, repairing equipment, and cleaning hallways weren't enough, these employees give their own blood to help the patients. And blood donation goes beyond Mayo employees. People from around the country who will probably never meet you have given their blood so that your life could be prolonged. When you receive blood, thank the Lord for the selflessness of others.

Also remember that there was someone else who gave His blood for you 2,000 years ago. He didn't donate a pint of His blood; He gave all of it for you, even His life. He didn't do this to simply prolong your life. His sacrifice gives you eternal life.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the technology that allows the blood from one person to be given to another person to sustain health. On a more personal level, thank You for the people who gave their blood to sustain my health. Please let this transfusion accomplish its purpose in my healthcare. Give my body strength so that it can replenish its own blood supply. Lord, as I receive another person's blood remind me of the greater gift that Jesus gave me as He shed His blood for me on the cross. Your Word tells me that Jesus' blood has washed me clean. As Martin Luther so eloquently put it, "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death." I put my self into Your strong, powerful and loving hands. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

In God's Word "shedding blood" is another way of saying killing someone. It's a vivid phrase based firmly in reality. If someone loses a significant amount of blood they will die. Obviously blood is vital to sustaining human life. That makes the blood donation that you are receiving so special. Someone cared about human life so much that they gave their blood.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. (Genesis 9:6)

As mentioned above, as you receive the blood of another person, our minds turn to our Savior who shed His blood for you. There is great power in the blood of Christ! In the following reading God tell us that we overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb. The sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross paid for the sins of the world. Through faith that forgiveness becomes ours. We can tell the devil, "I am a child of God, washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. Take you vile temptations and accusations and leave me!"

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:10-11)

The blood of Christ has cleansed your conscience. You can close your eyes at night (or even in the afternoon!) with this thought, "Lord, You have washed me clean by the blood of Your Son. My conscience is clear, and my heart is at peace. I praise You, Lord!

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:11-14)

On the night before Jesus shed His blood, He gave us His blood in a different way. In the Lord's Supper Jesus gives us His body and blood, the same body and blood given and shed for us. In the Lord's Supper Jesus comes to us in a most personal way.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28)

29. When going to a nursing home

One of my good friends at church says, "It stinks to get old." It's an old saying but certainly true that "Getting old is not for the faint of heart." Those sayings are especially true when someone has to go into a nursing home. For many families it's the most traumatic decision they have ever made. Mom or dad refuses to go to the nursing home even though the children, grandchildren, and social workers see no other options. It's tough enough to make those decisions in the privacy of one's home. Unfortunately many families end up making that decision in the hospital after mom or dad has fallen or sustained some other injury that makes it impossible for them to return home. A pastor quickly becomes a family counselor and mediator in those situations. Here are a few tips for that difficult situation:

- 1. Pray, pray, pray. Pray privately that your discussions will go well. Just as importantly, pray out loud with everyone (mom/dad, children, and grandchildren). Not only will you be asking the Lord to be part of the discussion and decision, you'll be putting everything into a spiritual context.*
- 2. Rely on the medical professionals. Mayo's doctors, nurses, and social workers know what they are doing. They have no interest in taking someone away from their home. They genuinely want what's best for their patient. Invite them to be part of the discussion as much as possible. Hearing something from multiple sources is helpful.*
- 3. Rely on your pastor and Christian friends. These decisions are tough! There's no reason to make them alone. Your pastor and church family can give you solid, Biblical and loving advice and encouragement. They can also pray for you.*
- 4. Chose a nursing home carefully. If possible have a family member or friend visit the place you are considering. Have them look around. Do*

the residents look well cared for? Does it look, and smell clean? What do the rooms look like? Talk to the administrator or nurse leader, asking them questions about the quality of care they provide. What data can they share with you about their quality of care and resident satisfaction? How will they meet your needs?

5. *Acknowledge that this is difficult for everyone. Listen to each other. Realize that mom or dad has probably been dreading this decision for years. The same thing is true for children and grandchildren. Go slowly. Listen with your heart and validate what everyone is feeling and thinking.*
6. *It is possible that your loved one's presence in the nursing home will become a great mission opportunity for them and their pastor. One retired pastor viewed his years in a nursing home as his "final call." It is not at all unusual that the pastor's visit to a nursing home or group home leads to contact with many unchurched individuals. Remind your mom or dad of this opportunity.*
7. *Tell each other that you love them. It's easy for mom or dad to slip into thinking that no one cares about them. Tell them that you love them! Mom or dad, tell your children and grandchildren that you love them! Be honest with your mom or dad. If it's becoming impossible for you to care for them at home tell them that: "Mom, I feel terrible about this, but I just can't take care of you at home. I'm afraid you are going to get hurt and it will be my fault. I'm so tired, mom."*
8. *Talk about the positive aspects of the nursing home: safety, assistance, and comradery. Assure your mom or dad that you will visit them and mean it. Perhaps even talk about setting up a visitation schedule.*
9. *Keep these bedrock spiritual truths in mind and in your conversations. First, God's love and forgiveness is there for you in the hospital, at home, and even at the nursing home. That will not change. Second, the nursing home is not home just as a house is not your home. Heaven is our home. That's not just a saying we throw around. It's*

profoundly true. Rely on that; speak about it. Third, our lives are in God's hands. Doctors, nurses and social workers are often sent by the Lord to take care of us. Hear the voice of the Lord in their voices.

- 10. One final point. Your mom or dad need to hear God's law directing them not to be selfish and to face reality. You need to hear God's law directing you to keep the 4'th commandment, showing honor and respect to your parent. And all of you need to hear the wonderful gospel message that You are forgiven children of God and the promise that the Lord will hold all of you in His hands, working all things out for good.*

Dear Heavenly Father, I'm afraid, sad, angry, and tired all at the same time. The doctors, nurses, social workers, and even my family members are telling me that I have to go into a nursing home. Part of me knows that they are right. But I don't want to go to a nursing home, Lord. Nursing homes are typically the last place people live before they die, Lord. I can't believe it's come to this, Lord. I need You to give me peace, wisdom, and strength ... and quickly! Lord, remind me that no matter where I live I'm in Your hands. Remind me that heaven is my real, eternal home. Remind me that my children and grandchildren love me and want what's best for me. And keep reminding me of those things, Lord, because it's such a hard, emotional time right now. Lord, You have promised that You are my Good Shepherd. Part of being a shepherd is leading the sheep where they should go. Help me to see Your hand in all this. I want to be in charge of my own life, directing my affairs as I see fit. But Lord, I've never been in charge of my own life. You have been. And I thank You for that. Now keep leading me, Good Shepherd, in the way I should go. I know that You love me and want what's best for me because You sent Jesus to suffer, die and rise again for me. For that reason I trust You.

Lord, this decision is tough on everyone in my family. Even though I'm going through turmoil don't let me say anything that will damage the relationship I have with my loved ones. Keep our love for one another strong.

Lord, I put myself into Your hands now just as I have always. If You lead I will follow. I pray in the name of my Good Shepherd. Amen.

God's Word to consider:

God told Joshua to be strong and courageous as he became the leader of the Israelites. Going into a nursing home takes a certain amount of courage as well because it's a major life change. Be strong and courageous because your God will go with you wherever you go!

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

There is a time for everything, even for going into a nursing home.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8)

30. When going home (to your house, not yet to heaven!) **

It's always a great sight when I walk into a hospital room and see the patient in street clothes with a suitcase by their side. That means it's moving day! Usually the patient says with a big smile on their face, "I'm going home today, Pastor Kom. Isn't that great?" A number of years ago that scene played out in an 8 AM visit. I asked the patient when he was heading home, thinking it was pretty soon because he even had his jacket on! He replied, "Late this afternoon or evening. I just want to be ready." That's how it is. People almost always have a fundamental urge to get home, even when they are in no shape to go home. It's a happy day when you can go home from the hospital. Be sure to thank the Lord for the blessing.

[In all my years of going to the hospital there has only been one person who was not in a hurry to go home: my wife Angela! After our fourth child was born she was perfectly happy to stay in the hospital for lunch and supper even though they offered to discharge her in the morning. She knew there was work waiting for her at home. This story is told with her permission.]

Dear Heavenly Father, I've been praying for the past days that I'd be able to go home as soon as possible. You have answered my prayers; I am heading home. Thank You, Lord, for this blessing. During my stay in the hospital it's been easy for me to remember how dependent I am on You. Now when I return home I'll slowly go back to my old routines. Keep me from forgetting how much I need You, Lord. I also ask You to motivate me to tell others how good You have been to me. When people ask how I am doing, make me quick to give all glory to You. Lord, I thank You for the good work that the medical staff has done. As I have opportunity let me express my thanks to them. Again, Lord, thank You for giving me the strength and health to return home. Give me a safe trip home and bless the transition to life at home. I pray this in the name of Jesus; Amen.

God's Word to consider:

Be sure to praise the Lord for allowing you to go home from the hospital!

“Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.” (Psalm 150)

Were there moments in the hospital when it seemed like you were calling to God from the depths of the pit? God has heard your prayer and has delivered you! Thank and praise the Lord.

“I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: “Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.” You came near when I called you, and you said, “Do not fear.” O Lord, you took up my case; you redeemed my life.” (Lamentations 3:55–58)

The man who had been demon possessed wanted to sail away with Jesus and the disciples. Instead Jesus told him to go home and to tell his family about the great things Jesus had done for him. That's exactly what Jesus wants you to do right now as you leave the hospital. Go home and tell your family about the great things that Jesus has done for you.

“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran

and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned." ... "As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed." (Mark 5:1-13, 18-20)

31. My prayer for you

I've prayed with patients in the hospital many thousands of times over the years. I've prayed that a complicated heart surgery will save someone's life, that a risky back surgery will finally alleviate years of pain, that an experimental surgery will keep an organ functioning, that someone's immune system will begin functioning after chemotherapy, and even that electroshock therapy will lessen acute mental illness. But that's not my "main prayer" for anyone. What I pray most of all for people in the hospital is the same thing that Paul prayed for in Philippians 1.

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:3–11)

Helpful Hospital Hints

I'm not a doctor and wouldn't dare diagnose anything. But I have been in the hospital in a million and one situations. Here are a few "helpful hospital hints".

Hint # 1: Have an advocate (or be your own advocate)

The hospital staff cares deeply about you. Thank the Lord for their good work! At the same time, they are busy, probably taking care of more than one patient, and are required to follow procedures. It's important for you and your family to take final responsibility for your care in the hospital. If you have questions, ask them. If you have concerns, voice them. Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. As you advocate for yourself or your loved one, always remember to treat the medical personnel with respect. Flying off the handle in anger does no one any good (and is a sin).

Hint # 2: Write things down

You are now in a hospital, a place of cutting edge technology. One of the best technologies you can use right now is an old one, a notebook! There will be a steady parade of doctors, residents (as one friend defined them, "practice doctors"), nurses, and various other medical staff. Everyone will have some information for you, some of it very important! Besides that, you aren't at the top of your game; you are sick and in the hospital. This is no time to rely on your memory. Write things down! If you have questions during the day (or night), write them down. If someone tells you what will be happening in the next few days, write it down! If a doctor talks about a new medication, write it down. That notebook of yours will be invaluable.

Hint # 3: Be nice to your nurse

The Mayo medical system is a “physician led” organization. The CEO and department heads are all doctors. That was the original design of the Mayo brothers. Doctors are tremendous blessings ... but it’s nurses who do the heavy lifting in the hospital. Doctors and their entourage of residents breeze in and out of a room with test results, opinions and ideas. But it’s your nurse who carries out the doctor’s orders, makes sure you get your medicine, helps you to the bathroom, and often has to put up with a lot of grief. Be nice to your nurse! Remember that in most cases your nurse has other patients to care for. Remember that your nurse has a personal life and has problems just like everyone else. Remember that God expects you to treat your nurse with kindness and respect. Take it from a guy who is in the hospital a lot, it will go better for you if you are nice to your nurse!

Hint # 4: Ask questions

This is closely related to the first two hints: have an advocate and write things down. Be sure to ask questions when you have them. Better yet, write them down when you think of the questions. My experience has been that the doctors at Mayo take the time to patiently answer questions. The key, obviously, is to ask. It’s intimidating when the doctors and residents suddenly come into the room. A patient might think, “These people are very busy ... and look how many of them there are! I had better let them get going.” Resist that urge! If you have questions ask them! The doctors genuinely want what’s best for you and are willing to answer questions. [And even if they aren’t all that willing, remember that you are the one who is paying them! 😊]

Hint # 5: Keep in contact with your pastor

It's a privilege for me to visit people from out of town. I've developed some strong relationships with people I've visited, relationships that are forged around the Word of God in the midst of challenging situations. But I'm no substitute for your pastor. Your pastor has a long-term relationship with you. Your pastor has been called by the Lord to shepherd you. Your pastor will care for you when you get home. Your pastor cares deeply about your wellbeing and is praying for you. Be sure to keep in contact with him! If you are able to call him do so. If that's impossible make sure someone else is letting him know about your progress. Trust me, your pastor wants to know how you are doing.

Hint # 6: Remember your loved ones

Dealing with a serious medical issue is hard on a patient. It's also hard (maybe even harder sometimes) on the patient's loved ones. Patient's loved ones feel helpless and often don't know what to do for someone who is seriously ill. At least the patient knows that heaven is waiting if things go wrong medically. Loved ones don't get to go right to heaven. They deal with heartache, worry, and sadness. If you are a patient who is seriously ill remember your loved ones. Pray for them. Encourage them in the Lord. Pray for the strength to be positive for them. Remember that you are teaching them how a child of God goes through challenging times.

Hint # 7: Ask about flushing the IV

One of the worst experiences I've had in the hospital was the result of the medical personnel not flushing an IV (making sure it worked and wouldn't get plugged up) before giving someone a very important medicine at a key moment. I'm not a doctor or a nurse but I promised myself that I'd always bring it up at key moments.

Information about Ascension

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Our Rochester WELS chaplaincy is a ministry of LIMA. If you would like to support LIMA financially or to receive more information about their ministry you can reach them at:

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