

# St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings  
for 01.17.15 Epiphany 2*

## **Day One: Isaiah 62:1-5**

*No longer will they call you  
Deserted, or name your land  
Desolate. But you will be called  
Hephzibah, and your land Beulah;  
for the Lord will take delight in  
you, and your land will be married.*

Las Vegas is called “Sin City.”  
Detroit is often called the  
“Motor City”, but it has also  
been called “Murder City.”  
Some other cities in Michigan  
are called Cereal City –  
Furniture City – Paper City –  
and Christmas Pickle Capital.

The land of Israel was  
being called Desolate and  
Deserted. As people move out  
of Michigan, some people are  
starting to talk about our state  
as deserted. We're said to be in  
The Rust Belt. We're not the  
first. You might have seen a  
billboard, “Would the last  
person to leave please turn out  
the lights?”

Trying to restore the  
fortunes of our state, we have  
the Pure Michigan campaign,  
which points out our natural  
beauty. We're trying to change

our image from rust and decay  
to freshness and life.

God promised Israel a  
name change, and more than a  
name change. He promised a  
change in their nature.

God says Israel will be  
called Hephzibah (my delight  
is in her) and Beulah  
(married). It is not wealth or  
power that he promises. He  
isn't giving them a new  
identity as a cultural capital.  
Their real identity will be as  
God's beloved, the one whom  
God cares for and makes his  
own. It is the name we might  
give to a land with no people  
at all, but with beautiful  
scenes. “God's Country.”

This promise is not just  
for properties or countries. It  
is for people. You might have  
some unflattering names for  
yourself. Ugly, fat, old, dumb,  
failure, those are things that  
we too often say when we  
look in the mirror. But this is  
what Jesus says of you: “my  
bride, my beloved, my  
delight.”

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, bless  
our state and our nation. We have  
often prayed for prosperity, but Lord  
we need more than wealth. Grant  
that we may be called “Beloved.”  
Amen.*

## Day Two: 1 Cor 12:1-11

*Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant... There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.*

“Parts is parts.” Do you remember that old commercial about fast food chicken? The advertiser knew that we don’t like just any part of the chicken. We want to *know* what part of the chicken we’re eating!

In the same way, we want to make some distinctions between different gifts. Not that one is better and another is worse, but we know that we are each unique people and our gifts each have value in a different way or a different place.

We tend to think that gifts of leadership are greater than gifts for following. We think that those gifts that are used “on stage” or in front of others, gifts of speaking or singing or performing, must be better than gifts that are “backstage,” gifts of serving, nurturing, and loving.

But Paul says that all of our gifts are tools for the same Holy Spirit, used for the same

purpose, to glorify God and to build up his kingdom.

Paul is not concerned that we know what all the gifts are. He does not even give us an exhaustive list or a sure-fire way to identify them. In fact, many of the gifts named in the New Testament seem vague and overlapping, and the way in which God works in our life might change from day to day. But more than anything else, Paul wants us to know where our gifts *come from*.

We like to focus on the gift itself. This person is musical, that person is artistic, this other person is good at math. We always seem to end up comparing gifts, and which is better or best. The end result is often hurt feelings.

What you most need to know is the “From:” and the “To:” part of your gift tag. Your gift is from God himself, through the Holy Spirit living in you. And your gift is to you. It is uniquely yours. No one else can be used by God in quite the same way!

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I don't even know what all my gifts may be, but I pray that you use every gift in me to glorify your wonderful name. Amen.*

### **Day Three: John 2:1-11**

*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had been invited to the wedding...*

Did you have company over during the Christmas and New Year holidays? There were lots of family gatherings, and many people had groups of friends at their house to celebrate together. Once in a while, if our planning wasn't quite right, we ran out of something. We opened the last bag of chips, or the last plate of cookies, or the last bottle of wine. But even then it wasn't a disaster. We could run out for more.

But sometimes when everyone is under one roof (and under foot) we run out of other things. Friendliness, patience, and love can become in short supply. Nerves get rubbed a little raw and tempers flare. Sometimes the topic of discussion at the party goes in a direction we didn't expect, and hard words are said.

At parties we're on our best behavior, but in our daily lives we run short like this quite often. We see it in the

grocery store, in traffic, at work, and at the dinner table. And when we run out of the love that our family most needs, then life becomes bitter and ugly. And where can we go to fill up again?

One couple took the right precaution. They invited Jesus to their wedding. It was not only liquid refreshment that Jesus supplied to them, but he came to bring life, and even abundant life.

We don't know what happens to make us run out of love and joy. But we experience it often, days that turn sour and joys that become bitter. What can turn our day, our heart, our life around? Not a drink. Not a gift. But a word from Jesus can change us. The presence of Jesus in our home, our car, our conversation can renew us. Asking Jesus to our work, to our marriage, or to our daily struggle invites him to supply what we really need.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, the couple in Cana didn't know what would go wrong, but they knew they needed you with them. Lord, I don't know where I will fail today, or what help I will need, but I know I need you. Walk with me today. Amen.*

## Day Four

“Lord, When You Came as  
Welcome Guest” (LSB #859)  
*Lord, when you came as welcome guest  
To Cana’s wedding feast,  
The bridal pair, divinely blest,  
Found all their joy increased.*

*Now give Your presence from above  
That these, by vowing true,  
May show their pledge is like the love  
Between the Church and You.*

It’s hard to preach on Mother’s Day and to talk about the wonderful blessings of parenting. After all, not everyone is a mother. Not even a majority of the congregation gathered are mothers. And there are some who long to be mothers, but cannot. And others whose experience of parenting ended in sadness. What’s a preacher to do?

It’s hard to preach on Father’s Day. We want to talk about the ideal of fatherhood, but so many people have had very negative experiences with their fathers that the subject becomes too sensitive. What should the pastor talk about?

It’s hard to preach about marriage, about the wonderful, amazing gift that God gave to us when he made Eve for Adam and the two became

one flesh. Doesn’t everyone long for that gift (or wouldn’t they, if it had not become so twisted and broken for so many)? But in marriage we often have our saddest, most painful memories. The phrase “broken heart” is considered a metaphor, but it doesn’t feel like it. When we are hurt because of love, it feels like we are literally broken inside.

And yet, we have a wonderful message to share. All our human relationships are broken, whether parent or child, spouse or sibling. But Jesus says that he will take us to be HIS bride. This is what marriage is, only the shadow of the real wonder of Jesus’ perfect love for us!

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, open my eyes. Let me see you in your word, in your sacraments, even in my brothers and sisters in Christ. And let others see your love in me. Amen.

<p>These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at <a href="http://stpaulannarbor.org">stpaulannarbor.org</a></p>
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