

## Laurie's Message for Friday April 17<sup>th</sup>



Hello Apostles Family and Friends.

Today I am called to reflect on the Star Word, or Star Gift, I received on Epiphany Sunday.

Before I get started on my reflection, here is a quick refresher about our Star Words/Gifts:

- Everyone who was at church on Epiphany Sunday (January 5, 2020) received a bright yellow star with a word printed on it. If you weren't present that Sunday, I believe that Pastor Narda provided you the opportunity to receive one during the next few Sundays.
- We received the Star Word by individually choosing a Star Gift from the offering plate that was passed around early in the church service (before the time the same plate was passed for offering.) At this time, we were not asked to give, but invited to receive a Star Word/Gift. This is the order of things in God's realm. God always gives first, and then we are invited to respond with our gifts and ourselves.
- Once received, we were invited to ponder what significance this word might have in our lives and how God might be speaking to us through this simple message.
- This simple gift has a special meaning. We are all so good at being busy and "doing" for God and the church, but rarely do we take the opportunity to "be still" in the presence of God and receive his gifts. This gift is a tangible sign of God's presence.
- We were asked to take the Star Word/Gift home and hang it where we would see it every day so that we can ponder and reflect upon it during the coming year. What significance does this work have in our lives? How might God be speaking to us through this simple message?
- To assist us in getting started, it was suggested that we look up the definition of the word in the dictionary and consider reviewing its synonyms to afford us a clear understanding of the word.
- Finally, we were encouraged to share our thoughts about our Star Word/Gift with each other throughout the year.

I received the Star Word “nurturing”, as shown in the picture above. I hung it, along with Bert’s Star, on our refrigerator when we got home from church on Epiphany Sunday so that we would see them frequently and have a daily reminder to reflect on the words. (I don’t know about you, but I certainly go to the refrigerator several times a day!)

Nurturing means to feed and protect; to support and encourage, as during the period of training or development; foster; to bring up, train; educate; or to have a particular emotion, plan or idea for a long period of time. My initial thought upon receiving the Star Word, was *“Wow! I am a nurturing person – how ironic that I received this word. I have nurtured my children, my co-workers and many animals during my lifetime.”* However, as the weeks since Epiphany have passed, I have reflected more and more on this Star Gift and realized that God’s message was a bit “deeper” for me this year.

The realization came to me after reviewing the synonyms for nurturing. Some of which are: widening, uplifting, promoting, socializing, stimulating, enriching, expanding, glorifying, broadening and advancing. I was originally looking at nurturing as the act of me teaching or caring for others. And that remains a big part of what God intended for me, but I now know there is much more to it! So far, I have three distinct aspects or situations in my life where “nurturing” has been prominently posed to me so far this year. And, they all stem from me taking the time to nurture myself! By nurturing myself and broadening my outlook, I am better able to nurture others.

The first of these occurrences was for me to allow myself or give permission to myself to slow down the pace a bit and focus more on balancing daily obligations, personal health and rest. In other words, promote my own well-being! For 30+ years, I worked full time, raised children, managed a household, juggled priorities, etc. just as we all have done. I retired in October of 2018 and immediately jumped into several volunteer responsibilities and tackling tasks on the never ending “to do” list I had put off for so many years. It wasn’t until I was on a winter vacation (which ironically began on January 7, 2020 – two days after receiving my Star Word) that I realized that I was so busy in 2019 that I may as well have still been working. Although I was getting a few hours more sleep, I still hadn’t taken the “me” time that my body and mind was craving. I was still frequently feeling drained, stressed by self-imposed deadlines or obligations that I volunteered to do, and I had new aches or pains that needed medical attention. I have since allowed myself to take that extra hour (or two) of sleep without feeling guilty, decline some invitations or opportunities, exercise more frequently and to not focus on the number of things that didn’t get completed each day but to focus on the things that were

accomplished each day. As a result, I am much more rested and at ease, can think a bit clearer, have gained a deeper sense of enjoyment from the little things in life as well as the big things life offers – and I am still getting tasks accomplished (although at a slower pace.)

The second occurrence was nurturing a long-standing friendship that became strained two years ago. We were still “friends”, but the incident left a coolness in the air when we were together, a noticeable break in our connection, a feeling of betrayal and a heaviness in my heart that was frequently with me. I made a conscious decision in January that despite what occurred, I loved this person and valued the friendship. I needed to let go of the hurt and come to terms with the fact that I would never understand the actions two years prior. Lifting the hurt and troubles up to God allowed me to release the heaviness in my heart and nurture the friendship to restore it to that of what we once shared. In February, my friend unexpectedly became very ill and was hospitalized for a week. Her recovery is slow but is progressing. It was so very natural and comfortable for me to be able to offer her heartfelt encouragement, check in on her daily, and take meals to her. God’s timing was impeccable!

And thirdly, I have nurtured my relationship with God this Lenten period. I was very moved by the “By Thy Hand” monologs and felt a more spiritually enriched understanding of the circumstances and actions that took place leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus this year than in previous years. Participating in the monolog and preparing these weekly messages to stay in touch with everyone during these times of social distancing has been personally very rewarding for me, and I feel closer to God. Although the effects of the COV19 pandemic is devastating worldwide, I have found that not all the effects of social distancing are negative. By the forced elimination of the hustle and bustle of daily grind or going here and there, we have slowed down, and are afforded the time to think, read and digest, reflect and experience our emotions.

And it is only April! What will I experience during the next 8.5 months? I am looking forward to hearing your experiences with your Star Words/Gifts if or when you are moved to share them.

When looking for a scripture to leave with you today, I was called to Peter 4:10 (New International Version (NIV))

<sup>10</sup> Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.

*Dear Lord, thank you for our star gifts and the ability to reflect upon them. Your message is sent to us in many ways – all we need to do is open our hearts and listen. May we use these messages to enrich our understanding and faithfulness to you. Please comfort those who are suffering from COV19 and other illness and bless those who are coming to their aid. Amen.*

Stay safe and healthy until we gather on Sundays in person again.

Many Blessings,

Laurie