

Prayer Devotions

September



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:

Maldives

Saudi Arabia

Egypt

Daily Prayers for September “Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading.” Oswald Chambers

Sunday, September 1st: Have you ever gotten dressed, looked in the mirror and thought, “I look beautiful”? Or put on workout clothes and said to yourself, “I feel strong”? Or maybe you have felt proud of your abilities and chosen clothes to wear that reinforced your feeling. Sometimes we put on clothes that help us feel what we’re not yet sure we really are. Sometimes we know who we are, and we get dressed to show on the outside what we feel inside. What would you put on to show your mind is renewed by the Spirit? What would you wear to demonstrate you are a new person made in God’s image? If it’s hard to think of pieces of clothing, like a shirt or jacket, that reflect the renewal of your mind and heart, I wonder if there is something you can put on — as concrete as a bracelet or tattoo or as metaphorical as an image or attitude — that would be a symbol of your desire to love God with your mind? Pray-God of my heart, I offer you the love of my mind. Use me to transform the world with your love. **Ephesians 4:23-24, Matthew 22:37-39**

Monday, September 2nd: One summer when I was a college student I worked in a nursing home where I met Mrs. Houston, an 84 year old woman whose son lived in the same town. Every Saturday she would have me help her get dressed, sit her up in the chair next to her bed, fix her hair, and she would wait for her son to come visit. And at the end of the day I would help her get back into her nightgown, wash her face, and tuck her into bed...alone and disheartened that he had not come. I wonder if that isn’t how God feels about us as His children sometimes. He’s waiting for us to acknowledge Him, to want to spend time with Him and talk with Him. He waits patiently – expectantly – longing for us to remember how much He loves us and has always cared for us. What is so important, so demanding of our time and attention, that we can’t carve out a place for Him in our schedules? The answer is, nothing is more important than seeking His face, remembering who He is, and giving Him the respect and love due Him. Don’t keep Him waiting. His phone number is Jeremiah 33:3. Call Him. **Jeremiah 29:12-13; Isaiah 55:6**

Tuesday, September 3rd: The prophet Amos gives us a warning, a dire one. In his days, people would be distracted by so many things: The New Moon Festival, we can party! The Sabbath will be over soon, and we can go back to normal! The harvest is coming, and we can make a load of money! We can cheat and make even more, whoot whoot! And God's head is shaking, seeing what is going on. God promises that this will not be forgotten. While we can get so distracted by all the fun and scheming for riches, we forgot those in need standing right in front of us. We are focused on such UNimportant things, and missing God's priority — the poor and needy in our very midst. We are even more distracted now, when our attention spans are barely seconds, not hours or minutes. What would Amos warn us about today? What would he name as our distractions? As you go through your day, ask God to point out Kingdom priorities and worthless distractions in your life.
Amos 8:4-7

Wednesday, September 4th: I find it interesting that James, the brother of Jesus, tells us we should consider it joy when we encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations. To me, that sounds more like work! But then, in a sense that's exactly what it is because we are supposed to understand that the *trial* is going to bring about endurance, steadfastness, patience; and when these are fully developed we will be perfectly and fully developed, lacking in nothing. What trial are you facing right now? Maybe it's some temptation that you're finding harder and harder to resist. Whatever it is, know that you're not facing it alone. Ask our loving and giving Father for wisdom and fortitude to see it through, and then fully expect Him to answer generously. He may give you deliverance, or He may give you an iron will to stay the course. Either way you will experience victory and victory is always cause for joy. James had seen his brother Jesus face the ultimate trial with victory for all of us, so maybe we should accept that what he's telling us isn't so implausible after all. Thank Him for your victory. **James 1:2-5; Romans 8:28-29**

Thursday, September 5th: I've heard some concern being expressed about the intake center being on our campus and the increasing involvement we have with trauma care. There is understandable apprehension about the prospect of dealing with addicts and those with other issues, but we need to look at things not only from a Biblical perspective but also through the lens of leadership as was addressed by Krish Kandia at the GLS last month. He used the acronym VIP to stand for Vision, Inclusion, and Proximity. Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others – seeing opportunity instead of obstacles and the treasure that may lie just beneath the surface of what appears to be trouble. Inclusion is seeing others as Jesus did; seeing their intrinsic value and seeking to serve their needs above having our own needs met. It's hospitality versus prejudice. Finally, proximity dictates being up close and personal, making room for others to tell their story and give insight to why they are where they are. It's showing them what the grace and compassion of Jesus looks like in the flesh. It all boils down to being like Jesus for the sake of others. Isn't that what we are supposed to be? Lord, fill us with Your VIP grace to see others as You do and to follow Your example of ministering and serving. **Colossians 3:12-15; Philipians 2:1-8; Mark 10:45**

Friday, September 6th: “Reading the Bible with the eyes of the poor is a different thing from reading it with a full belly. If it is read in the light of the experiences and hopes of the oppressed, the Bible’s revolutionary themes ... come alive.” ***Jürgen Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit, 1977***

Sometimes I wonder how on earth some stories made it into the Bible. Why would Jesus tell a story about a rich man condemned to everlasting torment? Isn't that a little harsh? Jesus is all about reversals. The first are last, the last are first. The sinners are called righteous and the righteous, sinners. The poor man is given heavenly blessings, and the man who stored up all his treasures on earth is cast into eternal disappointment. The rich man ignored those like the poor man — people struggling and invisible. The rich man had everything on the outside, but his heart was blind. Jesus cares more about a person's heart than he does their earthly treasures. As we go among family and friends, teachers and classmates, remember that love is valued by Jesus more than anything we may gain on earth. When we see people among us suffering, may we show them Jesus' love. Offer a kind word. Spend time with someone who is different. Listen to a stranger's story. No matter what our lives look like on the outside, God knows our hearts. **Luke 16:19-26**

Saturday, September 7th: There's a cookie shop in Austin, Texas, that makes the most delightful, delicious, and outrageous cookies ever. They're skillfully decorated and the proprietor is clever, to say the least. One of her creations reads, "I can spot a judgmental person the minute they walk through the door!" We laugh, but sometimes it may be a nervous laugh as we try to remove the plank from our eye. Unfortunately, I think almost all of us fall prey to this sinful mindset at different levels, and it can be easy to disguise and even easier to dismiss or rationalize. There are so many subtleties associated with a judgmental spirit – treating rumors or suspicions as fact, presuming to know another's motives, being quick to identify another's minor sins while being blind to our own greater failings, presuming something is sinful that is not clearly identified as such in the Bible, fixating on all the negatives of someone and ignoring any of their strong points, being a talebearer of another's failings under the pretense of concern. God does expect us to be discerning, but the goal is always to bring others closer to Him, so it would be wise to always bring our questions to Him first, remembering that we will be judged by the same standard we use with others! Lord, help us to fulfill Your law by loving our neighbors (fellow humans) as ourselves and relinquishing judgment to You. **James 2:1-9; Matthew 7:1-2**

Sunday, September 8th: When I am in the midst of a tough time, I don't always see God at work. Looking back on those tough times though, I can often see God in hindsight. When I was a senior in high school, my family was having a lot of trouble. God gave me good friends to support me and an outlet in music with my choir teacher and class to express my emotions. I remember praying and begging God for resolution while I waited. What I couldn't see until looking back, though, was how God was present in the midst of that tough time. Now I see that God provided the right people at the right time. I also see that one can't go around pain, or over it, but we have to go through it. Scriptures like this in the Bible are comforting to me. Suffering and struggle are normal, and so is struggling with feelings of hopelessness. If you are in a dark place, who is surrounding you now? Pray-Loving God, today I wait for you. Today, I lament with those who are suffering and struggling to see your goodness. You promise to walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death. May your world sense that presence today. **Lamentations 3:19-21**

Monday, September 9th: Awhile back Paul Covert challenged a Sunday school class to pray bigger prayers. It reminded me of something a friend told me – God honors bold prayers because bold prayers honor God. There’s nothing wrong with the spontaneous prayer for a closer parking spot; it demonstrates that we believe He hears and answers. But do we limit the extent of what we believe He will do? Or if we’re honest with ourselves, what we really believe He *can* do...for us? We need to press in; we need to pray titanic desires, expecting Him to respond! In fact, He even dares us to test Him. In Malachi 3:10 He challenges us to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse and see if He won’t open the floodgates of heaven. Then, knowing that He desires the very best for us, we need to wait for Him to respond and be willing to accept His answer. Remember He says that “no good thing” will He withhold to those who are walking uprightly. The key elements there are *good* and *uprightly*. Good simply means it’s in accordance with His perfect will and plan. Uprightly is a little deeper; it means to be sincere, without blemish, complete. To me this says we have to have a childlike, sincere faith in Him. So let’s take Him at His word and come boldly before His throne with the audacious requests that only He could fulfill. Keep asking until you hear His response. **Psalm 84:11-12; John 14:12-14**

Tuesday, September 10th: I grew up in a rather traditional, mainstream church and I remember well singing much of the liturgy. I was especially impressed with the line, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow...” At the time, I didn’t fully understand the magnitude of what I was singing, but it reminded me that He was in fact the source of all blessings and that somehow they flowed from Him. Flow means to move freely from one place to another in large numbers or amounts in a steady and unbroken stream. Every day we are inundated with blessings that are literally flowing into our lives. Some days they may be more evident than others, and we need to seize upon that and remember to thank Him. We woke up today and most of us at least have a roof over our heads and adequate food to sustain us. However, beyond this we live in a free country, we are surrounded by the beauty of His creation, and we have access to His word without fear of being persecuted or imprisoned for reading it. His Spirit flows through us and is ever with us. I think we would do well to remind ourselves of this on a regular basis. Sing your praise to Him for all of His blessings. **James 1:7; Philipians 4:6-7; Isaiah 41:10**

Wednesday, September 11th: What does it mean to love like Jesus? A colleague of mine recently described Jesus as the ultimately culturally-competent person, because he always entered with love. The full humanity of those he encountered was much more important than the labels that the social order had placed upon them. I strive to love like Jesus and am challenged every day by both small and large disagreements with the people around me. I have seen how disagreements can escalate into hate and violence, and when I hear about some of the terrible things that are happening in our world today, I get angry and discouraged. Maybe it’s not our role to solve every problem. Maybe we just need to model what it means to “live at peace with all people” in our daily lives. Maybe practicing the way of love in small ways every day will strengthen our ability to practice the way of love in every way. How will you strive to love like Jesus? **Romans 12:16-18**

Thursday, September 12th: Psalm 119:112-113 addresses some key issues for us to consider if we want to affect lasting change in our behaviors. First, we need to understand that it all originates in our hearts, and the psalmist states that he has *inclined* his heart to perform God's statutes. The implication here is that our default is not set to obedience, so we need to program our hearts to love His law and to hate double-mindedness. If we're wavering between His kingdom values and the world's wisdom, we'll never truly embrace His law. And the truth is, we all have our personal areas of double-mindedness. We love what something does **for** us but hate what it does **to** us. We need to incline our hearts to hate the outcome enough to also hate the cause. A piece of cheesecake may seem like comfort food until it makes the way our clothes fit uncomfortable! The saying goes; nothing tastes as good as thin (or healthy) feels. There has to be a conscious, continuous inclination of our hearts to see the destruction certain behaviors produce and to hate the result. When we come to see the positive outcome, we can learn to love the discipline that will achieve it. **Proverbs 4:23; 1 John 2:15-17**

Friday, September 13th: Jesus bids us the same call as Simon, Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee. These men are going about their day, and Jesus calls them to "Come, follow me." These first disciples drop their day jobs, leave their nets, and follow Jesus. The disciples show true faith in not packing their nets along with them as a measure of security. They leave them behind. For Andrew and Simon, Jesus says that they will fish for people instead of catching fish. With James and John, Jesus does not offer a similar pun, but the same is true. The brothers were mending their nets. In their world, they were prepared and trained to stitch up nets to catch more fish, but with God's vision they were preparing to know how to stitch up, mend, and repair relationships. The disciples had packed bags of practicality. Those with eyes to see will notice what other gifts and talents come with these practical skills and how they can be used for God's kingdom. Lord, help me to notice the skills that I have that I can use for your glory. Give me the eyes to notice and affirm these skills in others today. **Mark 1:16-20**

Saturday, September 14th: I know someone who likes to “help” others. Don’t get me wrong – this person has a genuine desire to see others overcome difficulties, but their method sometimes diminishes the sense of really being helped. To help means to come alongside, to assist, to make something easier. It’s a bit like giving a hand up rather than a hand out. It’s the difference between, “May I *help* you?” and, “Boy! Do **you** need help!” One is offering assistance; the other is taking control and implying a lack of ability or intelligence on the part of the person being “helped”. Both may accomplish the same result in the physical sense, but the latter does nothing positive for the relationship or the esteem of the recipient. Even Jesus would ask of those in desperate need what they wanted Him to do, and His concern was always for the whole person and not just their immediate physical need. If Jesus was mindful of this, so should we be. Whenever you feel the urge to “help”, make sure your motives and methods are Spirit-led. Lord, instill in us the mindset to help the way the Good Samaritan did – with generosity and humility, showing genuine concern solely for the good of the one he helped. **Luke 10:25-37; Philippians 2:2-7**

Sunday, September 15th: There is an old hymn, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” based on this passage from Lamentations. The chorus has a beautiful line: “Morning by morning, new mercies I see.” The hymn writer, Thomas Chisholm, wrote this hymn in 1923 while reflecting on God’s presence not just in the hard times or mountain top times, but every single day. Gratitude is one practice we have as Christians that grounds us in hope. One of my friends took on a daily gratitude practice for a year. Every single day she posted something she was grateful for on Facebook, from the mundane to the profound. That year turned out to be a tough one for her filled with change and challenge. The gratitude practice grounded her in goodness and hope. Even in the most challenging time in life there is something to be grateful for – from running water to a supportive friend. What are you grateful for today? What new mercy do you see? How can you share your gratitude with others? **Lamentations 3:22-24**

Monday, September 16th: It would be safe to say that everyone welcomes joy in their lives. The Bible even commands us to rejoice always. But how is that possible? Maybe Paul should have said to rejoice *most of the time* or *when you feel like it*, but then he wouldn't have emphasized the command by stating it twice! Notice that we are to rejoice "in the Lord." Therein lies the secret of being able to rejoice; we can rejoice **in Him** because He is reliable, good, gracious, merciful, and omnipotent. This is not to say that we will never experience times when we are discouraged or distraught, but we have the power in Him to choose how we will respond. We can see this lived out in the life of Paul who is writing this admonition. He is writing from prison and is facing possible death, yet he has found in his circumstances cause to rejoice. The key is to be seeking God's purpose to be fulfilled in your life. When we choose to rejoice, to maintain a gentle spirit, to not be anxious, and to pray with expectation and thanksgiving, we reflect to those around us the indescribable peace and joy of God. And if we practice these things, we are promised that the God of peace will be with us. **Philippians 4:4-9; Romans 15:13**

Tuesday, September 17th: “Lord have mercy!” — a phrase we often hear or say. Indeed, the phrase is so common, that the shock might have worn off. But God’s mercy is shocking! The Creator of all that is grants mercy when God could rightfully condemn or punish. God’s mercy is the ultimate gift and show of love to us. When we deserve the worst and are the most unlovable, mercy tells us differently. Do we realize this gift? And do we know how to respond? There is currently a popular song’s lyrics which include: “please have mercy on me / take it easy on my heart / even though you don’t mean to hurt me / you keep tearing us apart.” Messages like this tell us that mercy is simply the opposite of hurt or punishment, when in reality it’s so much more. It’s a conscious decision to offer compassion, to show care, to provide protection, to keep another from harm. God’s mercy is a life-altering gift, and praise is the appropriate response. But praise doesn’t come easy for us. Praise is what we give when we recognize the depth of another’s actions – in this case, God’s toward us. Praise means we have to lower ourselves to increase the object receiving it. It requires thought and an intentional response. “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love,” When we think of God’s mercy, may we prostrate ourselves before God in praise. **Psalm 145:1-8, Psalm 150**

Wednesday, September 18th: I’m always fascinated by the many ways the Old Testament points to Jesus our Messiah. One that especially caught my attention recently was the showbread in the tabernacle. Why did God make it one of the provisions for the Holy Place? First of all, its name is literally “bread of the presence” to remind us that He is always with us. It was also to be a constant reminder that man does not live by bread alone, and the loaves were to be continually placed before the Lord and were to be eaten by the priests when new loaves were placed on the table, which was every Sabbath. We are told that the bread was still fresh even after seven days. This reminds us that Jesus, the bread of life, is always with us, always fresh/relevant, and He will “give us this day our daily bread” continually to sustain us. And we are now the priesthood that is to be in His presence continually, relying on Him and serving Him, offering up our sacrifices of praise and service. Each new revelation of how He has always desired for us to see and know Him in everything He does deepens my faith and love for Him. He is such a good, good Father! **1 Peter 2:5-9; Hebrews 10:11-25**

Thursday, September 19th: What authority does Jesus have in our lives? What role do we play in granting that authority? And how might it change us to acknowledge it more completely? From our perspective, the priests and elders may seem silly to question Jesus about his authority. But from their point of view, this man was a threat. Just before this encounter Jesus physically kicked people out of the temple who were selling animals to be used as sacrificial offerings, which was a time-honored religious practice of the day. Now he's giving some kind of public lecture. It's no surprise that the temple officials are outraged. Who does this guy think He is? And who approved this class He's offering? Jesus had a habit of "turning the tables" wherever he went. He upset the established religious and social order by standing up for those who were disadvantaged in His society. And He continually challenged those in power to use that power to benefit others rather than for their own advantage and status. How is He still challenging us today? What would He say about the systems we're a part of? And what happens if we are willing to give Him authority in our lives? Pray-Lord, help me to see from your perspective and allow your authority to enter more and more into my world. **Matthew 21:23**

Friday, September 20th: It's not what we put into our mouths that can pollute us but rather that which comes out of our mouths. In fact, in Matthew 15 Jesus uses the word defile which means to corrupt or ruin! With that in mind you would think we would be more mindful with the words we speak. But we also know that the tongue is one of the last things we learn to master. It's so easy to let a snide remark, a harsh retort, a juicy piece of gossip roll glibly off the tongue, and once said the damage is done. How many relationships or reputations have been damaged or destroyed by careless words? So what can we do? The answer is to draw near to God and submit to Him. When we are listening to Him, we can rest assured that our words will reflect His nature and give grace to those who hear them. There are countless scriptures which advocate the benefits of guarding our speech – look for yourself and listen to what He may be saying to you. Lord, we ask that You would let no corrupt communication proceed from our mouths; instead let our speech be seasoned with grace, that it may bless those who hear it. **Matthew 15:11; Ephesians 4:29; Proverbs 15:4**

Saturday, September 21st: As a young camp director I was both excited and intimidated when the pastor would come to visit our camp. He was someone I deeply admired, and he was also my boss. So I confess that it made me slightly nervous to have him on site, just as it would for any worker to have their supervisor observing them. All of this was disarmed one afternoon as I walked from one camp activity to another and happened to see my pastor sweeping up one of the common areas where campers would gather during free time. No one had asked him to do this. No one was there to see it. I'm sure that some would have been appalled to see him doing something so menial, but there he was happily sweeping away. He put aside his status as pastor to do something needed and kind. Jesus' example calls us to give up our positions of power to serve whenever possible. By humbling ourselves, we lift others up. How can you let go of your status to benefit others? Pray-God, thank you for your humility and that you were willing to give up your place to show your love for all of humankind. Help me to set aside my own standing in service of others. **Philippians 2:5-11**

Sunday, September 22nd: Reach out. Reach out to those in difficulty. "Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world," St. Teresa says. Paintings of Jesus never portray him with his arms crossed or his hands behind his back. He is always reaching out, touching a child, holding a lamb, blessing those around him. What do pictures of us look like? Are we reaching out to those in difficulty? Today's scripture-**James 1:27** says that when we reach out, we are showing our devotion, our love for God. When our aim is devotion, we keep from becoming contaminated or corrupted by the world's ways. You've often heard: We are to be IN the world, not OF the world. Let us not stay isolated and insulated; instead, let us be devoted to God and to showing God's care for others. Let us continually reach out as the loving, pure, caring hands of Christ. Be encouraged- *Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) "Christ has no body now but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.*
Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

Monday, September 23rd: Do you ever feel like you've failed God miserably? Maybe you're harboring some sin that makes you feel totally unworthy of coming into His presence or even calling out to Him. Are you ashamed or afraid that there's something in your past that others might find out about, and it could disqualify you from ever being of service or accepted? St. Augustine once said, "There is no saint without a past, no sinner without a future." Take a moment to consider some of the great heroes of the Bible: David, Abraham, Paul. David, a murderer and adulterer, is called a man after God's own heart. Abraham, the father of many nations, was a liar. Paul was a chief persecutor of the church before his conversion, but once he had been captivated by the grace of His Lord and Savior, he penned the amazing words, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, not things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us (you) from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Got that? We are all sinners, but when we accepted Him as Lord and Savior we were also ushered into sainthood. His mercies are new every morning because we need them every morning. Nothing is too big for Him. He loves you! Accept His forgiveness and rejoice in your regeneration. **Romans 8:38-39; Titus 3:5**

Tuesday, September 24rd: As followers of Jesus, we have committed to a life of faith and discipleship. We reaffirm this initial commitment with a fresh commitment to follow Christ each day. Scripture invites us to choose today whom we will serve, whom we will follow. Will you follow Jesus today? Where might the Spirit of God lead you? A lesson that I learned from my ill-fated time in the garden is that harvests take patience. A good gardener must commit to work for a season before enjoying the crop. If I had learned this lesson sooner, maybe my pumpkins would have sprouted (even if they didn't win a prize). Scripture recognizes this principle and encourages us, "Let's not get tired of doing good." **Galatians 6:9-10** The author, inspired by Holy Spirit, recognized that getting tired is easy to do. Sometimes we labor, and it seems like our work is in vain. We want to quit — quit praying, quit serving, quit loving. Against this temptation, we have the promise that a harvest is coming ... if we don't give up. So let's use this season to recommit to doing good for those around us, especially for our sisters and brothers in the church. As we commit to love one another and share one another's burdens, we equip and encourage one another to share this same love with the rest of the world. Pray-Father, forgive me when I grow tired of doing good. Strengthen me through your Spirit and your people to work for the good of all at every opportunity. Help me to share this same grace with others to sustain them as well.

Wednesday, September 25th: My kids used to love the movie *An American Tail*. It's about the Russian/Jewish Mousekewitz family who are moving to America where they believe there are no cats! However, the young star Fievel gets separated from his family upon arriving in New York and learns, to his horror, that there *are* cats in America too. He even finds himself befriending one! In a particularly poignant scene Fievel is gazing into the night sky and finds comfort in the fact that he and his family could very well be looking at the exact same star. You see, Fievel knew that he was still connected with his family, and the only thing separating them was physical distance. That's really true of all of us. There are going to be "cats" anywhere we go, but just because they're not like us doesn't mean we have to automatically fear them because that's what we've been programmed to do. We see the same beauty in creation and share the love of the same God. He loves them even when they don't yet know Him. He's the God of all the nations and He reveals Himself to them as much as He does to us. Praise and thank Him for His immeasurable love and for the reality that He just extended your family exponentially. **Genesis 1:27; Isaiah 64:8**

Thursday, September 26th: Of all the things you could be doing at this very moment, nothing is more important than experiencing God's presence. Don't let anything interrupt this special time with God. Set aside any worries, lists, and distractions.

When I was in tenth grade, one day my teacher was late to class. I started entertaining my classmates by impersonating my tardy teacher. I didn't see her walk in behind me while my show went on. After watching for a moment she calmly asked the class, "What's everyone laughing about?" I was mortified! Thankfully, the teacher was kind enough to drop the issue. Jesus knew what the disciples were arguing about on the road. But instead of humiliating them, He humbled them by teaching them what true greatness looks like. It was a tough lesson — one that the disciples needed to learn if they were going to change the world. Not every lesson God teaches is easy to hear, but if we are willing to be humbled we will find that God speaks clearly, regularly, and lovingly. Listen for God speaking to you and to whatever challenges you're going through today. Seek wisdom. Expect to be changed and empowered. **Mark 9:33-35**

Friday, September 27th: When his father Hezekiah died, Manasseh became king and not only rebuilt the high places but also built altars to foreign gods in the house of the Lord and did more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed. We are told that the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people but they paid no attention. Therefore God allowed Manasseh to be taken captive by the king of Assyria. That got his attention and he humbled himself before God and cried out to Him, and the Lord answered. Then he knew the Lord was God and rectified his misdeeds except the high places were not removed, and it says the people still sacrificed in the high places, but “only to the Lord their God.” It’s moving in the right direction, but how many pagan practices do we still accept because we’ve tried to sanitize them in the guise of trying to make them more Christian? Things rooted in Eastern religions or the occult I don’t think can be adequately “cleaned up” enough to make them pleasing to God. We have to be guarded and discerning in how we practice our faith, always seeking to align with what He says. Remember His response to Uzzah and the ox cart! (**2 Samuel 6:1-7**) Ask Him to quicken our minds to anything that would be contrary to His word and not to compromise in how we follow Him. **Psalm 119:1-4; Colossians 2:8; 2 Timothy 2:5**

Saturday, September 28th: Often, when life isn't working out the way we imagined or hoped, our impulse is to pray for God to change things. We think, "if only" things were different, "if only" people were better, "if only" our needs were met, "if only" the pain went away, "if only" the choices were simple, "if only" temptation disappeared, "if only, if only..." Sometimes God does transform situations, but more often, God changes us... if only we ask. Being in partnership with God is no easy calling. Together, God and Moses accomplished the impossible: the people's freedom. Together, God and Moses would lead the people through forty years of desert wandering and to a Promised Land. And together, God and Moses would care for the peoples' needs — body and soul — along the way. When Moses felt overwhelmed with this responsibility, he knew he could turn to his partner, the God of freedom, the God of promise, the God of care. He knew he didn't have to shoulder the heavy burden on his own. Just as God had provided manna for the people, God would provide for Moses, too! Moses asked God for exactly what he needed: a relief from the weight of responsibility. Being in partnership with God is no lonely calling, because we can trust God to hear our anger, our fatigue, our sadness. We can trust God to help us carry our heaviest struggles. And we can trust God to provide for us in surprising ways.
Numbers 11:14-15

Sunday, September 29th: At the time of this writing, the U.S. economy is strong and the trend is upward. So why is there so much unrest, discontent, violence and depression in our country? One of the reasons is actually linked to our prosperity. You see, money really can't buy you love. Thank you, Paul McCartney. In fact, studies show that wealth can inhibit a person's ability to experience satisfaction with simple pleasures. We can become so consumed with wanting more or coveting what others have that we fail to appreciate what we already do have. As James tells us, this can lead to quarrels, jealousy, arrogance, and selfish ambition. And we are told that whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. The Amplified likens it to unfaithful spouses who are having illicit love affairs with "the world" and thus breaking their marriage vow to God! This is falling victim to the enticements of the flesh — the devil. The good news is that if we choose to draw near to God, He will draw near to us. When we treasure Him, He gives a greater grace, and He says that He will then exalt us. The only true happiness, joy and contentment we will ever find is in Him. So allow yourself to appreciate the gift but love the Giver. After all, every good and perfect gift is from Him. **James 4:1-4; Hebrews 13:5**

Monday, September 30th: Everyone needs to be reminded that God creates us with a calling for each of our lives. Everyone is given gifts that need to be shared with the world. You can be an agent of change in our world. You can empower anyone, no matter what age, to make a change in their life and to follow God's call.

Have you ever flown on an airplane at night? I am always amazed that even at very high altitudes, a single street lamp or beams of light from a car are visible. In the middle of the darkness even the tiniest lights make a difference. Today's scripture reminds us of that important truth. We may feel we have little to offer. It may seem to us that our "light" doesn't shine very brightly. Remember, however, that in the middle of the darkness, even the tiniest of lights make a difference. It isn't how bright your light shines or how large your light may be. What is important is that you shine! In a world of injustice and hate, shine your light of peace and dignity. In a world of rejection and hurt, shine your light of acceptance and healing. Wherever you may live, there are people who need to see your light of hope shining. Don't hide it...shine!

Matthew 5:14-16

