

## ST. MARK'S FAITH STORIES

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### **ADULT FAITH STORIES – December 2008**

When my daughter Kelsey was about two years old, we were facing our first Christmas alone. The previous June her father had left, ending our five-year marriage. I had never intended to be a single parent. Christmas had always been one of the most special times of the year for me, and for the first time in my life, I found myself dreading it.

One night, my sister Katherine and two of my very dear friends from St. Mark’s told me they were taking me out to dinner. When we returned to my home . . . SURPRISE! All the lights were on and my home was filled with women from St. Mark’s Chancel and Bell choirs! They had brought all kinds of goodies, and we had a wonderful Christmas party. I remember RoseMarie Lortz telling me that they weren’t going to let me NOT have a joy-filled Christmas. There were no words to express my surprise and gratitude. We had a wonderful evening of fellowship and yes, JOY.

I hadn’t known until after they all went home that there was an envelope left in the branches of the Christmas tree . . . with over \$500, collected from my friends, and some folks I didn’t even know, at St. Mark’s. Others had left bags of groceries in my basement. To this day, I can never say enough thanks for the gift of love and friendship the members of St. Mark’s showed me during a difficult time. Thank you again, my friends, for being the light that shines in the darkness!

“The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it.”

– John 1:5 (NLT)

**~ Karol White**

My St. Mark’s Story is nothing short of a miracle!

One magical day, I was driving down C Street and noticed this beautiful Lutheran Church! A church five minutes from my house! Well, I HAD to try it! I HAD to attend

the church to see if I liked it and to see if **it** liked me! So, one day I told my husband about the church and that I would be “trying it out” . . . The only time I’ve missed a Sunday since that first Sunday I attended is when I’ve been gone on business travel or vacation.

I love the church!

I love the sermons!

I love the fact that I can read out of a Bible (that Jane Simoson gave me as a present), and it’s okay that it’s not the King James Version (as I was raised that it was not appropriate to read out of anything but the King James Version) . . .

For the **FIRST** time in my entire life I am reading the Bible! I am showing **INTEREST** in learning about God and the Bible! I have so much to learn . . . I am way behind because kids who have completed third grade know more than I do! Talk about feeling “stupid!” But, that’s okay . . . better to start reading **NOW** than **NEVER**!

I love attending church! If I don’t make it to church, my week is incomplete. When I attend church, I feel I am getting off on the right foot that week . . . it starts my week off with positive reinforcement. It tells me that God is a loving and caring God, not a mean and hateful God. God wants to help us, not hurt us.

I have even joined **TWO** Bible study groups. And am thinking about joining a **THIRD**! There are so many great things going on at the Church that I can’t do everything I’d like to. Ugh! That’s another thing I just **LOVE**! The Church has so many ways you can be involved in different activities.

I have been moved more the past two years spiritually than I have been moved my entire life and I thank St. Mark’s for that every Sunday.

~ **Marilyn Cannady**

### **Growing Faith - A Lifelong Lesson**

God has a reason for creating me to be born at a certain time in history, in a particular place on the globe, with a unique family lineage. It is taking a lifetime to become mature in my Christian faith and fulfill that purpose. I grew up in a Christian home with parents who nurtured my faith. As a child and as a young adult, it was routine to go to church regularly. I “believed” and was comfortable in my religion.

But God wanted a relationship. In my hindsight wisdom, I see that many times God used difficulties and struggles to get my attention. I remember the moment Jesus became “real” to me when my marriage was falling apart. I suddenly knew that Jesus is near; He cares and can mend a broken spirit. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your path.” Proverbs 3:5-6.

With each challenge in life, I continued to grow in His grace and mercy. I understand now that “trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God’s approval and His approval creates hope. This hope does not disappoint us.” Romans 5:3. In all

circumstances, small or huge, I am learning to leave the results in God's hands. God is very patient and forgiving and gives second chances every day. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purposes." Romans 8:28.

It is exciting to see God actively working in my life—opening doors and putting people in my path. I know that Jesus wants me to be a shining light of His love and His hands and feet in service to others. I am thankful for my St. Mark's church family, the pastors and staff, and my small group friends with whom I can share and live out my faith.

My daily mantra is "Thank you, Lord, for this new day. Help me to complete the tasks that are before me today. Help me serve you by serving others. Help me fulfill your purpose for me in this place."

I also pray that God will help me leave a legacy to my children and grandchildren so I will be with them on the Glory side of eternity.

These things I know for sure: God hears all my prayers. In Him all things are possible. I am never alone.

**~ Melissa Hammersland**

I have always been a Christian. I cannot remember a time when God was not in my life. Sure, there were the college years when I didn't attend church as often as my mother would have liked, but I always had a Bible near and read it regularly. I prayed and felt God's presence.

As a young adult I had a good friend that was a mature Christian. God used her to lead me to a personal relationship with Jesus. For that I will always be thankful.

Our family joined St. Mark's in the winter of 1986. My husband and I raised our children here. We attended services almost every Sunday. Our children went to Pioneers, Sunday school and were confirmed here. I am confident in saying that God used St. Mark's to help all of us grow in our faith. We have an awesome community of believers that have celebrated our joys and have also mourned with us.

I believe that our daughter was nurtured at St. Mark's and that guided her to do campus ministry with her husband. We also have the blessing of worshiping with our son and his family each Sunday. I have felt God's hand in our journey at St. Mark's every step of the way. It is truly a blessed house of God.

**~ Deb Becker**

My walk with God was changed when my husband and I began trying to have a baby. We tried for more than a year and were finally referred to a fertility doctor. I was put on fertility drugs, and the doctor seemed reasonably confident that we would conceive within six months. However, six months went by with no success, and then the doctor told me I needed to stop taking the drugs for awhile. At that point the thought crossed

my mind that we would not be able to have children. God had other plans. Through various sermons, Bible verses, and songs, He was letting me know that I just needed to be patient and trust in His plan for us. I remember Pastor Perry's sermon about how God always answers prayers – sometimes with a “Yes,” sometimes with a “Not yet,” and other times with a “No.” I began to feel that I could trust God. He was just telling me “Not yet.” Then came Pastor Jana's sermon about how to spend daily quiet time with God. I was reading the Bible, but didn't have a strong prayer life. Her sermon helped me commit myself to that daily time of reflection and prayer. Bible verses, such as Philippians 4:6 began entering my mind as I drove to work. God was a big part of my life. He was using that time to teach me patience and trust, qualities I would need to be a better mother. Though he wasn't done with me (and still isn't), He did bless us with a child. Every once in awhile, we think about if God had answered our prayers on our time, we wouldn't have the boy we have now. Our son is the best gift we have ever been given and we can't imagine our lives without him.

My guiding Bible verse: Philippians 4:6 “Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done.”

**~ Anonymous**

My wife and I started dating in high school. As we grew in our relationship during college, and particularly after I proposed, I started to think about what our marriage would be like. Having been raised in the church, I believed that a marriage grounded in faith was essential. My wife was raised in the Catholic Church and had not regularly attended up to that point. Her family is terrific and I love them very much, but I struggled at the time with the questions of how to address my feelings without making her feel attacked and that I was forcing my beliefs on her. I prayed often about how exactly to approach my desire to join a church and make it part of our married life. Our marriage prep classes with Pastor Hagstrom helped get some of these feelings out in the open, but it was attending the Impact service and the welcoming atmosphere at St. Mark's that made her feel comfortable. Since we joined over five years ago, my wife's faith has grown to the point that she is a model for me regarding prayer, reading the Bible, and overall enthusiasm about our faith. I love her very much and thank God every day for his presence in our lives.

My guiding Bible verse: Matthew 6:27 - “Who by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

**~ Anonymous**

I grew up in a Missouri Synod Lutheran home. We were expected to go to church each Sunday and learn about our faith. It wasn't, however, a very personal faith. When Ron and I got married and moved to Cedar Rapids, we decided we should find a church. After much searching and visiting we decided we would like to join a church where we

could worship alongside family and so we joined the church my sister's family was a member of and we joined St. Mark's Lutheran church.

Our family's faith life grew through involvement in the church, growing our children in the church, through good teaching in the church, but it really became personal when we attended Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp. At the same time the small group ministry at St. Mark's started, and Bible study and living out our faith took on important part of our family and personal goals. By learning and sharing together with others in the faith, we became a community in our faith.

About this time I also had some serious health issues. My St. Mark's family surrounded me with support and love that brought me through those trials with greater faith in God's love.

Now, St. Mark's is an integral part of our faith life. In fact, we're relocating to be closer to St. Mark's and our many St. Mark's family and friends in faith.

**~ Denise Harriman**

I grew up in the Church—Catechism on Saturday mornings, while all the Protestant kids got to watch cartoons, and Mass on Sunday. It was a habit—a habit that gradually disappeared almost entirely as I moved from high school into my college years.

Near the end of my senior year at U.N.I. I had the good fortune to meet, fall in love with, and later marry, my wife Darla, whose own faith and love for Jesus has meant more to me than she will ever know.

Some time back, a friend and colleague from another faith tradition asked me what Bible verses meant the most to me. He then shared his favorite passages from Scripture. It struck me that each of the verses he chose centered on an obligation or duty. I mentioned that to him and he acknowledged the truth of my observation stressing his “call to obedience.”

I told him that, while I couldn't argue with our obligation to obey God's commands, his question had to do with the verses that had the most meaning in my life. I explained that, though I've never been particularly good at memorizing verses, I remember stories.

The first is the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). We all know the story: the son took his inheritance, left home, “squandered his wealth in wild living,” and then, destitute, returned home with the hope that he might become one of his father's servants. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son . . .”

The second story is the story that begins with Jesus walking on the water (Matthew 14). At Jesus' command, “Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.”

The third story is one of healing (Mark 9). A father, whose son was “possessed by a spirit” that caused severe convulsions, approached Jesus saying, “But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” Jesus replies, “‘If you can?’ Everything is possible

for him who believes.” The father replies, “I do believe, help my unbelief.” And Jesus healed the boy.

I believe. But what about those moments where my belief seems all too fragile?

I believe. But all too often, I feel incapable of living my life in a way that clearly shows that belief.

I believe. Why do I seem to be unable to trust completely?

There are times that I wish I was a bit more like my friend. I sometimes wish that I had the strength of character or the strength of will to more consistently heed the “call to obedience.”

Mostly, though, I’m simply grateful that we have a God who is willing to run to me when I am “still a long way off.” I am grateful that our God is willing to reach out to me when I am sinking and I am incapable of doing anything except crying out, “Lord, save me.” I am grateful that my faith is in a God who is willing to grant healing and salvation—even when my faith is inadequate and imperfect.

~ **Jerry Burt**

Why am I a follower of Christ? I am thankful to have been blessed with faithful parents, grandparents and ancestors before them. They instilled in me the importance of having God and the Lord Jesus in my life. I accepted Him when I was confirmed at St. Peter Lutheran Church, Denver, Iowa.

Things that helped me become a Christian were memorizing many Bible verses, Luther’s Small Catechism, and many hymns and songs, which I learned at Sunday School, VBS and junior choir. Later, I married Val, a faithful Christian. Together, as workers in His kingdom, the Holy Spirit has helped me stay on that straight and narrow path of faith.

How has God used St. Mark’s to maintain and grow my faith in Jesus? I believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. His Word has helped my faith to grow through:

1. Bible-based sermons that show me how to live my life.
2. Adult Sunday School using the Bible as a guide for everyday living.
3. Small group fellowship and Bible study with much discussion.

Other ways my faith has grown are by using some of the talents God has given me to serve others through St. Mark’s missions and through its outdoor property needs. Also, my faith has grown when we went through a very difficult time and we received some much-needed help from St. Mark’s members.

Our challenge: Are we helping to pass on the faith to our children, grandchildren, friends, relatives and to people in other parts of the world who don’t know Jesus, so they too may have eternal life? St. Mark’s is doing a wonderful job of this. Let’s stay connected closely to Jesus and to St. Mark’s. All praise and glory to Him.

Bible verse that is meaningful: Ephesians 6:11 - “Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

~ **Gene Wolter**

## **My New Church Home**

The first anniversary of my husband's death and our wedding anniversary had both occurred in the first three weeks after my move to Cedar Rapids. Probably not the best timing for a move! Now I was lonely and lost in the city. My children were glad to have me close, but they had families and busy lives. I knew I had to make a life for myself.

I grew up in the church, a mixed family: my mother, sister and I went to the Southern Baptist church, my father and brother went to the Presbyterian Church. My first husband was a Lutheran, and I did not want a "Sunday split" so I became a Lutheran. When I remarried after a painful divorce, my second husband was a Lutheran. We met at a Lutheran church. Now I was a widow whose children were in North Carolina and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

My plan had been to visit every Lutheran church in the city so the choice would be right for me. It never occurred to me how long this could take.

My son and I had already visited two churches. We were working the plan. I made some phone calls to talk with pastors—no one was in. It was August; pastors were on vacation. Finally I just picked the next church to visit because I knew where it was located.

Then the loneliness set in. I sat in my favorite rocker, crying to God that I needed a church home NOW. I couldn't wait another 12 weeks. I begged Him to send me to the right church on this Sunday.

The next afternoon I set out to just visit some of the churches including the one I had chosen to attend on Sunday. That secretary showed me brochures and introduced me to their pastoral intern. He was a second career ministerial student, very kind and caring. I asked about programs, Bible studies and prayer groups. "We don't have that," "that program should start in the fall"; "that has been discussed" were the only answers he could give. He quickly realized this wasn't the church for me and suggested other local churches. One church wasn't even on my list. Clutching his directions to this unlisted church, I left to find St. Mark's Lutheran Church.

The building was overwhelming to a small town gal, big and very modern. The secretary was eager to help when I told her I was looking for a church home. Another secretary stopped in the office on her way out. When she learned I was looking for a church home she put down her coat and asked if I would like to see their worship center.

This woman spent 45 minutes showing me their building and telling of the opportunities for worship, service and growth. The warmth of God's love just oozed from her wonderful smile. She even invited me to the "50+" potluck at her house the next week.

An incredible feeling of warmth, peace and excitement washed over me as I walked out. This felt like the church home I wanted. The rest of the afternoon I wrestled with whether I should continue to "work my plan" and visit the other ten churches or go with my heart. I called a prayer partner back in Illinois, told her my story, and asked if this was an answer to my prayer. "Do you need to be hit in the head with a bat?" she quickly asked.

I visited St. Mark's on Sunday and knew my prayer had, indeed, been answered. I had found my new church home and the "family" I longed for in only three weeks instead of three months.

St. Mark's has given me opportunities to continue growing in my faith and many options of how and where I serve.

My guiding Bible verse: Proverbs 3: 5-6 - "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will make your paths straight."

~ **Helen Saunders**

### **I Met My Savior On 10/25/2005**

On October 25, 2005 it was a beautiful fall day. I can still recall the colorful fall leaves hanging on the trees and the nice weather. It was such a beautiful day but it ended in a tragic way. I lost my husband in a terrible accident. The shock of the news sent my stomach into knots as I gasped for air in disbelief that my best friend was gone.

Good dishes can be cooked in a slow cooker or in the microwave. The same is true of Christian growth. My faith journey was in a slow cooker until 10/25/2005. On that day I was zapped. There was no other comfort but the comfort of the Savior. The promises of comfort, peace, and restored joy can only be found when journeying through the pain of grief with the one who has been there and overcome death itself – Jesus Christ.

I was fortunate to have been in a small group of mature Christian woman who kept me focused on the promises found in God's word. I carried and recited scriptures, prayed, journaled, and joined GriefShare here at St. Mark's. God works powerfully through participation in a small group focused on healing, comfort, and companionship. It's amazing to see God's work of restoration! God is good and goes beyond any kind of ordinary comfort.

My guiding Bible verses: 2 Corinthians 4: 8 – "What we see will only last a short time, but what we cannot see lasts forever." Deuteronomy 29:29 – "There are secret things that belong to the Lord our God."

~ **Mary Jackson**

I was baptized, confirmed and married at Zion Lutheran Church in Gowrie, Iowa. I graduated from Iowa State University where I met my husband, Gene, at the University Lutheran Student Center where I was directing the choir. We have been members of various Lutheran churches in communities of which we have lived.

St. Mark's has been a blessing to me in many ways on my faith journey: education, worship, stewardship, service, evangelism, discipleship and fellowship.

- Education: In 1991, we joined the church because of the wonderful Adult Sunday School program with excellent videos shown by Pastor Hess. I am thankful to God

and the people of St. Mark's for the many opportunities to learn and to be of service using my spiritual gifts. Later, I was asked to teach confirmation, Sunday school, and Vacation Bible School, and be the speaker at the Sunday school teacher's banquet.

- Worship and stewardship: Bible-based sermons and many varied presentations with film clips, skits, and gifts to enhance the messages have strengthened my faith. My giving of offerings has increased to reach the missionaries and programs of the church. It is always a blessing to hear the beautiful music of the Choir.
- Small Group Ministry and Discipleship: I became a leader of a Couples Bible Study group that continues to meet twice a month. We have become very good friends and have helped each other through each of our personal trials and joys.
- Service and Evangelism: In January 2002, my husband and I had the privilege of going on our first Mission Trip to the Texas/Mexico border for an immersion experience and to explore the possibility of our church forming a partnership with their Lutheran church. We continue to lead the International and Individual Missions of St. Mark's. Serving as co-chairman of the Scandinavian Smorgasbord, I encouraged others to help in raising money for missions.
- Fellowship: Women's Ministry has always been a joy of mine. I was welcomed by Naomi Circle and then later started the Priscilla Circle (Bible Study) which continues to meet once a month on Thursday evening in the church library. Later, *it was an honor* to serve as President of Women's Fellowship for two years. I also enjoy 'Fifty Plus' events.

I am glad to be a member of St. Mark's and experience uplifting worship services and fellowship with studying God's word. My guiding Bible verse: Matthew 7:17 – "Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."

**~ Valois Peterson Wolter**

I have a relationship with Jesus/God because of St. Mark's. I have always enjoyed attending church and found comfort in my faith. However, the "connection" I have found I owe to St. Mark's. My now 22-year old daughter came home from a funeral at St. Mark's in March 2003 and said we HAD to go to St. Mark's. She had felt so moved by Pastor Perry's message. I was thrilled at her enthusiasm. Although we were regular attendees at another church, we were not really mentally involved.

We began attending St. Mark's that Sunday, and I have not missed a Sunday service since, unless I have been out of town. Attending on Sundays is truly the highlight of my week. Really! I joined a Bible study and discovered that EVERYTHING is in the Bible. It really IS a handbook for life.

I have learned so much about how to be a better person – more compassionate, accepting and loving. I then joined another Bible study and found new friends with whom I feel so much comfort. I think it must have been the notion of joining that is stressed at St. Mark's that got me to join these groups. Through them I learned, and I met friends and felt "connected."

I love the services as well. There is no other place in which I feel so “full.” I look forward to Pastor Perry’s sermons as well as to the music. Church is fun and absolutely relevant to my life, which is what I had been searching for. I now know that it shouldn’t be about me, however, when I got these things at St. Mark’s, that is when I began learning about what the Bible teaches and was able to begin applying it to my life. And that is what is causing me to grow. I have a long, long way to go and still feel like I am just getting started. But, I really love it and owe so much to the people of St. Mark’s. Thank you, thank you!

~ **Sharon Hollinrake**

I was raised in the Lutheran Faith in the small town of Jewell in central Iowa. My parents and grandparents were strong influences in my life growing up. The church and our faith in God were at the very center of our lives. But I have to say that the 40 Days of Purpose event at St. Mark’s and the resulting small group that my husband, Wade, and I joined changed my life. It really made my faith stronger. That faith was and still is a tremendous source of strength for me in the days and months since my husband’s death in August of 2006.

The pastors of St. Mark’s, my Dorcas circle friends, my small group, and the GriefShare group have all been a great blessing to me. I am so grateful. God’s work in and through this congregation is amazing.

My guiding Bible verse: Psalm 138:8 – “The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your Love, O Lord, endures forever.”

~ **Solveig Walstrom**

I want to share a wonderful experience I had at the Girlfriends Getaway.

Nine years ago my husband and I adopted two little girls. Kara was 9 and Skylar was 3; the case worker told us they didn't know if they were going to let Kara be adopted because of her behavior. They said she was pretty wild. My husband and I met the girls and fell in love. We felt like the girls were a gift from God. And they say God only gives you what you can handle. When the girls moved in Kara adjusted quite well. For six years she was a joy and didn't show any signs of bad behavior. It was Skylar that gave us a run for our money.

When Kara was in Middle School she would get teased due to her immature behavior. This continued until she was 15. In April 2005 the school called and stated Kara was really upset and was talking about taking students to heaven with her. When I heard that I called my husband and told him to come home. We need to take Kara to the hospital. We took her to the hospital and a therapist spoke with us. During that time Kara was very calm and told all of us her plan. She had a list of students, teachers, and counselors. She was going to break into my

husband's gun case and show all of them what heaven was like.

I thought I was dreaming; this couldn't be happening. The therapist checked Kara into the mental ward at the hospital. We thought that after a day or two Kara would realize what she was planning was so wrong. But that never happened. Kara had no remorse.

Then she started cutting and attacking staff members. We ended up having to put her in a mental Institute.

I just cried and couldn't understand why God would give us this wonderful child and then take her away. Kara just kept getting worse, and my stress level was so high. I hated that I couldn't help her, and I was losing my motherly control. I would ask people and the Church to pray for her. In the last three years Kara has been moved to four different treatment centers.

Kara currently is living in a treatment center in OK. I hate that she is so far away. The last few months Kara has started to swallow things like, plastic forks, rocks, screws, and the latest, toothbrushes. Many times I would cry to Jesus and try to give him Kara, but part of me couldn't let go. I wanted the control, I'm her mom, I should be able to help her. Three weeks ago I got a call that Kara swallowed a toothbrush and was in the hospital. About two hours later, a doctor called me and stated he needed to do surgery; the toothbrush was stuck in her stomach. I lost it, I wanted to fly out to be with her, I was a nervous wreck. My stress level was unbelievable. I still couldn't give all of Kara to Jesus.

I signed up for the Girlfriends Getaway, not knowing what it was all about. The speaker was amazing I felt like she was talking about my past in front of everyone. On Saturday her message really hit me. I started crying and thinking about Kara. I took my rock up to the bucket that was 1 Philippians 4:6-7, I was ready to give up my fear. When we had small group in our cabin, I broke down and told my friends I was ready to turn Kara over to Jesus. It was amazing. My friends placed their hands on me, and we all prayed. At that time I told Jesus to please take Kara; I am giving up all control because I can't change anything. Jesus has a plan, and I need to step back and let Jesus take the wheel. That night I felt at peace and less stressed.

Today is April 1, and I got a call at 2:00 a.m. Kara swallowed another toothbrush and was sent to the hospital. I was so calm. I said "ok, keep me updated." I went back to bed and asked Jesus to hold my hand, and I fell back to sleep. I felt peaceful all day, no stress because I know she is in the best care ever; she's under the care of Jesus.

Bible verse: 1 Philippians 4:6-7 – "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 minds in Christ Jesus."

**~ Tammy Bradley**

My faith journey has taken some hairpin curves. As a youngster I attended a small country church where I was related to most of the congregation. When I married

Richard, I joined his church, but felt disconnected. It wasn't until we found St. Mark's in 1968 that I truly felt at home.

In 2003, we were hit head-on near Chapel Hill, NC. Richard was driving, my daughter Jeri Lynn was in the front seat and I was in the back seat. Richard was not hurt, but Jeri Lynn broke both her wrists and an ankle. I was in terrible pain. We were taken by ambulance to the UNC hospitals where I was in the hospital for 33 days. There were nine surgeries in all, four of which were emergencies.

This is what deepened my faith. While I was in a sort of "twilight zone" at UNC, I saw two black claws reaching for me. I thought, "Help me Jesus," and immediately they disappeared. From then on, I knew God was with me and I was not afraid. When we arrived in Cedar Rapids, we were met by our friend Rosie Bowers and Pastor and Sky Kaupins. It was wonderful to see them with a big card from St. Mark's welcoming us home. Many friends encouraged us with prayers, food, visits, and cards.

Through all the operations, setbacks and recovery, Richard was right beside me. In the hospital he learned how to bandage my wounds and take care of me. Once at home when we were going through a particularly bizarre rough time, we just looked at each other and had to laugh.

My daughter, Jeri Lynn, said something that has always meant a great deal to me. In 2004 she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Thankfully it was benign, but it was through this ordeal that she realized she is a spiritual being going through a physical experience.

Richard has a deep abiding faith, and I will always be grateful for his care and love. It was through this experience that I have come to know Christ more fully. I know how much friends mean to me and others who are suffering. Through my suffering and recovery I found more compassion and the peace of Christ. I rejoice in Him.

My favorite scripture verse comes from Philippians 4:13 – "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

**~ Janice L. Schulke**

### **Doing God's Will, Sometimes**

I never thought I could listen to a person going through a crisis. I wouldn't know what to say or say something wrong! With God's nudging, I became a Stephen Minister/leader and discovered one of my gifts was hospital visitation. I became an on-call chaplain at St. Luke's Hospital. Again, I was concerned I'd say the wrong thing or be teary-eyed, or throw-up! I almost fainted once when a young man was stabbed and in a lot of pain.

I spent some time with my 93 year-old uncle who was ill. We talked about his faith and dying. When he died his daughters asked if I would officiate at his funeral. I couldn't do that! I'm not a minister! Before the service, I got really nervous and I prayed. I was led to a verse in the Bible which said something like, "you are right where I want you to be."

I have officiated at my husband's sister's funeral, a cousin, and a gentleman I met at St. Luke's while ministering to him while his wife was dying. A year later, this man died and

his daughter called me and said her dad really appreciated the time I spent with them and would I officiate his funeral. I was totally surprised for these people to put their trust in me.

I don't think of myself as an Evangelist. But it hit me that these funerals were for unchurched. My messages contained humor and God's promises. Evangelism . . . duh!

God uses what we've been through to help others for His Glory. I'm very humbled to be a part of these funerals, and it's weird to say, but it's kind of fun! God is so cool!

~ **Pegg Clinton**

My journey in faith began with my parents. They took me to church and Sunday school faithfully every Sunday. They used their gifts and expected the same from us. As a high school student I taught Sunday school and played frequently in church. A foundation for faith in Jesus was being built by my parents.

During college I began to read the Bible daily, even if I did not attend church on a regular basis. I struggled to decide on a major my sophomore year and what career would provide me and my future family a good living. During one week in spring all of the readings were from Psalms and the general message was, "God will provide." I decided that week to become a music education major. I didn't realize how much I missed worshiping with a church family until I joined a church near campus.

When I came to St. Mark's my faith journey took a turn towards a more personal relationship with Jesus. I did not envision my faith as a relationship before this time. I think it was a sermon that I heard that talked about this relationship. By taking more time to listen through quiet time in prayer, Bible reading and inviting Jesus into all parts of life—even the silly parts that don't seem to matter—that relationship has grown. My hope is that my personal relationship with Jesus will continue to grow.

~ **Pam Schulz**

I was raised to believe there is a God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And I always have. The problem was, I didn't believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – not as fully as I could have or should have. Not as fully as I now know my parents do. It wasn't until a tragic event took place in my family's life that I was able to first run looking for God, then find him and be able to rest in His presence.

June 16, 2001, our good friend, Joe, drowned in the Boundary Waters while on vacation with my husband. Our firstborn would be born exactly two months, to the day, of his death. As a family, we were dealing with some pretty extreme emotions.

What was I supposed to do with these emotions? How was I going to be strong for my husband and continue to believe everything was going to be OK? How could this happen? Why did it happen? Was there someone to blame? Was there something to blame? Certainly there was a logical explanation for all of this.

The explanation I was looking for, I would come to find out, was Jesus. Nearly a year ago, after being a part of several small groups but not quite "feeling it" yet, I was taken in by Girlfriends Growing in Grace. Wow! What a wonderful group of women! Most of them had young children, worked, and struggled with everyday issues that moms and wives run into. I had found my place! Hallelujah! And because of these women, I found my moment with Jesus.

During a study on grace, I was in awe of what grace means and what Jesus had done for me. During one of the chapters, we were asked to reflect on the moment we first accepted Jesus; in essence, when we were born again. I realized at this time, I had not had my moment. How do you get one? Are you serious? Isn't this a little weird? What do you do? What do you say? How does it feel? These were just a few of the questions going through my brain which I voiced to the group. I stated I had never had my moment and a wise woman in my group simply stated, "Well, get one." Really? It's that easy?

They prayed over me that night. I can't tell you what a warm, beautiful feeling that is knowing that there are others who care that much about you.

That night, heading home from study, I turned off my radio and began to pray. Not just in my head, not just thoughts, but out loud. I was nervous, at first. As bizarre as that sounds, I was. I mean, I was talking to the big man upstairs! Little old me, asking for a place at His table? Awfully forward of me, I thought. But as I continued to pray, a feeling came over me that I cannot, and probably will not ever be able to explain. It was as if Jesus was sitting right beside me in the car, encouraging me like a father would his daughter, to be honest and tell him anything I needed to tell him, and he would still love me, no matter what. And I wept.

I prayed that Jesus would become a part of my life, that he would help me to be the best mom, wife, friend, daughter, and sister I could be. I prayed that he help me through this life, because I can't do it by myself I confessed to sins for which I needed forgiveness and healing and I vocalized that I needed Him, I loved Him, and couldn't live without Him.

Another wise and faithful woman in my small group said being born again was similar to a wedding day. Amen to that! The anticipation (knowing there is someone out there for you), the nerves (getting ready for the ceremony), finally the ceremony (being born again), and then spending the rest of your life committed to, and working for, that relationship. I am the bride of the Father, and have never entered into a more fulfilling union. I have St. Mark's and the people of this congregation to thank for that. What a wonderful way to journey through doubts, desires, and cultivation of my faith. My life has been changed, and truly blessed.

**~Christine McSweeney**

### **Remembering Those Who Light Our Way**

One morning in adult Sunday school I noticed that the Bible I was using – and in fact all the Bibles in our row – bore the cover imprint, "In Memory of Lucille Thompson." The name was unfamiliar to me, and it started me thinking about all the generations of St. Mark's members who have come before me. I know that during my 20 years at St. Mark's, I have been shaped and

strengthened by my interaction with a host of long-time members – many of whom are now very elderly and are perhaps unknown to today's younger or newer St. Mark's members.

For the last 10 years, since we moved to our new Faith and Life Center, Daryl and I have been privileged to provide rides to four ladies who lived in an apartment building near our former church. Today only one of the ladies remains there – Connie Fox, who continues to greet us joyfully each Sunday morning when we arrive, even though we're usually a few minutes later than advertised. Ruth Pannkuk, approaching age 100, now lives with her son; Helen Mohni [died in December]; and Hazel Canady died this past June.

During the years when all four ladies lived at the Cedar Apartments, we enjoyed many, many wonderful visits on our drives to and from church – our van always humming with conversation and often seized with laughter as we reviewed the events of the day. On occasion our group would venture into the after-church lunch crowd at a nearby restaurant, attend an afternoon concert, or take an evening tour of the area's Christmas lights.

One spectacular fall afternoon we drove Connie and Hazel to dinner at Breitbart's Restaurant in northeast Iowa, doubling our pleasure as they basked in the beauty of the season. During those years, all four of "our ladies" experienced illness and hospitalization at least once - and, to our amazement, returned to our waiting van within a few weeks. We marveled at their resilience, as well as their positive spirits in the face of trying circumstances.

I remember one dark day in particular. It was Maundy Thursday, a dismal, rainy, wind-swept evening, when we picked up Ruth and Hazel for church. Connie was quite ill at the time, and we were all very concerned about her. Ruth's dear daughter-in-law was dying of cancer, and a beloved member of our congregation had died that day, taken by leukemia at mid-life. I found myself fighting back tears throughout the service. On the way home from church Ruth said she felt the same way, but that it was good to be with our church family.

When we arrived at their apartment building, Daryl and I walked Ruth and Hazel into the foyer, and we all leaned into a group hug. Wet from tears and rain, we soon started laughing. "This is all part of it," Ruth said. I wasn't sure whether she meant the tears or the laughter, or both, and I tried to imagine all the times of joy and sadness she has experienced during her long life. It was a moment of deep community.

This past summer we experienced another day of mixed sadness and joy as we said good-bye to our long-time friend Hazel. For many years, Hazel planned and promoted bus trips for the Fifty-Plus group, excitedly urging people to sign up for a day of camaraderie, touring - and, of course, good eats. In spite of our protests at the time that we were neither 50 nor retired, she eventually cajoled us into coming along a couple of times. Oh, for another chance to ride the bus with her!

Although Hazel had become far less mobile the last couple of years, we were nonetheless caught off guard when we learned that her heart had suddenly stopped beating one morning. I think she had already had enough of sitting around. Just a couple of weeks before, we had joined her for the special monthly Cornish hen lunch at Keystone Cedars, her new home, which she was excited to share with us.

Hazel's funeral took place Thursday, June 12 2008, during a week that will not soon be forgotten in Cedar Rapids. Our power was out that morning, as was Connie's at the Cedar Apartments, and the stoplights were dark as we drove to and from church in a driving rainstorm - the final deluge that triggered so much misery in our community. But at church, it was warm and bright, spilling over with Hazel's friends and family members, and we joined hearts and voices in remembering this steadfast and irrepressible child of God.

"She believed that she was blessed to bless others," Pastor Perry said, aptly capturing the spirit of Hazel Canady. "She knew that she was loved in order to love others, as we all are." As I accepted the fact that she had joined that "great cloud of witnesses" encouraging us in our faith, I was overwhelmed with gratitude for Hazel, for Ruth, for Connie, for Helen, and for the countless others who came before them - the ones I have known and the ones I never met, like Lucille Thompson. These are the saints who have marched in the family of faith that is St. Mark's, keeping us faithful to our mission of proclaiming - and living - God's Word for nearly 125 years.

~ **Sher Jasperse**

### **Born and Born from Above**

In my infancy I was baptized into Jesus Christ. I left the old country of sin behind, and I entered a new country of grace. Even though the words "I left" and "I entered" was used, baptism into Christ Jesus was not my doing; it was something that happened to me. It was like my conception and my birth. They too happened to me. As a result of those happenings, I am now "Kaupins."

I still remember vividly when I, as a little boy, moved with my parents in the circle of society, someone pointing in my direction asked, "Who is that boy?" And the response was, "Oh, he is Kaupins' boy." Hearing these words made me very proud, even though I had not done or accomplished anything. I was simply pleased to be Kaupins' son.

The second birth in baptism, when the Holy Spirit gave life from heaven (John 3:6) also happened to me. In a sense, the heavens opened, and the Heavenly Father, in an inaudible voice, announced, "You are my beloved child. I have called you by your name Alfred Egons. In my Son Jesus Christ I am pleased with you." When now anyone calls me "Alfred," I am glad because I know that I am a child of God.

There are two special days in the calendar. One day is August 20, when I was born and became Kaupins. The other day, according to the Latvian calendar, is August 7 when I am invited to celebrate my name's day – Alfred – as a joyous reminder that I am child of God.

"Oh, God. How can I thank you for the first of life and new life to me? Your gift comes to me new every day. Open my heart and hands to share this gift in your holy name. Amen."

~ **Pastor Alfred Kaupins**

As a young child, teen, and young adult I was active in the Presbyterian Church, along with my family. After marrying, my husband (a confirmed Lutheran) and I moved to the East Coast where we joined a near-by Lutheran church. As the years passed, we attended church less and less often. After moving to Cedar Rapids, I made a half-hearted effort to "find" a church, but soon became more engrossed in family and work. "Finding a church" ended up on the bottom of my "to do" list.

Over the years, occasionally I lamented that my spiritual bucket was empty. It wasn't until my husband passed away in 1999 that I felt compelled to do something about it. A friend invited me to St. Mark's. As soon as I saw the sign "Faith and Life Center," I had a feeling that this might be a place where faith was an integral part of your life and not just something that you were exposed to on Sunday. Then, I didn't think about it again for a week. The contemporary service confirmed my thoughts: this was a place that I could relate to. The message. The people. The music. WOW!

Now, after eight years at St. Mark's, I feel that I "know" the Lord—that there is a big difference between "knowing about" the Lord and developing a relationship with the Lord. It's interactive! Faith and life are woven together!

**~ Sue Pearson**

I have been a Christian all my life. I was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran Church. I attended Luther League all through high school and went to church regularly. I was a Sunday school teacher for years and held an office at my former Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids.

About eight years ago a friend called and asked me if I knew of any Bible study groups through our church that I would attend with her. I had previously only attended ladies fellowship groups. After calling Deb Becker, I decided to take her to the early morning study at Panera coffee shop. My thought was that I would take her to introduce her to everyone and then go back to my own routine. She never went again but I never stopped. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. Not only did I make wonderful Christian friends, my spirituality went deeper than it had all my life!

I now have a relationship with Christ and understand what it is to be a good Lutheran! Spiritual growth is something I will continue to strive for but know I get fed through small groups, ministry leaders, fellow Christians, reading the Bible and not just by sitting in a church pew.

I have thanked this friend that once asked me to take her to a small group study, and I thank God everyday for being my constant companion.

My favorite Bible verse came from one of my friends at church and I say it each morning, "Today is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it. I am a child of God and therefore surrounded by His grace, mercy and blessings and favor. I expect great things to happen to me today in His name."

**~ Judy Cheney**

I can still remember a dreary, drizzly, fall Sunday morning when I was 16 years old and I was sitting in the balcony of the old St. Mark's Lutheran Church. As I was sitting there during the service a little lightning bolt zapped me just above and behind my right ear and I was immediately filled with "Joy and Peace."

There were quite a few people sitting up there, but no one knew what had just happened to me. I didn't gasp or jump up or rollover. I'm a Norwegian Lutheran for heavens sake, and we don't even like to shake hands.

Anyway, I didn't say anything about it to anyone, not even the pastor when I left church. I had a bus boy job I had to walk to after church and literally floated to it. (I've always been in good health and I don't drink or smoke or even take aspirin and I didn't then; to dispel any thoughts that it was something like that to cause it.)

All I can say, is this had to hit me out of the blue, and this "Joy and Peace" stayed with me strong over a year, and it left me completely after a year and a half. It had been with me when I got up in the morning until I went to bed; but I told no one.

Years later, when I was at a family get-together, I said, "I think everyone should hear this," and I told the story. I think a few eyes rolled and I got some strange looks and they went on eating their potato salad, drinking their coffee and chatting among themselves. I tried to tell a few other people about it but I'd get the same reaction. One time when I thought I'd tell someone who hadn't heard it, someone who was standing nearby and who had heard it before (and who is a good Christian person) said, "You're not telling that stupid story again, are you?" So there you go. That's my story. I don't know what it all means. I was going to keep this anonymous, but I changed my mind. God Bless.

**~ Roland Dean Vangen**

After being baptized and raised in the Lutheran Church, I went deeper into my faith when I met my wife and started to attend church regularly. We have always felt God's hand in our marriage and recognize the importance of our faith for our two boys. Our small group keeps God's word in our minds throughout the week. Our group has talked about what heaven might be like. I always thought it might be like a stuffy family gathering with harp music. But worship here has helped me anticipate a heaven that meets and exceeds my emotional needs for eternity. Nothing stuffy about that.

**~ Eric U. Schulz**

### **Is he God?**

I've started bringing my two grandchildren to church with me because God planted that desire in my heart. I sense that they feel that love, peace, harmony and the presence of God here (at St. Mark's). One time Pastor Perry was speaking and my grandson pointed to him and asked me, "Is he God?" What a profound and humbling question. Thank you, Lord, for entrusting me with the awesome privilege of bringing my grandchildren to church with me.

**~ Barbara Taylor**

## **Children are God's Way of Showing That Life Will Go On**

I always know that God is present in my life and He showed himself to me through my son. After David and I were married, we wanted children, knowing that we were older and the odds were not in our favor. After two years, the “test” was finally positive. Our doctor wasn't optimistic at our first appointment and sent us for our first ultrasound. Fearing the worst, we went and upon seeing our little life growing no bigger than a peanut, a sudden rush of calmness and a sense of presence overwhelmed me, and I knew that God was there at that very moment, telling me everything will be okay. We have a beautiful son, Andrew, and every night together, we thank God for his presence in our lives. God trusted us with His son, Andrew, and we are forever grateful.

~ Vicki Thiede Knipper

I needed to get back to the basics of being a Christian. By attending St. Mark's and listening to the sermons and lessons; it has taught me how to work toward or back to the core of my life, that being salvation through Christ. Trusting in God and knowing He has a plan for my life; he has navigated a path to follow.

Being here has helped me to re-establish a loving and wonderful and remarkable relationship with my now fiancée. God is our foundation and we are trusting Him and His path for us. Prayer, Bible study and growing in Christ has brought us closer than ever.

I have also attended and participated in Men's Fraternity. It has opened my eyes, heart and thought-process, not to mention a great relationship with other men, Christian men. The church has truly been a blessing in my life.

~ Phil Christian

## **From the Inside Out**

My parents, who are age 94, and have been married 74 years, instilled in me a strong path in my God. I have always gone to church even in my nursing school days. Once as an eight year old, I decided to skip church. I told my mom I was sick. She questioned it, but let me stay home for the first time alone. A half-hour after my family left for church I has a 103-degree temperature (I took it) and I felt sick. God taught me that day about obeying parents and telling the truth.

Gary, my husband, asked when I was going to join a women's small group. I answered immediately, “When I am ready.” I was “ready,” when a new women's small group started, because the first book to be discussed was “Praying for Your Husband.” I loved my group and was thrilled that I was readying my Bible more.

We have been involved in starting several small groups which we are still active in. We have become very close and involved with our church friends, many that we had never

met previously. We have learned to love each other from the inside out. We know each other's faults, problems, prayer requests and also their thanksgivings. Our groups have grown, I feel, to be more like Jesus.

My Bible verse is: John 14: 16-17 – “I will ask nothing more of you except that you hold tightly to what you have until I come. To all who are victorious, who obey me to the very ends, I will give you authority over all the nations.” And, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth.”

~ **Linda Pribyl**

### **Praying at My Church**

During one of the most difficult times in our family life, God answered my prayers and gave me comfort. It was amazing. I was so worried, anxious and didn't know who to talk to about my thoughts. I couldn't talk to my parents because I knew I would cause them to worry. I didn't want to talk to friends because I didn't want them to feel sorry for me. I didn't want to talk to the pastor because I would feel embarrassed. But the one thing I could do, that I KNEW I would not be judged, I know He wouldn't feel sorry for me, and He wouldn't second guess what was going on; it was talk to God. We had a prayer room, which we should still have; I would go there and just have private moments. I know we can do this during the service, but there just isn't enough time to be quiet and just pray. Also, I know we can pray at home, but there is just something special about praying at church, my church. I know we talk about praying, but I didn't really know [until] I went through personal awakening. I now know He does listen and provide the wonderful love for me.

~ **Anonymous**

### **Emptiness Within Transformed With God's Love**

My life changed on a cold January morning. Sunday, January 6, 2007. I hesitated about going to church. I rationalize that it was too cold outside and a good day to stay in bed. But, I was being nudged by something or someone, perhaps God, so I got up and got ready for church. The most amazing thing happened during worship this particular Sunday. Digressing for a moment . . . I've been the kind of person who firmly believed I could do EVERYTHING myself without anyone's help or intervention. But there was one problem with my belief, it simply WASN'T working. I felt alone, directionless, depressed, dissatisfied with my life in all aspects. On Sunday, January 6, 2007, while at church and not really wanting to be there, the worship service opened with the song, “Grace Like Rain.” This song spoke to me that day and opened my heart to what Jesus could do for me. I cried through much of the service, praying and giving ALL my worries, struggles and problems to God. Describing the overwhelming feeling that came over me once I surrendered totally to God and Jesus cannot be put into words. Every day since my awakening to God's grace to me, I have discovered I cannot live without God as part of my daily life. I have a true hunger to learn and have an everlasting relationship with

God and His son, Jesus. Do I still have struggles in my life? Yes, but they are no longer insurmountable. I've learned it's all very simple, the cliché, "Let go and let God," is very, very true. My life has been enriched with God's grace...grace like rain.

~ **Vickie Weuve**

My faith journey encountered a number of road blocks, detours, and bumpy terrain. However, I must say that because of the firm foundation that was laid during the years of my youth, while at St. Mark's, I have endured all of life's challenges with God guiding me. I may not have always done the "right thing," but God was and is patient with me. I thank Him for my St. Mark's family and the great legacy of faithfulness instilled in me by my parents and others at St. Mark's over the years. It is so exciting to see the spiritual growth and awakening taking place in the people of this church. God is moving in great ways and I'm waiting to see how he is going to use me next. No journey is smooth and without obstacle and I am looking forward to being part of a new ministry at St. Mark's designed to help everyone that is hurting, has a habit or has a hang-up. Celebrate Recovery will be that ministry; let the healing begin. My guiding verse when I need encouragement: Philippians 4:13 – "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."

~ **Dana Hagstrom**

God is good. I have been blessed beyond measure. I have regained my sanity during trying times. The holidays bring some of them. Most do not know that my father passed away when I was in high school. This actually strengthened and renewed my faith in the existence of God and the idea of an afterlife, but not in Jesus Christ, unfortunately. I'll get to that later in this synopsis of my faith journey. (At that time) I was medicated, psychiatrically and not given time to properly grieve. God intervened on my behalf in regards to my psychiatric treatment. I am not on the pills, now. God has blessed me again with years of peace of mind and stability that can only come through His love for me. Getting back to Jesus, I have been graced with the ability to interpret the Bible in a much clearer sense. Also, the video series that informed us all of the archeological finds backing up the Bible and the existence of Jesus has reconfirmed my faith in Jesus.

~ **Kelly Brown**

### **Life Starts at 40**

At a particularly low point in my life, St. Mark's offered a deep dive into the Bible via the Crossways Course. Pastor Hagstrom led us through the Bible book by book, chapter by chapter, and verse by verse. I had never been completely through the Bible. Week by week for two years, I and several others (15-40 people each week) listened and learned. I had focused on a few books (Gospels and Acts) as a child going to Catechism and

growing up Catholic. Crossways, led by Pastor Hagstrom, a true Biblical scholar, with a group of searchers and believers, gave me solid ground. A firm foundation to build my faith on. When Pastor Perry came and challenged us all to reconnect to opportunities to share our faith with students through Sunday School, with men in Men's Fraternity, and with other members in many other situations, it allowed my faith to deepen and grow. I feel comfortable going from book to book and seeing the big picture from knowing the Word better. I am better able to contribute to our weekly Bible study. St. Mark's has helped me develop a new foundation in His Word.

Guiding Bible verse: 2 Timothy 4: 6-8 – This was read at my dad's funeral this past year, and I hope to be worthy enough to have it read at mine: "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 my 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."

**~ John Mosinski**

I have seen God in action in my life. Presented with an opportunity to buy a child a gift for Christmas from the giving tree, we found it to be too expensive. Instead we had to buy something similar, but not too close. A couple of days later I was at Target and just decided I had to buy her the gift regardless of cost. I went to the shelf. There was one left. I took it to checkout and paid for it. Miraculously it was an unadvertised special, and it was 40% off.

**~ Anonymous**

## **HIGH SCHOOL and MIDDLE SCHOOL FAITH STORIES**

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He will always love us no matter what we do. He just wants a relationship with us no matter how bad we mess up. It's not like we have to do some fancy schmancy ceremony or ritual or anything to earn his love. He died just for us. I don't quite understand why yet, but I know he loves us so much only he can understand. He rocks!

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Once I was laying in my bed and I prayed to God. I just figured I might as well confess what I had did wrong in my life. I never really knew if I had really confessed to him before and I know I had definitely done wrong things. But I had basically been going through the motions all my life. So I prayed and prayed. I bet I [never] even fell asleep, because I prayed all night. It was like a miracle. I know that sounds cheesy, but the next day I felt light as a feather. Like all I had done was gone, I was starting new again. I still get chills when I think about it.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** My small group leader(s) have encouraged me in my spiritual journey. I have always been connected to the church and involved in the church, but now I understand what that means.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** His forgiveness. How you can just blatantly lie and somehow he still loves us. I mean how could God love a sin filled and evil world and love it. Unconditionally. It's amazing.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Praying for my family. Just hearing my family talk about how much better they feel when I had just prayed for them the day before.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** Small groups. Being able to come to St. Mark's and being able to hear about God and see my friends is AWESOME!!

~ Zach Mulvihill

**One thing I love about God is . . .** He's always there. He loves to listen to you. He answers tough questions. He loves you no matter what you say or do.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Tough times. Bad times. Good times. School – tests, homework.

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** Helped me get to know Him better. Learn new things about Him and other people. Just take it all in.

~ Taylor Dalecky

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** I love that he is the creator of everything. I love him for being all loving. I love him for being all forgiving and because he will never leave us.

~ Taylor Richardson

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He is always there for me, and I know when I need a friend he'll be there for me 100%

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My friends and family. Whenever my friends or family need help, God is always there for us. When I feel bad I ask for God to be with me and then I'm happy.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** When I went to Youth Quake I felt God's presence. Whenever I'm at church, everything's about God.

~ Megan Brown

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** Being human having doubt you are betraying God. My friend hates the idea of God (Jesus, God) but what I love most about God is he forgives my friend and loves him even when my friend hates God. I love God because he will always love me.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Church and worship. God has given me the gift of speech, debates and talking to others. Through me, others were saved.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** He has used my mom, her strong faith in speaking and reaching to others. That's how I'm such a big Christian.

~ Andrew

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** I love it when I can feel God inside me. It makes me feel all warm and happy.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** He has impacted my life by letting me meet new friends.

~Nate Weger

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He listens. I like that he listens because its' nice to know someone is actually there.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Service. God helps me in Boy Scouts service and in everywhere else. I do help a lot and I rely on God to help me do that.

~ Taylor Chittick

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That God is always among us and never leaves.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** To have pastors speak to us saying what we need to hear.

~ Austin

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That He is so forgiving.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Keeping me safe through all the stupid things I do.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** Through the Target gift night.

~ Beau Oberboeckling

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** God forgives my sins.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** I asked God if my dad could get a job and he did.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** The video and I understand that there's nothing I can do to make God not love me.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** God will always tell the truth.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** That video tonight on December 10, 2008; that it's hard to lie and you should not do it.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That he can never love me less. He will always forgive me. Never think bad of me.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My life during hard times, e.g., when someone is in the hospital or sports games.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — He has really changed the way of how I think of me.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He gave me a life to live.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My friend's mom had cancer, but she was optimistic the whole time.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — He has made me realize that only through him life should be lived.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That he will forgive our sins no matter what.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** When my mom was in the emergency room and she made it through.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — Wednesday night ministry.

~ Anonymous

**One thing I love about God is . . .** I love how He always cares for me.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** When I had my surgery

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — Made me believe in God.

~ Tory

**One thing I love about God is . . .** I love that he is always there even when I ignore Him. He always cares about me. He is always waiting, ready to listen. He can always forgive me.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** He makes me feel comfortable whenever I question my faith. He speaks to me in certain ways.

~ Anonymous

**One thing I love about God is . . .** You can tell him anything.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My friends' problems.

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — I tell my friends jokes I learn from church, and they learn things about him from me.

~ Anonymous

**One thing I love about God is . . .** He is there for you and you can tell Him anything. He also forgives you for your sins.

~ Anonymous

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** He helped a family member through a problem this summer when I prayed I asked him to.

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — He has taught me things.

~ Anonymous

**One thing I love about God is . . .** He loves us no matter what, and you can talk to him about everything.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Things that have happened in my life and my relationship with my friends and family. Also he answers my prayers when needed.

~ Anonymous

**One thing I love about God is . . .** He is always there for you and knows everything about you. He also loves you no matter what!

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Different problems I have in my life with friends and family.

~ Anonymous

**One thing I love about God is . . .** He always forgives us and He loves us no matter what.

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — He helped me continue going to church on Sundays.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He loves me no matter what and is always there for me.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** School.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — I made new friends.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** How he always forgives us. How he loves us unconditionally.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** All the blessings in my life.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — Learn more about him.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** How he never stops loving us even when we sin. How he's always there for us. No matter how bad your life seems, all you need is him.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** School, dance, family, friends.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — It has taught me a lot of new things about him.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He always forgives me no matter what I do, he will always love me, he is always with me, he's my best bud!

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** When my mom had cancer he healed her and helped us through all the scary parts.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — I have been in great small groups and made long-lasting friendships.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** I love how he is always there for us and watching out for me. I love how he forgives me for everything. He's amazing!

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** When my parents were getting a divorce, he helped me realize that isn't /wasn't the worst thing in the world and lots of people go through it.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — By all the great and comforting people here.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That you can always talk to him whenever you need to, like if you're having problems, or you're sad or something, He's always there to listen.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** By bringing me closer to him with sermons and confirmations and stuff.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He forgives me and I know there is nothing I can do to make him love me less. He is always there to share in my highs and lows.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My dad and his ministry and his example.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That he will never love us less. He forgives everyone and everything.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Accidents and going to church.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** I meet new friend.

~ José

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He forgives everyone and everything.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Accidents and incidents where people could have gotten hurt, but didn't.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** Made new friends and met new people.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** His nature to forgive

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** The people around me and their stories.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** He has made me come closer to him.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He gives us life, and lets us decide what to do with it.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — It allows me to learn more about him.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That he always forgives you when you make a sin.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My mom because He helped her have patience in raising us.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — He helped me see how people less fortunate than me need help.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** A thing I love about God is that he is always there and always forgives you.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** I've seen God in action by the kindness of my father and mother.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — The food drive impacted my life by helping the needy.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He gave his only son to forgive us, which is the ultimate sacrifice.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** The love of my family.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — They taught me about God and Jesus and the Bible in a fun way.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That he is always there or me. I can trust him.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Him have a guy from being hit by a car in Washington DC.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — He has put him into people and made them my friends.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He loves everyone, and he helps us in our times of need.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My parents.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** It has helped me to understand more about the Bible, God, and Jesus.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That he is forgiving and loving.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** In the kindness of my mother.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** The food drive taught me to be generous.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That he forgives our sins.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** The love of my family.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He forgives spelling mistakes. He created everything. He made this church awesome.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My confirmation leaders.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** He influenced my dad to bring me to church.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That he is there for you when you need him the most.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** When I was in a basketball tournament and we needed 10 points to win. I asked God to help me and my team. Then all of a sudden, everyone started to make their shots and we won.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** During the canned food drive, I felt good that someone was going to get food when they can barely afford anything.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He always forgives you, and he is always there when you need him to be.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Other people helping people and showing compassion.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — It's made me believe more and love God.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He always forgives.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Him answering my prayers and my confirmation leaders.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — He made me realize when I sin.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** His forgiveness.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My confirmation leader.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He is always there. He never ignores me.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — Through the sermons.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He always forgives and you can.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Church

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That He loves you no matter what you do. No matter if you swear or vandalize or even do something so bad that you have to go to prison for life, He still loves you.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Prayer, worship, singing, and reading the Bible even through hard times.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — It lets me learn about God's doing in a fun safe environment. I like it.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He takes care of us.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Humane Society. I want to become a volunteer there.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — By giving me information to find my answers to my tough questions.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** His forgiveness in sin.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** When my grandma was in a hospital, she lost her pulse and breath, she was saved and said it was her time to go because the angel told her so; she is now living happily and continues her life.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He loves me no matter what and he always forgives.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — I think about him more often and I believe that he's there.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** That if you do something wrong then God will still love you no matter what!

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** When someone in my family was sick he helped him get better. I believe that he helped him because he got better pretty fast, but it still took awhile for him to recover.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — He has brought everyone together to celebrate and to understand more about God (himself).

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He always there no matter where you are and even if you are up at 12:00 at night, he's still there. He's one of my friends that I can say anything to and he won't tell anyone and he doesn't judge me.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** This year my biological mother and I got in a fight and I was in anger so I prayed to God that I could get out, and I kept praying for a long time and he finally answered and he told my mother to take me to my dad's, and she did.

**How has Good used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life?** — This place had been a safe place for me and I can't wait to come here every Sunday and Wednesday to just not think about what's happening in my life.

~ Anonymous

**One (or more) thing I love about God . . .** He's unpredictable. You never know what you will get, and He loves me no matter what.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** My friend. She was kind of in a phase where she was doing bad things to her body. And one day at lunch she was like I don't believe in God and then I took her to church and after that she was like, "wow." That's so cool someone would love me that much.☺

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** He's gotten me closer to my friends and him.

~ Anonymous

**One thing I love about God . . .** He loves me and forgives me.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Saving my dad in a car accident.

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** That he helps me learn on how to be a better person."

~ Anonymous

**One thing I love about God is . . .** He forgives you no matter what you do and never blames you for anything.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Lenten services.

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** Yes, because in Lenten services I felt like they were talking only to me.

~ Ethan, Age 11

**One thing I love about God is . . .** Forgiveness.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** Death.

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** Believe in him.

~ Andrew, Age 11

**One thing I love about God is . . .** he forgives us.

**I have seen God in action in my life through . . .** when I almost broke my neck.

**How has God used the ministry or relationships at St. Mark's to impact your life? —** They told us about you and why we should worship you.

~ Anonymous

## **YOUTH FAITH STORIES**

### **Grace, age 9**

My name is Grace. I am nine years old. I have known the Lord all of my life. But one day I made a decision to start devotions to become closer to Jesus. I started prayers every night and reading my Bible in the morning and at night and choosing a fruit of the spirit for that day I got closer to Christ. It makes me feel so happy. Psalms: “God show me favor in keeping with your faithful love.”

### **Ruth, age 7**

My mom teaches me how to be closer to God. I saw a star last year—a long time ago. I was so surprised because I saw stars and that starlight made a cross. I knew God was talking to me. He told me to be kind to my sisters and that He was proud of me for sharing. Today I keep trying to do what he said by reading my Bible and staying close to him. My sister has been sharing the book of Psalms with me. They are my favorite.

### **Ashley**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** Jesus, Bible, and the Holy Spirit.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** Once my mom got a bunch of flowers and had a card that said Jesus loves you, Tracy.

### **Dalton**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** The Bible tells me so and because He sacrificed himself for our sins.

### **Shane**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He tells me what to do in my head. He keeps the mean guy away from my heart.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** He is the Holy Spirit. He is always nice and good. He always keeps me safe. When I feel down he picks me up. He is the Father of everybody. He is stronger than anybody else. He loves us. God is good. The End.

### **Erica**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** The Bible tells me.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** Alyssa and I have God’s girls. I love God.

## **Matthew**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** I'm a special kid. A nice kid.

## **Amanda**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He answers my prayers. He protects me from anything harmful.

## **Jake**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He loves us a lot.

## **Ali**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** I am nice. I have a special family. I have a nice mom. I have a nice dad. I have a nice sister. I love God.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** He makes kids, He makes grass, He makes people, He's the creator.

## **Noah**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** he gave us the Bible.

## **Solveig**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** Mom and dad, my toys.

## **Maya**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** I love him.

## **Emily**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He died on the Christ for me.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** when I am scared he helps me be brave.

## **Anna**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He made me special.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** He is kind to forgive us when we do things bad.

## Alexis

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He made me as a special person. He loves me.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** He loves everyone. He spreads his arms to love people.

## Marissa

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He loves everyone in the world. And if He didn't love us He probably wouldn't have made us.

## Cailin

**I know that God loves me because . . .** I love him! And he loves me. He is really, super, nice! And he made love! So, he loves everyone! And I love him so much . . . He made the world!!!! So, I am happy! He loves me! I'm happy!

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** One time I made him a special picture. I put it someplace. And in the morning, it was not there! And I think he took it and looked at it. And I think He loved it! I was so happy! I love God! Then I was happy!

## Jaryle

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He looks up to me. He cares about me. He answers my prayers.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** One time I was at dance and I said that I can't do it and He said you can do it.

## Brianna

**I know that God loves me because . . .** mom, dad, my sister, cat (Sam)

## Drew

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He takes care of me. He gave us Jesus. He gave me my Mom and Dad.

## Luke

**I know that God loves me because . . .** Of my mom and dad. Of rainbows. I have cool toys to play with like Transformers!

## **Sam**

**I know that God loves me because . . .** He is everyone's father.

**I have a special story to share about God . . .** That He chose people to tell about him and He loves every one in the whole world and He's everyone's father in the whole wide world.

## **Alec – Age 8 ½**

I worship him and I love him and he loves me. He is awesome in every way.

## **Kaylee – Age 7**

God takes care of me. I love him. God is with me forever and ever. God loves me. I love him. I have a friend. His name is God and Jesus.

## **Emma – Age 8**

He's always with me and there wouldn't be any earth, there wouldn't be anything without him, He never lets me down.

Some kids at school always bug me so . . . I pray, it was a miracle. They stopped picking on me after that. I could never live without God! I love him soooooo much!

## **Delani – Age 7**

We live with him. We are around the world. We get loving and caring. He takes care of me. He is a good God. God likes me and everyone. I pray for him. I like him.

## **Alysa – Age 8**

He talks to me. He takes care of me. He shows me stuff. He shows me the Holy Spirit.

He is nice to me. He made me and I am glad about that. He is good to me. I wish I could see him but I can't. I can't wait to see him. But I can wait.

## **Tanner – Age 8**

Cause I'm good. I have a good life. He takes care of me. I wonder what he looks like. I want to see him.

## **Noah – Age 7**

He gave everyone the Holy Spirit. He made my brain, lungs, bones, etc.

When I got 100% done in my test. I also had 38/40 in one test, in another, the hardest test, 40/40. Wow!

### **Emily – Age 7**

I am a good child to everyone, but sometimes I mess with people. Like people who are in my family and some of my friends and some of my mom's friends.

I know that God made us all so that means that the people that I don't know, I really know.

### **Garret – Age 8**

He died on the cross for us. That he died on the cross for us.

### **Karter – Age 8**

He made me. He gives me life and health. He gives me church. He gave me Jesus.

Before I came here I didn't know anything about God or Jesus. But now I know a lot for 8 years old. I didn't know I'd like Jesus but now I love him.

### **Calvin – Age 8**

Because He made us and He's in is heart. When I want to go outside and it's raining and then I go outside the sun comes out!

### **Michael – Age 9**

He is our Savior to all the earth. He helps me when I am scared. He is in my heart. He guides me around. If I get here early we get to play a game.

### **Madelyn – Age 7**

He gave us everything in the world and he helps us with everything. He rocks.

He is the one that made us and He helps us do things in the world. He does everything for us. He is the best in the world. You should believe him.

### **Brianna – Age 8**

He created everybody and everything. If God did not create us we would not be here right now. God helps us through everything. He's always there for us.

I prayed for my cat China to act like herself again and when I got home from church she acted like herself again. It was like he heard me.

### **Katie – Age 7**

It is in the Bible. I like to go to KFC and praise God.

**Megan – Age 8**

He takes care of me in sickness. And give me confidence when I am scared. He is there when I need help.

He helped me in a spelling test in school; I didn't think I was going to spell "direction" right.

**Shea – Age 8**

Because if he didn't I wouldn't be alive, bad things would happen in my life instead of good things and he wouldn't give us all the things he did.

**Megan – Age 7**

He loves everyone and he loves me. He wrote the Bible and share their life of God.

He has the power to keep us safe tomorrow. I am going on a special field trip.

**Braden – Age 9**

He shares the Holy Spirit with us. He's been there with us everywhere we go.

When it is rainy out and I want to play outside he brings the sun out so I can play.

**Dawson – Age 9**

He had his son die on the cross for me and everyone. He is with me.

Is that he gave me a loving family to live with and let me come to church to worship and pray.

**Will – Age 7**

Because I am special. God created us. When I go to Sunday School I feel so special.

**Jessie – Age 9**

He helps me through a lot of things and hard times. Every Monday and Friday because I have spelling tests.

**Anonymous**

He gives to us. He is with us day or night. 24/7.

**Mike – Age 10**

He helps me. And He loves me.

**Nathan – age 10**

He does a bunch of miracles for me each day. He also lets me do a lot of the things I want to do, and most important, He saved me from my sins.

God has helped me get through my grandma's death and a miscarriage that happened to my family.

**Libby – Age 10**

When I moved from Maryland to Iowa, He helped me make new friends and making friends with my friend's friend.

Love for me and everybody around me.

**Aimee – Age 10**

How I know that God loves me is because He wrote the Bible and died for us.

**Meckenzie – Age 10**

The Bible tells me so. God has helped me a lot. God helped me through stitches, broken arms, sprained arms, and more. I know he will be with me forever.

**Madeline – Age 10**

I read the Bible. I pray every night. I do good things. I recycle and that means I keep the world clean. God helps me everyday.

**Peyton – Age 10**

He loves everyone; even if they are not the nicest people because God loves everyone no matter how mean they are because if you didn't, how does that make you any different than anyone else.

God and how he cares about everyone else. Just think he protects us every night when we're sleeping and when we're doing anything because he is there for us like everyone else is.

**Cassidy – Age 9**

It says it in the Bible and everyone at church says he does. I love him because he loves me. He wants us to know he loves us. He loves everyone.

When my hamster died God helped me through it.

## **Nica – Age 15**

He shows me that He loves me everyday. Everyday I see his love; with every breath I take I feel his love.

I have a story. I battled with God at one time, but then I saw that He only wanted to know, and love me, so I now fully accept him in my life.

## **Kelsey**

I know that God loves me because I praise him.

## **Tyler**

I know that God loves me because He makes things. I know that God loves me because He is a builder.

## **Joshua**

I know that God loves me because God likes us and I like other people.

God has made the whole world for us.

## **Brady**

I know that God loves me because He loves us.

## **Reid**

I know that God loves me because He loves us, the Bible says it a ton of times.

## **Lauryn**

I know that God loves me because He died on the cross. God was with me when my Grandpa died.

## **Cade**

We talk about God at home and we pray to God. God made me and I am playing laser tag to celebrate.

## **Lauren**

Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He loves us. God was with me when I got first place in a swimming competition. God was with me when I got a ribbon.

## **Elizabeth**

I know that God loves me because He made everyone. He gave me brothers. My special story about God is Sunday School.

## **Zackary, 1st Grade**

I know that God loves me because He made me. My birthday is January 11, 2005.

## **Jon**

I know that God loves me because I pray to him.

## **Jacob**

I know that God loves me because of my mom and dad.

## **Cassidy**

I know that God loves me because He died on the cross to save our sins. Also, because He gives us things. I know because people at my church have told me lots that he does. My special story about God is one day I went to a hotel and I was walking in the front door when a big light fell and hit my head. I am glad because God helped me through it. He helped me not get hurt to bad. It just made a bruise on my head. He helped me not worry about it. The light could have killed me, but God saved me.

## **Nick**

I know that God loves me because I do thankful things for him. My special story about God is learning about the Holy Sprit with parachute.

## **Peyton**

I know that God loves me because He sacrificed his life for me and all my family. My special story to share about God is one time two years ago, we were putting up the Christmas lights. I was scared, yes, but once I got up on the roof, I suddenly had the courage to go up on the roof.

## **Phillip**

I know that God loves me because He told me in the Bible.

## **Maci**

I know that God loves me because the Holy Spirit.

**Reid**

I know that God loves me because He helps me in life with my troubles. He also helps me when I am hurt on the inside and on the outside. He tells me so in the Bible. He tells me in my prayers.

**Adam**

I know that God loves me because I love him. My special story to share about God because He is our God.

**Nick, Age 10**

I know that God loves me because I have a warm home and safe neighborhood and good life and if I die I go to heaven.

**Alec, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because he gave me awesome parents and I'm not afraid to die because then I'll go to heaven with him. Also I have warm place to sleep, I get to go to school everyday to learn. My special story to share about God is when I went to Florida and went Disney World to go on rides. He helped me do everything.

**Alec, Age 11**

I know that God loves me because God loves everyone.

**Jordan, Age 10**

I know that God loves me because He loves everyone.

**Zach, Age 10**

I know that God loves me because He died on the cross so everyone can live in heaven.

**Autumn, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because He gives me what I need like He gives me cats, He gives me clothes, He gives me shoes, He give me a dog, He gives me a family, He gives me friends, He also gives me a school. My special story to share about God is when Jesus left the earth; he went to heaven to live with God the Father. That is where he is right now. He sits at the Father's right hand. That is the place of highest honor.

### **Dax, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because I'm special. If there was any other family in the universe, I would pick the one I have. I'm glad that my mom, dad, brothers and sisters are nice. God wrote the Bible and sent it down to us. My special story to share about God is I prayed for a long time to get my own Bible. I finally got one at church. I'm very grateful for it and it's probably one of the best things to happen to our family.

### **Chandler**

I know that God loves me because I am nice to other people. I worship him. He is awesome in every way.

### **Ty, Age 7**

I know that God loves me because he made me special. I have a special story to share about God . . . God loves every thing and everyone.

### **Carly, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because he helps me with my hard time. When I ask him to help he helps me. He is my best friend. I love him so much. I have a special story to share about God . . . He helped me when my grandfather died. He said that is was going to be all right.

### **Cole**

I know that God loves me because if I ask him for help he helps. Because he made me. Because he gave me talents. I have a special story to share about God . . . I asked him if my grandmother still loves me. He said yes!! He said she still loves you Cole.

### **Luke, Age 8**

I know that God loves me because he gave me really great talent.

### **Olivia, Age 11**

I have a special story to share about God . . . He helped my sister in hospital. She was in an air tent because she had liquid in her lungs. My whole family and church prayed for her. The next day she was out. I know God loves me because I believe in him and everything tells me that. So I guess I just know and feel it in my heart and I hope you feel it too.

### **Kayleen, Age 10**

I know that God loves me because God has given me the amazing gift of creativity. He has showed me that he loves me by blessing me with amazing friends, family, school, and a great church. God protects me when I am in danger and helps me whenever I ask him to.

I have a special story to share about God . . . when I was only a little less than one year old; I had a heart valve that didn't work right. I had an open heart surgery and I was very lucky that I survived. Now I have to be careful when I have a cut, but I can do pretty much everything that other kids can do.

### **Dev, Age 8 ½**

I know that God loves me because he died for our sins. I want to go to heaven. I have a special story to share about God . . . for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. Be brave and strong; do not be terrified, discouraged my Lord is my God.

### **Cole, Age 11**

I know that God loves me because I get to go to church every Wednesday. I have a special story to share about God . . . about 11 years ago I almost didn't live but God helped and I lived.

### **Aren, Age 10**

I know that God loves me because he has blessed me with amazing friends. I'm so thankful for everything. Some people don't look hard enough to see the true beauty of God's blessings. I pour out my heart with love and thanks because he has given us a gift of life, love, and everything. I have a special story to share about God . . . at a Christian camp, lots of memories and friendships were made. The best one was my friendship with God and singing praises around the campfire. We all held hands and swayed as we sang. It was one of those moments when you feel the Holy Spirit is lifting you. It's one of the best times in my life and I will cherish it forever, the times with my great Lord.

### **Sydney, Age 10**

"I know that God loves me because Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins. And I have lots of friends at club 45! I have a special story to share about God . . . God helped me get through when my cat died by helping me forget about it and have fun!

### **Kayla, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because he is our family and he loves us always. I have a special story to share about God . . . because he is special to us.

### **Alissa**

I know that God loves me because he gives me good luck every day. If I have something bad happen to me. Something good will happen to me. I have a special story to share about God . . . one day I was at my singing program, and my teacher was picking nine people out of the program to sing a solo before a song. And I prayed so God helped me and I am in it now.

### **Marshall, 5th grade**

I know that God loves me because he loves me because we believe in him and we love him. I have a special story to share about God . . . when my parent's got divorced I was unhappy then I felt better.

### **Jordan, Age 11**

I know that God loves me because God is he helped me through a lot of bad times and good times that I know I now he loves me because he's helped.

### **Taylor, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because I felt it in my mind and my heart! And go to church. I have a special story to share about God . . . God helps me a lot everywhere I go!

### **Colton, Age 11**

I know that God loves me because he is always with me and he helped me. He also loves me.

### **Alyson, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because it said in the Bible if you believe in the Holy Spirit and Jesus that you will go to heaven and heaven is God's way of saying thank you! I have a special story to share about God . . . because some people had really bad things happen but if they didn't believe, it would be different.

### **Jaicey, Age 11**

I know that God loves me because it's in the Bible and he forgives us and forgives our sin even if it is for being mean to our siblings to committing a crime. I have a special story to share about God . . . he helped me believe there is always a way no matter what the problem he has made me believe.

### **Anonymous, Age 11**

I know that God loves me because He is always with me. He always answers my prayers. I have a special story to share about God . . . I was born in 1997, and I have had a good life.

### **Allie**

I know that God loves me because He died on the cross for me. I have a special story to share about God . . . God was with me when I played outside.

### **Anonymous**

I know that God loves me because even though I'm bad sometimes, He died for me on the cross. I have a special story to share about God . . . Long ago baby Jesus was born in a stall. Bethlehem had been traveling a long time and found a town. Every inn was filled. A man lent his stall. This is why today we have Christmas.

### **Parker**

I know that God loves me because I stay healthy. Play nice! Be nice! Kiss your family! Pet my dog. Hug my mom. Hug my dad. Brush my teeth. I have a special story to share about God . . . At school I got a green light! Yay!

### **Kirsten**

I know that God loves me because He died on the cross. And he always helps me. And he has been there for me every second of the day. I have a special story to share about God . . . One day I had to go to the ER for my breathing and I was scared. But then I remembered God was with me.

### **Oliver and Emma, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because He trusts me and He cares about me. We love God. I have a special story to share about God . . . God is a good person and He never messes up. I love God.

### **Brynn, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because I am very nice to people. And I always tell the truth. I pray to Him. I have a special story to share about God . . . He made miracles. He died on the cross.

## **Kiana, Age 9**

I know that God loves me because He gave me my wonderful family–Mommy, Daddy, Kylie, Noah, Solveig. I have a story to share about God . . .He gave me my very, very special family. Mommy, Daddy, Kylie, Noah and Solveig. They are a blessing in my life. And very important to me.

## **Caleb**

I know that God loves me because He died on the cross to save me from my sins and sent me to a great family who loves me and has taught me about Christ. I have a special story to share about God . . .One time in San Diego our back door of our trunk was open while we were vacationing in California. Three pieces of our luggage fell out, but each piece had our name and phone number on it. We called our neighbor back home and asked if he could see if anyone had called our house. Right as he walked into the house the phone was ringing. It was a man that said that he had found our luggage. God timed it perfectly and we got our luggage from a homeless guy who found it.

## **Ben**

I know that God loves me because He sent Jesus to die on the cross and give us eternal life.

## **Mallory**

I know that God loves me because I believe in Him because He is the Holy Spirit. When we are sad He gives us courage and love. When we die He will lead us to heaven . . . forever. Sometimes when we are mad He tells us to cool off and not be mad.

## **Jessica, 5th grade**

I know that God loves me because He gave His only son to us to die on the cross to save us from our sins so we could spend eternity in heaven with Him and Jesus.

## **Nathan**

I know that God loves me because I pray and I know even though that when I pray even though that I can't hear him I know he answers me. I have a special story to share about God . . . I was born in 1998. I have lived a wonderful life (with soccer).

## **Sam**

I know that God loves me because I love Him. I work for Him. He helps me complete goals. I have a special story to share about God . . .He's special! He rocks! Thank you for making this world!

## **YOUNG CHILDREN**

### **Anonymous, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because he made me special.

### **Tessa, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because we can hear stories about him and we can love him.

### **Elaina, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because I love God. He good all the time. I have a home. I pray all the time for my family. My friends Noah, Joshua, Hailey and Kim.

### **Zoe, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because he made the whole world and he has faith in us. Because he is in heaven.

### **Riley, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because he's special.

### **Noah, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because I have a home. I get three meals a day.

### **Anonymous, Age 5**

I have a special story to share about God . . . He's always with me. God gives me life. Christmas is a special story.

### **Klaire, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because the Bible tells me so.

### **Jalen, Age 1st grade**

I know that God loves me because yes God love me in my family. God love my teachers. I have a special story to share about God . . . God helped me with my homework.

**Anonymous, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because he made me.

**Sydney Schultz, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because he made the whole world and he has faith in us. Because he is in heaven.

**Raven, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because I'm smart. He loves me even when I'm not smart. I have a special story to share about God . . . when I go to Christian school. Christmas is a special story.

**Hannah, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because I have food to eat.

**Lauren, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because he made me special. And he made me friends to play with. God gave me a family.

**Owen, Age 5**

I know that God loves me because he made the world for me. He made the trees and the sun. He made people and animals too. And he made the Bible so I could know about his love. God loves me because he gave me my family. Because we get 'Thanksgiving.' For my best friends.

**Daulton**

I know that God loves me because he let me have the teacher I wanted to have.

**Nick**

I know that God loves me because my mommy and daddy tell me that God loves me and they love me too. I have a special story to share about God . . . God made me and it's M birthday.

**Brady**

I know that God loves me because He died on the cross. I have a special story to share about God . . . God was with me when my grandpa died.

**Zach**

I know that God loves me because I'm part of God's family.

**Madison**

I know that God loves me because Jesus, Bible and the Holy Spirit.

**Ethan**

I know God loves me because I can learn from school. I can see stars and I know a lot of stuff. I have a good world. I have a special story to share about God . . . I came to Vacation Bible School and I learned about Jesus.

**Emma**

I know that God loves me because my pet Ally. He made my friends.

**Alyssa**

I know that God loves me because the Bible tells me so. He gave me a vacation. I have a special story to share about God . . . me and Eria are God's girls.

**Aaron**

I know that God loves me because God helps my thumb. God helped to remember my gummies (vitamins). I have a special story to share about God . . . God healed my back!

**Austin**

I know that God loves me because I love Him. I read about God in the Bible.

**Nathaniel, Kindergarten**

I know that God loves me because of the Holy Spirit and God loves us too. God loves me lots of days. You can't see Him or hear Him but you have to eat healthy food so you can be strong. I have a special story to share about God . . . There was an old man and God came and saw him and Jesus came to him and he was alive. Jesus loves us and the Holy Spirit is good to us and she loves us if we tell the truth and be good and get stickers at school.

## **Nate**

I know that God loves me because He is always with me. Because even though I can't hear Him I know that He is always answering me. I have a special story to share about God . . . I was born. And I have lived so far. He was killed and rose from the dead.

## **Ana, 2nd grade**

I know that God loves me because I praise Him. I love Him. I am good to Him. I share with other people. I pray to Him. I have a special story to share about God . . .because he is special to me. Because he loves everyone.

## **Morgan, Age 7**

I know that God loves me because . . .I be good. I share with other people. I pray to him. I play with him. I love him. Because everyone gives him love. I have a special story to share about God . . . because he is special. Because he loves everyone. Because he is good.

## **Isabelle**

I know that God loves me because He is in my heart. I pray to God. I am thankful for my brothers. I have a special story to share about God . . . I was born. And I have lived a wonderful life. He was killed and rose from the dead.

## **Kylie, 1st grade**

I know that God loves me because He is our shepherd.