



Prayer Devotions

February

Luke 18:1

Pray Always and Never Give Up

Prayer for Persecuted Church

Pray for those in the midst of persecution

Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Hebrews 13:3

Global watchdog Open Doors reports that 322 Christians are killed every month for their faith while millions more suffer persecution on a routine basis.

Please pray that these believers will not only stay committed to the call of Christ but also will respond in love to the evil shown by their aggressors. God's love will open doors for these believers to share the Gospel even more.

This Month's Countries, these are some of the most dangerous countries to follow Jesus:

Yemen

Iran

India

Daily prayers for February...

Friday, February 1st: Today is National Freedom Day commemorating the passage of the 13th amendment making slavery unlawful. I can only imagine the feeling of “free at last!” that the slaves must have experienced. But just as the passage of legislation had not come easily or quickly, neither has the implementation or realization of that freedom based on the premise that all truly are created equal. Legislation cannot truly free anyone; it takes people whose hearts have been changed – both slaves and those with a slave-owner mindset - to walk it out. **All** are created in the image of God, and if He shows no partiality, neither should we. In Christ we are new creations and no longer slaves, so let’s celebrate that freedom and recognize it in everyone He died for. That’s pretty all inclusive - for God so loved the *world...* **John 3:16; Gen. 1:27; Gal. 3:28**

Saturday, February 2nd: Once when I was in college, I had a positive and very personal, life-changing event happen. Then just thirty minutes later, I bumped into a friend. He looked at me with a quizzical expression and said, "What happened to you? You're glowing!" No words. Still in the moment. Those who know us well just, well, know. Moses came down from the mountain having had one of these moments of profound change, unquestioned beauty, and unspeakable holiness. Scripture says he glowed. They did not know what had been revealed to their leader — something had transformed Moses. Change can be scary to some, and "they were afraid to come near." Moses saw this and calmed them by being very clear and sharing what God had said for them all to hear. Open our eyes, Lord, and let us see what you would have us see. Let us see with the eyes of Christ, and let us respond with a spirit of faith. **Exodus 24:29-33**

Sunday, February 3rd: Sometimes the most dangerous words we can utter are “what if?” What if I never get married? What if he/she leaves me? What if I lose my job? What if I don’t measure up? The list is long. And in all honesty, some of those “what ifs” may actually come to pass. But we need to understand that those things are not what define who we are, and dwelling on negative uncertainties can cripple us and lock us into a permanent state of panic. What if? = fear; even if = faith. Our Abba Father has assured us that nothing is going to happen to us that catches Him by surprise, and He is always with us. Sometimes the trials we experience are the very thing we need to mature and strengthen us. So *even if*...never forget that you – yes, *you* – are the apple of His eye! He has promised to never leave you, to walk beside you, and to deliver you. And *what if* what happens is greater and more wonderful than anything you could have even imagined? Trust Him who is able. **Is. 41:10; Eph. 3:20-21; James 1:2-4**

Monday, February 4th: I sometimes joke that with a little butter, I could live on just bread. What else could I need? Ok, maybe that's not the greatest attitude to have. I grew up in a Christian home, so I have always known about Jesus. Now, that doesn't mean that I've had a perfect life... far from it. But I know Christ has provided peace and comfort in my many times of *yuck*. In fact, I can't imagine what my life would be like without knowing and having a relationship with Christ. (I also can't imagine my life without bread and butter.) It is my prayer that you use this day to reflect on who Christ is to you. Maybe Jesus has played a huge role in your life, or maybe he hasn't. (Be honest — it's okay!) Think about creating, maintaining, or improving your relationship with Christ. Ask questions, struggle with God, and look for answers. When you're awake and aware to being on a journey with Jesus, it makes those wilderness times a little easier and may provide you some peace. **Luke 4:1-4**

Tuesday, February 5th: February is always associated with love, and I think God is pleased with that if we direct our thoughts to the highest form of love and purpose to emulate it. Depending on which version of the Bible you use, the word love appears from 310 times in the King James to 538 times in the NRSV. He has a lot to say about the subject: He dedicated an entire chapter to it (1 Cor. 13); He's the reason we are even capable of loving (1 Jn. 4:19); He says that if we *don't* love, we don't know Him (1 Jn. 4:7-9); and His love for us is so great that He died for us! (Jn. 3:16) Then Jesus condenses it all down to a very simple principle – love God completely; love others selflessly. Ask Him to show you how to experience and embrace His love and then how to express it to *all of creation* because that's who He loves! **1 John 3:16-18; Mark 12:30-31**

Wednesday, February 6th: I'm going to make an unabashed pitch for the Brushfire Grill. If you have any questions as to why we should heartily support them (besides the amazing food) I would urge you to read *My Journey and the Faithfulness of God* by Brushfire owner and founder Clint Berkey. His story reveals a heart after God, seeking to walk in obedience and to honor Him no matter what that means in terms of personal cost or sacrifice. Did you know that 100% of the profits go toward the work of the Kingdom? If we truly want to see God's purpose powerfully fulfilled in placing Brushfire on our campus, we will not only frequent it on the weekends. We'll make it a destination during the week when we feel like going out. We'll tell others about it, even those who may not be believers. Especially those! We'll see it as not just a great restaurant but as a ministry opportunity that God has given us to see multitudes fed with the Bread of Life as they encounter His Spirit. **2 Cor. 9:10-15**

Thursday, February 7th: Did you know that laughing decreases physical tension, lowers stress levels, and can even temporarily relieve pain? Studies show that laughter is a key to long-lasting relationships and can make you a better girlfriend, boyfriend, or spouse. Laughing also makes you

a better God-truster. Abraham had many options for his reaction to God's incredible plan — to create nations from the womb of a tired, geriatric Hebrew woman. But all he could do was fall on his face and laugh. It was just too good! Sometimes journeying with God can get heavy, as if it were our job to save the world. Trusting God means believing that God is doing the kind of astounding things we could never dream of accomplishing ourselves. Just as with Abraham and Sarah, the living God is on the loose in this world and in your life making absurd and wonderful things happen every day. How would your life change if you woke up every day prepared to laugh in delighted disbelief at the things God is doing? **Genesis 17:7-8, 17**

Friday, February 8th: One of the most moving Scriptures for me is found in Isaiah 61 and later quoted by Jesus after His wilderness experience when He began teaching in the synagogue. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” This is what the Resilient Church Conference is all about, and this is something we should be all about. Proclaiming the freedom of Jesus to any who are in chains of addiction, trauma, or mental illness. There can be such a stigma attached to these conditions, but Jesus saw beyond the affliction into redemption and restoration. Pray that those attending the conference will gain Jesus' perspective and wisdom on how to best respond and minister to the afflicted. **2 Cor. 1:3-5; Luke 4:18**

Saturday, February 9th: When I was in fifth grade my friend and I decided to bake an angel food cake from scratch. The recipe called for one dozen egg whites. Being novices, we cracked all of the eggs into one bowl at the same time and a very small amount of yolk got into the mixture. We figured – no problem! As a result of that miniscule bit of “contaminant” the cake

failed to rise and never became what it was supposed to be. The same is true of us. God calls us to holiness and purity, and when we flippantly ignore things that are clearly not according to His design, the outcome is not going to be appealing or profitable. It takes all of us as a body to reflect that Pure Heart and become His masterpiece, accomplishing His purposes, and walking in His power. No yolk! **Eph. 4:1-32; 2 Tim. 2:15-21**

Sunday, February 10th: I'm impatient. It is a symptom of our busy and chaotic world. Smart phones, computers, and tablets have conditioned me to want an immediate response. Facebook and Instagram prove to the world how up-to-date I am on all the recent news and that I am in constant motion. But our text from Luke is calling us to pull back for a moment (**Luke 13:8-9**). The gardener says to give it a year — give it some time. Cultivate the plant and then you can judge it for what it is. We need to slow down and spend some time cultivating the things that are most important to us. We need to go against what culture tells us — that we need answers and information now — and be prepared to wait. Where can you say no to busyness? When might you put your cell phone aside or turn off the computer to practice cultivating your life? Share with God if it is hard for you to slow down and wait. Ask Him to help you to recognize the importance of saying no to busyness and saying yes to quiet and stillness.

Monday, February 11th: Have you ever wondered what it was like for Noah to be confined to the ark for over a year? Talk about your cabin fever! He was stuck with immediate family and a boatload of critters, and I can only imagine the challenges that presented. Don't we all have times when we just need to get away from it all — to find a little space? And then I think about the joy Noah must have felt when the dove first returned with an olive leaf and then didn't return because she had found a resting place. And yet, Noah didn't get off the boat until God directed him to do so. So often we

react to trying circumstances in the flesh without inquiring of the Lord, even when every fiber of our being is screaming, “Hallelujah! Here’s your chance to remove yourself from your captivity!” Lord, help us to never allow human reasoning or emotional overload to dictate how we move forward. Thank You for Your infinite wisdom and perfect plan for our lives. **Gen. 8:15; Prov. 3:5-6**

Tuesday, February 12th: We go to work, we take naps, we read books and watch movies, we spend time with friends and family, we take adventures, and we rest. And maybe, in the midst of all these things, we go to church. What is our motivation? If Jesus is, in fact, our motivation for the church piece of our week, what is our motivation for all those other things? In the midst of everything that consumes our daily lives, it is easy to lose our focus on Jesus. But it is in the everyday — not just at church — that we are transformed. And transformation happens not by our doing, but by the Son of God, who continues to guide us even when we are forgetful. Let us now turn our hearts and minds to Jesus. Pray... God, help me to know, even if I don’t always recognize, that you are a constant in my life, whether I’ve received your word with confidence upon the mountaintop, or if I’m walking through normal, day-to-day life. **Genesis 22, Hebrews 10:31**

Wednesday, February 13th: We all have our personal ways of dealing with anxiety and pressure. Some eat, some isolate themselves or veg out in front of the TV, others turn to alcohol or pills to deaden the aching. All of these are just different forms of self-medication. But God has a better prescription for how we can deal with life’s maladies. He urges us to meditate on His word. If we do that, He promises that He will guard our hearts and minds, give us peace, and make our ways prosper. Forgive the play on words, but “medicate” on these things! **Ps. 1:1-3; Josh. 1:8; Phil. 4:6-8**

Thursday, February 14th: Have you ever considered that you are God's valentine? His love for you is so incredible, so all-encompassing, that no other love could even hold a candle to it. It's the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love we sing about in church. Nothing we could ever do can separate us from His love. He may not love what we do, but He will never *not* love us! And if that isn't enough, hold this picture in your mind – He rejoices over you with singing. Happy Valentine's Day! **Zeph. 3:17; Is. 54:10**

Friday, February 15th: Forgiveness is difficult to accept. Our culture is quick to dismiss rather than accept apologies. "I'm sorry," or "I apologize," is often met with, "don't worry about it," or "no apology necessary." Recently I explained to a couple of friends that they would be receiving a formal apology from me and a colleague. They were quick to say it wasn't necessary. I asked them to consider that even if they didn't require an apology, perhaps we needed to make one. Later we were gathered and asked everyone to return to a moment earlier in the day when we had failed the group. We described what had happened, named the point of our own disappointing behavior, and then looked everyone in the eyes as we said, "Please accept our apology. It won't happen again." The faithful individuals meeting with us simply said, "Thank you. You are forgiven." Making and accepting an apology can be an amazing step in returning to right relationship with God. We must practice forgiveness in order to be forgiven. Pray-Forgiving God, please help me to remember that in forgiving I receive forgiveness, and that asking for forgiveness is a return to happiness in your love. Thank you for accepting my apology and helping to restore my relationship with you and with others, in Jesus name Amen. **Psalm 32:1-2, Matthew 6:11-13**

Saturday, February 16th: We are so blessed to have so many opportunities at Pure Heart to hear sound teaching and to go deeper in God's word. However, if all we do is listen and learn to build knowledge, we

could become like the Dead Sea. Even though it's fed by the revered waters of the Jordan River, there is no outlet and hence the saline level of the water is so intense that only bacteria can survive in it! As James tells us, we need to be doers of the word and not merely hearers. We are being fed for a reason. All our learning will not serve God or others if we don't do something with it. Instead, we should be more like the Sea of Galilee, also fed by the Jordan, which *does* have an outlet and is a source of life and abundance to its surrounding area. It's also where Jesus did a lot of teaching, performed miracles, and walked on water! **Ja.1:22; Rom. 2:13**

Sunday, February 17th: Sometimes it might seem like we have a lot to do in order to be Christians. We may feel like we aren't good enough, or don't read our Bibles enough, or don't understand faith enough. But God reminds us that we don't have to have it all figured out to be blessed by Him. God asks that we respect His goodness, awesomeness, and presence. Then God asks that we obey; and we know from scripture that God is asking us to obey the commandment to love — God, others, and ourselves. This is the first step to a life filled with Him: Respect and Love. Once we set our minds to do those two things, the rest will come to us. God will reveal more to us as we need it. God will guide us when we need to know the path. God will answer our questions when we need certainty. So, take a step back and breathe. God is only asking you to respect God and to love. In your prayer time ask Him to reveal ways that you can respect and love Him as well others. **Psalm 111:10, Matthew 22:37, 1 Corinthians 13**

Monday, February 18th: Abraham's unreserved obedience in his readiness to obey God and sacrifice his only son led to extreme blessing. When we read this familiar story, we can sometimes get so focused on God's immediate provision of the ram that we overlook the magnitude of the resulting blessing. It is proportional to the sacrifice; rewards are multiplied (Luke 1:74, Mat 19:29); there is deliverance from enemies (we are more than conquerors - Rom 8:37); through the seed of Abraham (Jesus) **all**

nations are blessed. Abraham was asked to do something radical and costly, but in the end the resulting blessing for his obedience proved to be so much greater than he could have imagined. God uses the same paradigm with us. What He asks of us may initially seem extreme, but as we trust Him in our obedience we can rest assured that it will be worth it! **Gen. 22:17-18**

Tuesday, February 19th: Mark 1:29-31 This is good news and bad news. The good news is of the healing ministry of Christ. This is one of many healing stories in the Bible, which have fed generations of believers and uplifted those who draw strength and hope from them. The bad news is that some people are turned away from faith by these very same stories. Healing stories raise some questions: Is there a “fix-it” God in heaven, who will make all things right if we but ask? And if so, why do some people remain unhealed? These stories can be more troublesome than uplifting to some people among us. But, this is what our faith asks us to do: to live in the tension between the ministry of Jesus and the world as we know it, which often just don’t line up. Questions and doubts are a normal part of the life of faith. What about you? What do you hear in this story? Is it more of a promise or a puzzle to you? Shall we pray? Lord, I have faith. Help my lack of faith. Thank you that even when my questions feel bigger than my belief, you are still with me.

Wednesday, February 20th: When Jesus gave the command to go into all the world, it was just that – a command. It wasn’t a suggestion, and it wasn’t directed at only the disciples or an elite few. We are all called to go into all the world, and the way I see it, we have two choices: go or send. There is no third alternative. Senders can be those who financially support those who are sent, or they may be faithful prayer warriors who intercede on their behalf, but everyone should be missions minded. And don’t forget that being sent into the world can be as far as Myanmar or as close as the family next

door. Ask God to show you what your role in missions is and then heartily pursue it. **Matt. 28:19; Rom. 10:14-15**

Thursday, February 21st: Notice the subtlety in this message. **1**

Corinthians 9:19-23 Becoming “like” or one with various populations, Paul is emulating Christ — Emmanuel, God with us — who is for and with all people. Sometimes it is hard to see God in other people. They act meanly, they are inconsiderate, they are greedy. As are we, sometimes. It depends on when someone sees us, I guess. Perhaps it depends on what we see, as well. When we realize that Christ is in us, even though we are sometimes unbearable to others, our hearts are opened to all of God’s people. We might be willing to serve and love them for the sake of the gospel. May God give us the eyes to see through the lens of love. **John 15:12**

Friday, February 22nd: The lyrics of a recent song entitled “God is on the Move” declare, “I see a generation standing in the truth,” and, “God is on the move in many mighty ways.” This weekend our 6th – 12th grade students along with youth leaders and pastors are being equipped and inspired to become world changers! One way we can support His mighty movement in our next generation is to pray that the Holy Spirit would be given free rein in their sessions, anointing the speakers, opening the hearts and minds of attendees, and pouring into them His wisdom and heart. Pray that they would eagerly receive all that He has for them. **Ps. 22:30-31; 78:6-7**

Saturday, February 23rd: Every time I have heard this Naaman story told, somehow the role of the little Israelite girl gets brushed over. But the truth is that she is the symbol of hope in this story. It is she who speaks out about the prophet in Israel through whom God heals Naaman. Her part in the story was small, but a very important part. We are all part of the story of our communities and our world. Let us, like the Israelite girl, allow our message of hope to be heard. We should not allow our situation, no matter what it is,

to prevent us from spreading this message of hope. The Israelite girl was a slave and could have easily kept her mouth shut because of her situation. Yet she cried out: there was a prophet in Israel! Our cry should be that there is hope for our community to be better, hope for our schools to be better, hope for our world to be better. Pause and Pray - God, may my voice today be a voice of hope speaking out, that in You there is hope for our world. No matter what my situation looks like today, Lord, may I continue to be a messenger of hope. **2 Kings 5:1-5a**

Sunday, February 24th: When I was young, my church owned a cabin at a conference center. Every so often the youth group would take over for a weekend. These retreats were what I would eventually learn to call “mountaintop experiences,” times when I would encounter God in new, exciting, and unusual ways. In the book of Mark, Jesus’ disciples have a mountaintop experience of Jesus, as he is transfigured by God before their very eyes. They hear God’s voice proclaim that they should listen to Jesus, as he is God’s Son. It’s obvious they’ve witnessed something amazing. While the disciples don’t necessarily understand what happened, Jesus stays with them. Much like the disciples, we don’t always understand our mountaintop experiences, nor do we always know how to tell others about them. But the truth remains that God is present on the mountaintop and on the descent. When we heed God’s call to be ready to listen to Jesus, we realize that the mountaintop moments may stand out, but we are not alone in the valleys, either. **Mark 9:2-9**

Monday, February 25th: I was recently reading a book that discussed the complexity and depth of the fact that we are image bearers of a triune God – three separate beings, yet One. It’s difficult to grasp how that affects, or at least should impact, every area of our being – intellectually, emotionally,

and spiritually. If we try to compartmentalize and only apply our identification with Him to the spiritual side, we are seriously missing the mark. When God is not loved by our entire being, sin is exposed in how we speak, how we treat others, what we choose to watch and listen to, and what activities we engage in. Just as He is diverse, so are those He created in His image. And if we think that we can define what a Christian *should* look like, we need go no further than our personal relationships. In a family with as few as three children, it's pretty easy to see that they are distinct from one another, yet all carry the same DNA. Let's first begin by examining ourselves to determine if we are striving after just improved behavior or holiness; then let's be less judgmental in our assessment of others. Only God knows their hearts, and we can be assured that He also knows ours. Let's seek to truly bear His image. **Gen. 1:27; 1 John 4:9-11**

Tuesday, February 26th: Rejoice and be glad? I don't know about you, but I wouldn't cheer if people hated, hurt, or mocked me for my beliefs. Whether it's easy or hard to stand up for what we believe, when we speak out against school bullying or advocate against systemic injustice, God promises to be right alongside of us. Imprisoned and executed for resistance to the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote of this blessing in his 1943 Christmas prison prayer: In me there is darkness, But with you there is light; I am lonely, but you do not leave me; I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help; I am restless, but with you there is peace. In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience; I do not understand your ways, But you know the way for me. Living in faith may not be easy; God knows that. But God promises to be with us at every step, blessing and keeping us along the way. Pray-Almighty God, I don't always understand your ways. How can I radiate your light and forgiveness even when it's costly to me? Help me to trust that you do know the way for me and that you walk with me, blessing me each day. **Matthew 5:10-12**

Wednesday, February 27th: Can you imagine going to the emergency room and being turned away because you were too sick and the people there were afraid you might infect them? Isn't that exactly where you **need** to go? Understandably some precautions may need to be taken, but everyone in that room should have the same mindset: either get help or be a helper. The more Jesus healed people, the more people sought Him out. As Pure Heart continues to be a place where broken people can come to find help, we can expect more and more hurting people to come, and we need to be prepared for that and expect that it will sometimes be messy. As long as we're wearing our spiritual armor, we needn't fear "infection". We need to decide if we want to be a hospital or just a health spa. Pray for God to give us hearts of compassion that reach out to the broken and welcome them. **Matt. 9:30-38; Rom. 15:1**

Thursday, February 28th: I remember wanting to quit my basketball team because I thought I wasn't getting enough playing time in the games. So I told my coach I was quitting. I'll never forget her looking me straight in the eye and asking, "What about the team?" I wasn't sure how to respond, because I hadn't thought about the team. I hadn't thought about how my decision to quit would affect my teammates, or even how it would affect my family and friends. My coach's question helped open my eyes to the responsibility I had as a teammate, and it encouraged me to stay on the team. Moses was encouraging the Israelites to understand that their decision to follow or not follow God was about more than just them. He wanted them to think about how their choice could give life to their children and their children's children. He even encouraged them to think back to the promises God made to their faith leaders like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Israelites were instructed to make the right choice and to know that their decision stretched from ancient ancestors of yesterday through future generations of tomorrow. Thank the Lord, for people who help you to look beyond yourself and encourage me you make the right decisions. Pray- that He would help you to think about others in every decision you make.
Deuteronomy 30:19-20