

# *Prayer Devotions*

*August*

*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:

Syria

Nigeria

Iraq

**Daily Prayers for August...** "Where does your security lie? Is God your refuge, your hiding place, your stronghold, your shepherd, your counselor, your friend, your redeemer, your savior, your guide? If He is, you don't need to search any further for security." - Elisabeth Elliot

**Thursday, August 1st:** Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who finishes your sentences for you? Not only can this be extremely annoying, but it often can sidetrack any genuine communication because they have already predetermined your thoughts without actually hearing you. This reminds me of a conversation I recently had with someone who is facing his mortality with an ominous diagnosis, yet he is still resistant to the truth of God. This person's thinking is very logic based, and although he concedes to the existence of Jesus, he can't accept His deity. I tried to encourage him to read Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ* and he said he read a review that more or less echoed his own reservations. Exasperated, I told him to *just read the stinking book* and come to his own conclusion! How often are we stiff-necked when we hear something that doesn't line up with what we already have chosen to believe? I'm planning to purchase the book for him and pray that he actually reads it in order to make an educated deduction rather than a knee-jerk retort. I need to remind myself that at this point his eyes have been blinded by the enemy and that we all fall prey to snap judgments at times. Proverbs warns us that to give and answer before we hear is folly and shame. And remember...when in doubt, **read the Book!**  
**Prov. 18:13; 2 Cor. 4:3-6**

**Friday, August 2nd:** Have you ever heard the question, “Which came first? The chicken, or the egg?” The question seems impossible—chickens must hatch from eggs, but eggs must be laid by chickens. It doesn’t seem that either a chicken or an egg could come first, because you can’t have one without the other! Sometimes faith feels like a similar problem. Which comes first? Faith in God or seeing God at work around us? On the one hand, we won’t see evidence of God at work if we don’t believe in God. But on the other hand, why would we believe in God if we don’t see evidence of God around us? Hebrews tells us that faith is the evidence of what we hope for, and the proof of what we don’t see. Faith and the ability to see God go hand in hand; you can’t have one without the other. As Augustine said in his 43rd sermon, “Faith means believing what you don’t yet see, and the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.” Pray-God, give me a faith that is alive; give me a faith that is the evidence of what I hope for, and the proof of what I don’t see.  
**Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-16**

**Saturday, August 3rd:** There are some rather interesting quotes on listening. Two that I particularly like are anonymous. “God gave us mouths that close and ears that don’t; that must tell us something.” And in the same vein, “Did you ever wonder why God gave us two ears but only one mouth?” The take away here is that He is far wiser than we, and He knows that more wisdom is gained by what we hear from others than by what we expound from our own storehouse of information. When we speak, we’re only repeating what we already know, but when we listen – really listen – we have the opportunity to gain new insights and perspectives that we may have never considered. Besides, when we actively listen to what others have to say, we are showing them courtesy and respect. We’re letting them know that we value their input, and everyone likes to feel validated. None of us has all the answers, and when we respectfully listen to others we allow ourselves to be humble, teachable and vulnerable – just the sort of vessel that God can use. Lord, let us always show preference to one another in honor and be eager to hear, to learn, and to grow in understanding and wisdom according to Your Word. **Rom. 12:10; Prov. 12:15; James 1:19**

**Sunday, August 4th:** There are a growing number of people in our world who think the life of faith is pointless. The very idea of attending worship or going to bible study sounds boring to them. But if you read the bible, you get the sense that the life of faith is anything but boring. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets — all of these people were full of life. In a world of division and hatred, they believed faith had something to do with tapping into the deeper current of love; for them, it was about getting completely swept up into something larger than one's self. Faith wasn't a ticket out of this place, but an invitation to enter into the world and make a difference. Faith was an embrace of adventure, the best kind of adventure, one that involves restoration, renewal, and salvation for all. At its best, faith challenges, stretches, grows, inspires changes, cultivates, and resurrects. This is what faith is about. What a privilege, that even now, even in us, faith is alive and active in the world. **Hebrews 11:32-35**

**Monday, August 5th:** If you've ever taken a road trip with children, you know that despite your efforts to ensure their needs are being met, you will eventually hear the inevitable, "Are we there yet?" And it isn't just children who become impatient. On a trip to Long Beach one summer (towing a 24' sail boat), our truck kept overheating and we had to turn off the air. I was continually reassured that we could turn the air back on "as soon as we got over the next hill." The problem was there was always another hill! I wonder if God felt the same frustration when He was leading the children of Israel to the Promised Land. They had seen Him perform miracles, their needs were being met in supernatural ways, yet they continued to grumble and complain. Don't we do the same thing when we feel like He isn't acting fast enough, or our "wants" aren't being met, even if our basic needs are? I like Max Lucado's quote, "God never said the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile." We don't need to pretend that everything is hunky-dory when we have legitimate needs, but we need to keep our eyes on the destination, knowing that in His time He promises to make *all things* beautiful. And we're not there...yet. **James 1:2; Phil 4:13-14**

**Tuesday, August 6th:** There's life, and then there's eternal life. One is just getting by, and the other hints at something deeper and fuller, a quality of life that is greater than the ordinary humdrum way of living. The Good News is that God wants us to experience eternal life, and in and through Christ, God has offered it to us. This gift is grace, and it always gives birth to faith, the act of accepting one's acceptance. Though we often try, we cannot earn or purchase our acceptance. The fullness of life can only be received, and when it is, the result is overflowing joy and gratitude. The Psalmist knew, however, that it's not possible to live in perpetual bliss. God's love and acceptance feel distant at times. We get lost. Things get dark. And in those moments, all we can do is ask God to "revive us," to "restore us," and to "make His face shine so that we can be saved!" Putting our faith in God isn't always easy, but it's worth it. By faith we receive eternal life. Through faith we're revived, restored, and saved. **Psalm 80:14-19**

**Wednesday, August 7th:** Tomorrow is the first day of GLS (Global Leadership Summit) being hosted through live streaming at the Pure Heart Glendale campus. We need to pray that all those in attendance will learn biblical principles for becoming better leaders according to God's design for their lives. He has placed leaders in every arena of influence, and He has given each one of us a voice that has the potential to impact others. Our aim should be to use that voice in a positive way that will be in line with God's Word and will bring Him glory. Pray for the Summit, that every speaker would present strategies and ideas that are based on Biblical truth, that attendees would be eager to hear, and that we would all be like the Bereans and receive with open minds and hearts and then immediately examine how the teaching aligns with the Bible. Then pray that they would put into practice all that He desires for them to do. May His words always be the sure foundation upon which everything else is built. **Acts 17:10-11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17**

**Thursday, August 8th:** In a recent discussion involving Jesus' healing of the blind man by spitting on his eyes, His technique was questioned. But then the same question arises in the case of Naaman being told to wash in the dirty Jordan River to heal his leprosy. Not the most glamorous way to perform a miracle, and as much as we would all like to witness the miraculous, we sometimes would prefer that it be done in a spectacular, impressive way. All Jesus requires of us is faith and obedience, even when His methods are unconventional, or worse, in some way we may feel is undignified. In the case of Naaman this meant doing something that he felt was beneath him, and he risked not experiencing the miracle for the sake of pride. What if the blind man had recoiled at the idea of someone spitting on him? How often do we miss out on something big God is doing because the initial phase seems mundane, menial, or demeaning?

**Friday, August 9th:** When you're running a race, there's only one direction that matters — forward — towards the finish line. This sounds easy enough, but as most of us know, running takes a lot of endurance and strength. It's easy to give up but it's hard to keep going. Faith is also this way, which is why the book of Hebrews offers us a few words of encouragement. First, we have to let go of anything and everything that is weighing us down. Things like guilt, shame, fear, anxiety, and anger can sap us of strength and keep us from moving forward. Secondly, we have to get rid of sin, which is to say we have to quit engaging in behaviors that are harmful and damaging, or we may trip and fall. Lastly, we have to focus all of our attention on Jesus. He is the perfect example of a life well lived, and it is in and through him that we discover eternal life. Knowing that Jesus has gone before us and goes with us gives us the strength and endurance we need to keep running.

**Hebrews 12:1-2**

**Saturday, August 10th:** Have you ever considered how counterproductive it is to worry about something? My husband used to say that worrying must work because 90% of what he worried about never happened! But the truth is, worrying can have a paralyzing effect on us. It begins to dominate our thoughts to the point that we become ineffective in our responsibilities and we fail to appreciate anything good. And to be honest, worry is just another word for unbelief. Paul exhorted the church at Philippi to “be anxious for nothing!” Instead they were to give thanks for everything and then to make their requests known to God. He told them that this would lead to incomprehensible peace. The word for anxious is *merimnao* and it refers to worry. It’s the same word used in the parable of the sower when Jesus warned that the *merimnao* of the world could choke the good seed of the Word and keep it from taking root and producing fruit. Sometimes those difficult times are the very things that grow us up and enrich our relationship with our Father, Savior, and Comforter. Henry Ward Beecher once said, “The little troubles and worries of life may be as stumbling blocks in our way, or we may make them stepping-stones to a nobler character and to Heaven. Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things.” Choose to allow Him to shape you; cast your cares on Him.

**Phil. 4:6-7; Ps. 55:22**

**Sunday, August 11th:** “When the night has come / And the land is dark / And the moon is the only light we’ll see / No I won’t be afraid / Oh, I won’t be afraid / Just as long as you stand, stand by me.” The lyrics to the song “Stand By Me” (originally performed by Ben E. King) reminds me of many of my friends who have stood by me in tight circumstances and kept me from being afraid. I am thankful to God for the gift of their life reminding me that God stands by me. The Psalmist writes a song to sing that is similar to Ben E. King’s with the lyric “The Lord is for me — I won’t be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” The Psalmist reminds you that you don’t have to be afraid when the night comes, for God stands by you. Do you have a friend, a family member, or someone special whom you can always depend on when you need them? Thank God for them today and for reminding you that God stands by you.

**Psalm 118:5-6**

**Monday, August 12th:** I'm totally blown away by the magnitude of God's mercy. Not only His willingness but His *desire* to show kindness and compassion toward us when we don't deserve it – to bring us relief and restoration rather than retribution. In fact, we are told that He delights in showing mercy! That's something to give thanks for. It is His kindness (mercy) that leads men to repentance. Rather than shaking an angry finger at those who understand their offense and undeserved forgiveness, He draws them in with compassion. Mercy triumphs over judgment. And that is exactly what He expects us to do in kind. We have so freely received; we cannot become hardened or arrogant in our unmerited favor and neglect or refuse to extend the same benevolence to those around us. Once we have drawn near and received mercy, we are to walk humbly and graciously in that forgiven state so that others might also be drawn near. Failure to do so displeases our Father, and He will hold us accountable. Even if the offender deserves justice (and they often do), so do we! Pray that we would instead choose to be merciful, even as He has been to us. Thank You, Lord, for Your unfathomable mercy and grace. **Rom. 2:4; James 2:13**

**Tuesday, August 13th:** Theologian and author Frederick Buechner wrote: "...if you don't have any doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving." In the book of Matthew, Jesus tells His followers not to worry about their life. Does Jesus mean if you doubt that you are unable to love God with all of your heart? Or is there another kind of worry that Jesus is referring to in his teaching? Often, when you doubt, you do so with your head or your thoughts. You might question as you move forward, still trusting that God is bigger than any doubt you can imagine. These doubts are the "ants in the pants of faith" which Buechner references. Worry is deeper, a doubt that comes from the heart, a doubt that doesn't trust God enough to provide or to sustain you even with your day-to-day needs. To love God with all of your heart means you will not worry about your life, despite the doubts in our head.

**Matthew 6:25, James 1:6, Mark 9:24b**

**Wednesday, August 14th:** Water can conjure up many images. Gentle waves lapping the shore of a beach can be so relaxing. They are inviting. But if the waves are all joined together in a tsunami, well that's a different story! It reminds me of a time on a sailing ship in the midst of a huge storm with the waves literally crashing over the top of the wheelhouse. At each trough the bow of the ship would go completely underwater. It was quite overwhelming, but then God whispered to me that they were just drops of water and He controlled them *all*. The small waves lapping at the shore are united but still independent and although they do have an effect, it takes a long time for them to alter anything onshore. But united they can permanently alter the landscape. They have incredible power. When the church is content to be a collection of small waves working independently, it will have a pleasant effect but will not dramatically alter the spiritual landscape of our city – our state – our country - God's creation. If we can unite together, remembering that He created us and is ultimately in control, imagine what could be accomplished. Pray for God-centered collaboration, focused more on furthering His kingdom than "brand recognition." Let's be a spiritual tsunami. **Eph. 4:1-6;**

**Thursday, August 15th:** We've probably heard it a hundred times – attitude is everything! How we respond to others and to situations says a lot about where we put our trust and what we truly value. When all of our focus is inward, chances are pretty good we'll retaliate rather than respond when someone offends or disappoints us. But when we turn on eyes on Jesus, fully putting our trust and expectations in Him and His power and purposes, we can see the bigger picture. We can then understand that regardless of what we face or must endure, He is there with us and will use it to shape us and perhaps impact someone else for kingdom purposes. Then the whatever or the whoever has no power over you. You are the only one who can determine your response and how it affects you. I read once, "Don't put the key to your happiness in someone else's pocket...keep it in your own." Better yet, turn it over to Jesus with an attitude of gratitude and trust. **Rom. 15:5; Heb. 13:6**

**Friday, August 16th:** Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and **with all your soul** and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ **Matthew 22:37-39** My soul is the essence of who I am, my very being. It is the boundless, timeless, passionate part of me. It is my authentic spiritual self. What does it mean to honor my authentic spiritual self today? What does it mean to love God with my soul? We are made for connection. Connection with God. Connection with friends and family. And, yes, even connection with people who are difficult. Every one of us struggles with someone whom we find challenging. Maybe they don’t like us for some reason. Maybe they are fearful and taking it out on the people around them. Maybe we don’t agree with how they see the world. Whatever the reason, God calls us to bless even those who harass us. That doesn’t mean we have to let them hurt us. It simply means we cannot let their behavior change who we are or make us into hateful or harassing people. God calls us to prayer and love and hope and welcome. God calls us to share the journey with all of God’s people. **Romans 12:12-15**

**Saturday, August 17th:** Charles Spurgeon once said, "Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength." And Jesus even tells us that in this world we *will* have tribulation – that’s a given. But He doesn’t leave it there; He says He’s telling us about the inevitability of trials beforehand that we may have peace! What? The peace comes from knowing that HE has already overcome the world! One of my favorite passages in scripture is in Isaiah 43 where God promises us that *when* we walk through the waters, He will be with us; *when* we pass through the rivers, they will not overflow us; *when* we walk through the fires, we will not (even) be scorched. You notice He doesn’t say *if* but *when*. A life that is always asking “what if...?” will be one dominated by fear; a life that declares “even if...” will be a life of faith and peace. Pray that we would be a people who choose to rest in the One who promises to walk beside us through every trial we will ever face. He is always faithful. **Ps. 23; Jer. 17:7-8; John 16:33**

**Sunday, August 18th:** Renew your mind so you can figure out what God's will is. The Apostle Paul makes it sound so easy. I remember worrying a lot about knowing God's will. With big decisions ahead of me, what would happen if I chose something that wasn't God's will? Sometimes I felt paralyzed to make a decision because I was afraid I would pick a direction that wasn't pleasing to God. It isn't always clear what is good and pleasing and mature. Christians can (and often do) disagree about what God's will is. So how do we know what to do? Paul speaks to a community in his letter. The "you" he refers to is plural, as in "you all." We need one another when it comes to figuring out God's will. The Christian life is best lived in a community of people whose minds and hearts are tuned to following the way of Christ. None of us knows all the answers, but together we may get closer to discerning the mind of Christ. Are you in community? Where can you be in community? How can you help others get connected in community?

**Romans 12:2**

**Monday, August 19th:** We can be thankful that Dan and the other pastors who deliver our weekend messages are bold enough to tackle unpopular subjects – the ones that challenge us and hold the possibility of offending some. However, we need to be very aware and vigilant about who else and what else we allow to teach us and shape our beliefs. There's a dangerous trend in the western church to adapt the Bible to the wisdom of man and rather than base programs solidly on Biblical principles, we want to take teachings founded in the world or other religions and try to somehow Christianize them. And by all means, don't tell us anything that would challenge how we want to live. As one writer put it, "To want one's ears 'tickled' is to desire massages rather than messages—sermons that charm rather than challenge, entertain rather than edify, and please rather than preach." Pray that we always would be committed to searching out and following the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth as it aligns with God's Word. Our spiritual lives depend on it. **2 Tim. 4:3-4; Hosea 4:6; Jude**

**Tuesday, August 20th:** As much capacity as our minds have for creativity, analysis, remembering, and judgment, there are some things that are simply beyond us. We could gather together our intellectual reasoning, our creative problem solving, we could add in the most sophisticated artificial intelligence, and still the mind and ways of God will be mysterious to us. It's not that we can't know anything about God and God's ways. Studying the bible, prayer and gathering together for worship are three basic avenues to knowing God and God's desires for us. But every time we think we have God all figured out, what we've really done is make God small and manageable. God asks us to open our minds to the possibility of being surprised, even shocked, at what God intends for us and for our world. There's an old hymn that says, "For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind." Might we allow our minds to be transformed by the surprising love of God that surpasses our expectations? **Isaiah 55:8-9, Ephesians 3:20**

**Wednesday, August 21st:** What does it really mean to be healthy? We've been taught about the fact that we are "whole" beings, consisting of a body, a spirit, and a soul. To be truly healthy, all three of these need to be functioning in alignment. But there's more. CHE (Community, Health, Evangelism) defines good health as living in harmony with God, self, others, and the environment. When we have ill feelings towards someone, our spirits will not be healthy and neither will our minds. They will be filled with bitterness, unforgiveness, and thoughts of revenge. The enemy is a master at filling our minds with thoughts of self-doubt. And there are scientific studies that prove the correlation between mental and physical health. Finally, we know that when we fail to take care of His creation it creates all kinds of problems with pollution, adversely affected food sources, and the spread of disease. Therefore to be really healthy, harmony in all of these areas needs to be reconciled. God expects us to care for His creation, and that is pretty all inclusive. As the 1950's sitcom declared, *Father Knows Best!* Ask Him to show us all how to be better stewards of every part of His creation that we may experience true wellbeing. **Gen. 3:16-19; Isaiah 24:4-6; James 5:13-16**

**Thursday, August 22nd:** Growing up and becoming an adult brings with it the feeling of being constantly unprepared. “Adulting” has a way of requiring more out of me than I can give most days. This is precisely when these verses from Matthew mean the most to me — when I feel like I have almost nothing to give. That’s how I imagine the disciples feel when they hear Jesus’ command to feed the hungry crowd of five thousand. He tells them to do something with next to nothing. Jesus invites his disciples to believe not in what they see before them but in what faith can make happen even with the smallest of offerings. And on our worst days when we feel like we have nothing to offer, Jesus is there inviting us to give and feed and love whether we feel prepared to or not. By trusting in God, we can respond with love to Jesus’ invitation. And that’s when miracles can happen. **Matthew 14:16-17**

**Friday, August 23rd:** It’s the sense of relief you feel after a long talk with a good friend. It’s the energy you actually regain after you run, walk, swim, or play a game. It’s the complete shift in attitude you experience after a belly laugh with a group of people. The fancy word for this experience is RESTORATION. Some part of you that was gone has come back. Summer can be a time of restoration for you. It’s the time between school years when your tired body and brain can rest and recuperate. But restoration is needed all the time, even in the middle of a school year. So how will you find restoration this year? The people surrounding Jesus were looking for restoration. Jesus, right before he “came down from the mountain,” was likely looking for restoration. We all need to find energy in order to manage the hard things we're faced with. You might be feeling hungry, tired, dejected, lonely, sad, or excluded right now, but take the power of hope from life in Christ. Love, power, and restoration go out from Jesus. Pray-God, I know that you can bring restoration to me. God, restore my faith today. Restore my desire to learn, to live, to laugh. Show me the people and the places where I can find healing and energy. As I start this new season after summer break, help me find moments of restoration. Remind me again and again, God, that your love is there, even when I can't see it or feel it. **Luke 6:17-23**

**Saturday, August 24th:** Another word for worry might be unbelief. When we worry about things it's the same as saying we don't really trust God to have our best interests in mind. We worry about things that we feel we have no control over, but if we're really honest with ourselves, we ultimately aren't in control. That's not to say that we're just robots or pawns that are driven by fate; we are expected to be responsible and judicious in our choices. However, we still live in a fallen world. But we have a Savior who has overcome the world, a loving Father who is omnipotent, and a Comforter who comes alongside us. We need also to remember that it's not enough to simply call out to Him; we need to be ready and willing to listen and respond. His answer will not always be an instantaneous, supernatural deliverance. He may instead choose to send us an answer through another person or circumstance...like the man who perished in a flood and asked the Lord why He hadn't saved him. The Lord responded to the man, "I sent a policeman to warn you to evacuate, a boat to your front door, and a helicopter to you on the roof!" A similar scenario could just be God's supernatural intervention – we need to be listening and trusting. Teach us, Lord, to run to You when we are afraid and to trust You to lead and deliver. **Prov. 3:5-6; John 14:27**

**Sunday, August 25th:** The moral of this story is (or should be): just because you are filled with the Holy Spirit, beloved by God, baptized, confirmed, go to church, are generally good, etc... things will not be easy. Gosh, wouldn't it be great if being a follower of Jesus meant that life would be easier? But easier is not the assurance. Instead, the "thing" that comes with believing in Jesus and following Jesus is that life is ALIVE. Life opens up when you open your heart and mind to God! You will still encounter angry crowds and fussing friends. With life in Jesus, however, comes the ability to make your way through anger, to find your way through loss, to see a path through confusion. These things aren't easy, even with faith. But they are possible. What are the cliffs ahead of you today? Don't look down the cliff in fear. Take a deep breath. Remember the love that surrounds you. Grab onto the support God offers you through a friend, a leader, small group, or a quiet moment. Then look ahead and go on your way. **Luke 4:24-30**

**Monday, August 26th:** 1 Corinthians is a letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. Some people there had been given the God-given gift of speaking and praying in other languages, just as Paul sometimes did. Paul reminds them that gifts and abilities like this are great, but they are given by God so that we can help others and build them up. Whatever the gifts God has given us, they are given not just for our sake, but for the sake of others. We're blessed to be a blessing, gifted to share gifts. Some gifts get a lot of attention; others are more behind-the-scenes. Some are more spectacular; many are very ordinary. And yet all of our gifts are equally important, all needed to make this world more like what God intended it be. God has gifted us all, including you! What gifts, abilities, and passions do you have? How might God be calling you to use them to build up and help others?

**1 Corinthians 14:13-19**

**Tuesday, August 27th:** In the Amplified Bible version of Psalm 119:32 David says, "I will (not merely walk, but) run the way of Your commandments, when You give me a heart that is willing." So are we, am I content to just casually stroll the way of His commandments, or is my heart willing to run – to really pursue with all I have in me? Running requires effort, focus, and determination. If we want to truly excel and compete so as to make a difference, then we need to be committed. It's not going to be a walk in the park, but then it also is not necessarily going to be a grueling, straining, exhausting competition. Hopefully, it will be something that gives us profound delight – like Eric Liddle in the 1924 Olympics who was immortalized in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. He firmly believed that God had made him fast for a reason, and he is quoted in the movie as saying that when he ran he felt God's pleasure. I think we could safely say the same thing – if we are running the race that He has set before us with all our hearts, we will most assuredly feel His pleasure, and that will be a far better motivator than beating everyone else. The writer of Hebrews tells us to throw or cast off anything that's going to be a hindrance – attitudes of discouragement, distractions, the tyranny of the urgent or the danger of apathy, pride, doubt, or anything we put above answering His call on our life. Instead, fix your eyes on the goal, feel the wind in your face, and run for the prize. **Heb. 12:1; 1 Cor. 9:24-27**

**Wednesday, August 28th:** The average person spends about five years of their life waiting in lines. Five years! We spend lots of time waiting on other things too. Waiting on someone to text us back. Waiting to be older. Waiting for love. Waiting to do something hard until we feel brave enough. Waiting for our bodies or circumstances or lives to change. Waiting... waiting... waiting. All this waiting can be frustrating. Sometimes we feel stuck. Sometimes we need to change a bad situation. In those seasons of life, it's helpful to remember that God's on our side, working on our behalf. "We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to God's purpose" (Romans 8:28). Life is full of waiting, but waiting shouldn't be a passive activity. God wants us to wait actively, hopefully, and prayerfully. So the next time you find yourself at a traffic light or in line at Chipotle or staring at your phone, take a moment to thank God for working for and with us. **Psalm 130:5-6**

**Thursday, August 29th:** When my kids were in high school they had a youth pastor who was genuinely concerned about how casual many of the younger generation are about the nature of sin being relative. To illustrate a point, he baked a pan of brownies for their Sunday night youth gathering in his home, but before they were allowed to take any he advised them that he had picked up after his dog and used "just a smidge" of the droppings in the brownies. Disturbingly, one young man still grabbed a brownie! So just how much sin does it take for us to decide that the consequences outweigh the lure of momentary pleasure? Are we truly repulsed by the thought of indulging "just a small, nearly indiscernible" sin or do we blithely dive right in, hoping it's insignificant enough that it won't really affect us? We know full well where the temptation to sin comes from, and the problem is, the more we give in to the enticement the easier it becomes to rationalize it the next time. James tells us that we are tempted when we are *carried away by our own lust* and lust gives birth to sin which in turn brings forth death. Ask God to help us be so in tune with Him that we recognize the temptation, see it for what it really is, and are unbendable in our resolve to choose not to fall prey. Don't swallow the devil's food – it's laced with deadly lies! **Rom. 1:28-32; 3:23**

**Friday, August 30th:** It is awfully hard to imagine a world in which we agree with everyone all the time. Luckily, this bit of scripture from Philipians is specifically talking about being united and in agreement with those in our community. Wait, even that can be challenging! As you steep into your community and conflicts naturally arise, imagine how you might engage those issues with compassion, love, patience, and grace. We aren't going to agree with everyone all of the time. In fact, there are going to be times when we feel irreversibly divided. There are times when we feel so far away from our people that we aren't sure if we'll ever make it back. But, it is in those moments that we have a choice in how we respond. Will we be patient and listen? Will we strive to stay connected as we work through conflict? Will we remember that we are all children of God and we are united as such? It is certainly my prayer for my own life and for yours. **Philipians 2:1-2**

**Saturday, August 31<sup>st</sup>:** The book of James begins with what might be considered a rather outlandish statement. He tells us to consider it all *joy* when we encounter various trials. I don't know of many people who would consider trials to be a source of joy, but James goes on to explain that the reason for the joy is that the trails are to test our faith and develop our endurance, the result of which will be that we are perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. This word endurance is a compound word – *hupomonē* from *hupo*, meaning under, and *meno*, which means to stay or abide. It was one of the defining characteristics of a man who was unswerved from his deliberate purpose. He stood his ground no matter what came against him. Our more contemporary definition would be, let the devil know not today! As a pianist, practicing scales is the height of tedium, but the outcome is improved technique and awareness of tonalities and harmony. Basically, that means you play with greater skill and you become more sensitive to hearing when things are a little off as opposed to being harmonious. So as we tough it out in the midst of trials we are becoming more in tune with God, and we are perfecting our ability to sense when things are not in tune with His purpose. So thank You Lord for the trials – train us. **James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7**



