

Prayer Devotions



May 2021

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:

Morocco

Mali

Qatar

Daily Prayers for May "This is our time on the history line of God. This is it. What will we do with the one deep exhale of God on this earth? For we are but a vapor and we have to make it count. We're on. Direct us, Lord, and get us on our feet." - Beth Moore

Saturday, May 1st: When I was in grade school, there was a tradition on the first day of May – it was May Basket Day. The idea was to make a basket of sorts, often out of colored construction paper, fill it with flowers or small treats, and hang it on the door knob of someone you cared about or wanted to bless – or someone in whom you had a special interest. Then you rang the doorbell and ran so the recipient wouldn't know who was blessing them. Sadly this practice has fallen by the wayside, but wouldn't it be nice, even the Christian thing to do, to make it a regular practice of letting others know they are special to us and especially now during a time of extended isolation for so many who feel a sense of hopelessness and of being forgotten. In fact, if there is an older (I hesitate to say elderly as I'm reluctant to put myself in that category) person who would remember the tradition, why not make a May basket and leave it at their door? Or maybe you could restart the tradition. You could even include a special Scripture verse such as **Numbers 6:24-26** and a personal note. This is remembering others and honoring them, blessing them and showing them the love of Jesus.

Hebrews 13:16; Galatians 6:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Sunday, May 2nd: The Robe of Righteousness: **Isaiah 64:6** TLB "We are all infected and impure with sin. When we put on our prized robes of righteousness, we find they are but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves we fade, wither, and fall. And our sins, like the wind, sweep us away." A stunning reminder that our works of righteousness are meaningless and will not give us right standing with God. Only the cross of Christ bears the burden for our sins. **2 Corinthians 5:21** "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." So, Christ paid in full with His death, the price for our sin and in so doing brought us into right standing with God through faith in Christ. There is nothing we can do to earn this right standing with God. It is the precious blood of Jesus that gives us the victory. We have been given a robe of righteousness, purchased by the death of Jesus. Christ died for all that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Monday, May 3rd: K-Love has an interesting practice for Mondays called Mad Monday. Many people consider Monday something of a downer because it's the first day of the traditional work week, but instead of being "mad" about it, K-Love encourages listeners to use the day to "Make A Difference" in some way. Put even more simply, be the hands and feet of Jesus. There are so many ways we can make a difference in someone's life or in our community, and it doesn't have to be something big. It could be a phone call to someone you know is hurting or feeling isolated, a warm smile or a compliment to a random stranger, letting the young mom with the screaming toddler to go ahead of you in the check-out like...even though her cart is filled! Or maybe you could pick up the trash in your neighborhood or at a local park. Say thank you often and with sincerity to those who serve you. There are opportunities surrounding us every day, and most of them cost us little more than awareness and possibly some time out of our normal schedule. Even if no one seems to notice or shows appreciation, you have a Daddy who sees and smiles because He sees His kids walking in His footsteps. You don't even have to limit being a "mad" sort of person to Mondays. Why not practice being the positive difference in someone's day every day.

Philippians 2:1-2; Matthew 25:35-40; Hebrews 10:23-24

Tuesday, May 4th: I was listening to a teaching on fasting, and I am a firm believer in this practice when we use it as a means to put our focus on hearing from God without distraction. That said, another thought occurred to me. Usually the first three days of a fast are the most difficult as the craving for food is still pretty intense, but thereafter it becomes much easier to maintain. On a negative note, the same holds true with the regularity of our spiritual intake. If we aren't used to digesting the word on a daily basis there's a good chance we could go for extended stretches of time without ever opening our Bibles, listening to the word, or even praying. Just like fasting, we may survive for a time, but eventually if there's no nourishment we're going to die. Intermittent dieting isn't much better – you know, maybe only eating once a week. It's not healthy and it will never sustain you. If we want to be spiritually healthy enough to fight off the ravages of sin and be successful in maintaining our vigor, then we need to be feeding our spirits with a steady diet of solid food. And if you're one of those people who have trouble with certain diets because there isn't enough variety, try reading different translations to "keep it fresh." Once you establish your regimen, you will hopefully find that missing a day or two leaves you hungering to return to that which sustains you. Stay healthy!

Psalm 119:9-12; Romans 15:4; 1 Peter 2:2

Wednesday, May 5th: In the past when I've used the expression "raise the standard" I didn't fully understand the implication and origin of it. In Biblical times a standard was a banner that was used for identification and often as a rallying point for battle. Each of the 12 tribes had their unique banner to identify whose camp they belonged to and it promoted a sense of community and strength. The two Hebrew words used for banner or standard are *degel* and *nes*. *Degel* means standard in the sense of a regulation as a rule of conduct. *Nes* denotes a signal or sign and is from the root *nasas* which means to be high or conspicuous. When all of that come together we get the idea of a conspicuous identity that conforms to a high rule of conduct – high standard. When the standard, or banner, was raised up on a signal pole, everyone who saw it knew that if it was theirs it was time to rally. When the enemies of Israel saw the standard raised by Moses it struck fear into their hearts because they knew it represented the living God and His power. **(Isaiah 59:19-21) – "...so shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him."** We now use that concept to indicate our particular code of ethics, and as the church of Jesus Christ we need to fully embrace some of the basic caveats that carries with it. First, it isn't our banner – it's His, and He has graciously grafted us into His tribe. As such, we have the protection and power that are afforded to those who rally under Him. We also need to be mindful of the fact that those outside the camp are also aware of whose tribe we claim, and they want to witness in us what the standards are that we are representing. We have a weighty responsibility to "raise the standard" of our lives and conduct in order to honor His kingdom and to aptly represent Him as a unified body, ready to defend His name in the strength, power of His might according to His standards.

Isaiah 62:10-12; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 4:5-6

Thursday, May 6th: Today is the National Day of Prayer, and although it wasn't written into law until 1952 by President Harry Truman, the need for such was recognized by the Continental Congress in 1775 and reiterated by President Lincoln in 1863. Those were critical times in our country's history, and now is definitely another such time. A designated day of prayer has great significance for us as a nation as it enables us to recall and to teach the way in which our founding fathers sought the wisdom of God when faced with critical decisions. It stands as a call for us to humbly come before God, seeking His guidance for our leaders and His grace upon us as a people. The very fact that the bill establishing the National Day of Prayer as an annual event was passed unanimously by Congress should signify that prayer was deemed as important to our nation in the period following WW2 as it was in the beginning. We can only wonder what the count would be today if it were again put to a vote. All the more reason for us as a nation to be on our knees. We are asked to address the impact on family and church in the seven major areas of influence: education, workplace, military, government, art, entertainment, and the media; asking for His intervention, guidance, and for His church to be active and vocal in standing for truth and being a godly influence in each of these arenas as opportunities arise. For more detailed ideas on how to pray, you can go to the National Day of Prayer website: <https://www.nationaldayofprayer.org> and click on equipping. Lord, we are asking You to pour out Your love, life, and liberty through the power of Your Spirit, because where the Spirit is, there is liberty.

1 Chronicles 7:14; 2 Corinthians 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Psalm 91

Friday, May 7th: Every day is one day closer to the Lord's return and none of us can know just when that will be, but today is one day closer than yesterday and tomorrow the same can be said. That means if we have done nothing to ensure we are prepared for that day today, we've lost precious time. The hard truth is that Jesus IS coming back, and we should be mindful of that with how we conduct ourselves and where our priorities are set. The one thing we do know is that the day will come like a thief, and the takeaway from that is thieves don't typically send an advance announcement giving you a timeline for their ETA. That's why people install cameras and alarm systems, why they have dead bolt locks on their doors, and why they put their lights on timers when they plan to be gone for awhile. Nobody likes to leave their homes unprotected. So why should we be any less concerned with being prepared for eternity? Home security systems come with an instruction manual and so does the plan for eternal security. It's called the Bible and for starters we should be frequently renewing our minds to conform to His will by reviewing His explanation of how it's all supposed to work. I've heard of people who will post a sign declaring they have a home security system to stave off invasion attempts, and that may deter amateurs from breaking in, but a professional knows the tricks of the trade and without anything to back up the declaration there is no protection. We need to make sure we've actually installed the system correctly (hidden the Word in our hearts) and are following the instructions as written. Just reading them isn't going to keep us secure – the system needs to be plugged in and fully charged. Sitting in the gym and watching others work out isn't going to improve our fitness any more than sitting in church without actively participating in what we're being taught will prepare us for eternity. Don't wait until tomorrow to safeguard something as precious as eternal security because the thief is always on the prowl for easy targets and we have no guarantees that he'll wait until later.

Matthew 24:42-51; 2 Peter 3:10-12; Romans 12:2

Saturday, May 8th: I've always been fascinated by the verse in Hebrews that says to show hospitality to strangers because in doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it. How could we possibly be unaware of them being angels? It doesn't say that Abraham knew the three men he encountered by the oaks of Mamre were angels at first. It would seem that they had the appearance of men, but as the story progresses their identity becomes more obvious. The two angels then proceeded to Sodom and were given lodging in the home of Lot. Again, it seems that Lot didn't recognize their true nature until they escorted him from the town before it was destroyed for its wickedness. Angels are messengers of God, and they can appear in human form, in what may be described as human form on steroids, or in dreams and visions. But when they are sent by our Father, it is always for our good to deliver important information or protection or to administer His justice against evil. And there are the modern day encounters such as the one experienced by Genelle Guzman-McMillan, the last survivor pulled from the wreckage of the Twin Towers who recounts the comfort she received from a "rescue worker" named Paul. Genelle had turned her back on the God her then deceased mother had always relied upon, but in her helplessness and fear she cried out to Him. When she finally saw a ray of light and called out, the rescue team acknowledged they could hear her but could not see her outstretched hand. And then a man who identified himself as Paul reassured her that she would be okay and began to firmly grip and squeeze her hand whenever the fear would surge through her body. Needless to say, there was no one on the team named Paul. We have no way of knowing if the person who helps us is one of God's special messengers, but what we can know is that He is always looking out for us and is ready to dispatch the heavenly host if need be. Thank Him for His provision and protection, and never discount strangers who could be working undercover on your behalf.

Hebrews 1:13-14, 13:2; Psalm 91:11-12

Sunday, May 9th: The well-known theologian Karl Barth was asked by a reporter, “Sir, you have written huge volumes about God. Tell me, how do you know it is all true?” According to the story, he answered, “My mother told me.” As simplistic as that may sound, it reveals a truth that many of us may relate to. Oftentimes our first memories of hearing about God’s love for us and seeing it lived out are linked to our mothers. The influence of godly mothers in the home is incalculable, yet our culture tends to put more value on glory in the public arena than on building stable, healthy families. Too often a mother’s contribution is undervalued and overlooked, but mothers need affirmation and tenderness just as much as the rest of their family members. Even as He hung on the cross, Jesus showed His concern and compassion for His mother in telling one of His closest disciples to take care of her as if she were his own. If your mother is still living, let her know that she is special and thank her for how she shaped your life, even if she didn’t always live up to your expectations. If she is gone, thank God for who she was. And if she was not a good mother or possibly left scars, ask God to help you forgive her and to heal you as He shows you His purpose in all of it. If you are a mother yourself, ask God to continue to equip and guide you in caring for your family. We never outgrow our need for moms or the role of being Mom. Thank You, Father, for the gift of God fearing women in our lives who reveal to us Your compassion, patience and love.

John 19:25-27; Proverbs 17:6, 31:25-31

Monday, May 10th: Driving home, I heard the song “In the River” by Jesus Culture and the lyrics made me think of Ezekiel 47. The prophet speaks of the Lord showing him a man with a measuring rod who shows the prophet water flowing to the east from under the temple. Each 1000 cubits the man measures, the water rises to the ankle...to the knee...to the waist...until finally it is a rushing torrent. This is symbolic of an outpouring of His Spirit on the church, empowering it to influence the entire earth. But this requires us to step out in faith. Ankle deep, wherever the soles of our feet tread will be claimed for Him. We must go. Knee deep, as we call out to Him, He will hear and move. We must pray. Waist deep, as we firmly stand, girded with the belt of truth, we are prepared for battle. We must believe. Then we must let the river carry us wherever He wills. So the lyrics of the song declare, “There is a current stirring deep inside, it's overflowing from the heart of God, the flood of heaven crashing over us, the tide is rising, rising.” Church, we cannot sit idly by and observe the rising waters; we must invite the Spirit to move mightily in us individually and corporately, and then we need to jump in. The tide is rising! Lord, let us come alive in the river.

Deuteronomy 11:24, 31:8; Isaiah 42:16; Ezekiel 47:1-9; Romans 12:1-2

Tuesday, May 11th: The Way, the Life, and the Truth: Psalm 106:1 "Praise the Lord! Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever." God demonstrated His love for us when Jesus, the Son of God, died a cruel and harsh death for us on the cross. We can now enter into His presence with thanksgiving, for the mercy He bestowed upon us, His beloved children. We are now made near by the blood of Christ. We can come boldly to the throne of grace and receive help in the time of need. John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus died so He could open the way to the Father. Jesus said He is the truth. There is no other way to the Father except by Jesus. Jesus said He is the life. 1 John 5:11 "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." Jesus is the ONLY way: Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:13, Hebrews 4:16

Wednesday, May 12th: **Psalm 119:12-13** 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 heart, and the psalmist states that he has *inclined* his heart to perform God's statutes. The implication here is that our default setting is not 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! No matter how stealthy we are in our "little indulgences" the effect will eventually become observable. We have to make a conscious, continuous inclination of our heart not only to see the destruction certain behaviors produce and to hate the result but also to desire the positive outcomes of walking in truth and obedience to His precepts. When we see the good this produces, we can learn to love the discipline which will achieve it.

Proverb 4:23; 1 John 2:15-17

Thursday, May 13th: Seek the Lord. My nature is goodness and mercy. My mercy is new for you each day. You are my great delight. I invite you into My presence to sit with Me awhile and let go of all the cares of the world. My peace I give to you. My banner over you is love. I have chosen to lead you in paths of righteousness for My name sake. I am restoring your soul. As you spend time in My presence, you will sense an eternal perspective and the things of the world become less important. In My presence is the fullness of joy. This joy is not based on circumstances but relationship with THE KING OF KINGS. My child, seek Me early and seek Me often. Ask for your spiritual eyes and ears to be fully opened to the living Christ. Set your mind on things above not on the things of earth. Lean on the everlasting arms. Walk with Me each day and I will lead you in the way I have prepared for you. Spend time in My presence daily. Remember, I am leading you in paths of righteousness for My name sake.

Friday, May 14th: I've been more aware lately of my thought processes – thinking about my thinking. Several things sort of jumped out at me. The first was to take note of when possibly unhealthy thoughts are most likely to occur: when I first wake up and am still a little foggy, or when I'm bored, depressed, stressed or fatigued. These are the times when I'm more vulnerable and consequently more apt to not notice the open door to potentially destructive thoughts. And that reminded me of the familiar phrase of entertaining a thought. Entertain is defined as: to hold the attention of agreeably; divert; amuse; to treat as a guest or show hospitality. It isn't the initial thought that pollutes our minds; it's what we do with the thought. When I'm in one of those vulnerable positions, I'm much more apt to be open to something that would divert my attention from boredom or frustration to something to amuse me or possibly vindicate the seed of bitterness that is looking for some fertile soil in which to take root. Am I allowing it to be treated as a guest in my mind? Am I accommodating it and making sure it has a comfortable place to rest and is well fed? Before I even open the door, I want to make sure the security door is locked – you know, the one that allows me to see who's at the door but still affords protection from them being able to come in. Just like I'm less likely to open the door at all if I'm still in my pajamas, I need to be more aware of what thoughts I'm inviting into my mind. Lord, keep me alert to those thoughts that are not of You and give me discernment that will keep me from ever even considering entertaining them. In fact, help me to so fill my mind with Your thoughts and words that I won't even be tempted to give entrance to uninvited callers.

Psalm 119:11; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8

Saturday, May 15th: Sometimes there can be a very real temptation to go into ministry because we long to receive the affirmation from others of being used mightily of God and to be looked to as a “chaplain”, a “pastor”, a “teacher”, an “apostle”, a “prophet”. There unquestionably can and should be a respect for those who hold these positions, but if we are aspiring to such a position we need to honestly examine our hearts to establish what our expectations are and why we feel led to pursue that calling. In fact, we need to first confirm that it is truly a calling and not a fleshly desire. If you read the Biblical job description for apostle or prophet, it may not sound so glamorous – condemned to death, a spectacle to the world, looked upon as fools, without honor, hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, working with their own hands, reviled, slandered, scum of the earth...you get the picture. The point is, sacrifices need to be made. God sacrificed His only Son on our behalf; what are we willing to sacrifice? Too often we want to get by with the minimum daily requirement of sacrifice on our part. We’re willing to attend services regularly, serve once-a-week in some ministry, and maybe even tithe if we’re really gung ho. But in order to truly serve, our hearts have to be 100% convinced that He is completely worthy of anything we have to surrender. And to be clear, if regular attendance, serving and tithing are done in the right spirit they may be the embodiment of what we are able to offer as a sacrifice of praise in our particular season. The only ones who really know your heart are you and God, and you may be able to fool yourself but He is never fooled. Lord, we ask You to show us our hearts that we might understand one of our highest callings is that of being willing to suffer in this life in order to honor You and bring You glory.

1 Corinthians 4:8-13; Colossians 3:23-24; Mark 10:45

Sunday, May 16th: The idea of holiness is too often disregarded, dismissed, denied, and frankly misunderstood by many Christians. We either allocate it to an elite few whose lifestyle is beyond our perceived ability to attain or perhaps not something we would honestly want to pursue. Or we might even feel that we have already attained a sufficient degree of holiness and there's no need for us to continue to pursue it. Self righteousness is actually more dangerous than unrighteousness because it denies our continuing need for God. Such an attitude precludes us from living the life that God designed for us and as a result will keep us from ever reaching His best. It's not only a pretty cavalier and disrespectful approach to the throne of grace, it's downright dangerous if you take a closer look at Scripture. Many scholars feel that the Western Church most closely identifies with the church at Laodicea which is described as being neither hot nor cold. The indictment against them reveals that they see themselves as being rich and in need of nothing when in fact in God's eyes they are wretched, miserable, blind, poor and naked! Can you imagine showing up for church and being stark naked?! Only in your nightmares, right? You would never dream of excuses like you were just too busy, forgot to put on any clothes, or didn't have anything that struck your fancy. Yet we often fail to take seriously the need to be clothed in holiness. We are told in **Hebrews 12:14**, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." The root for sanctification is *hagios* which means to be made holy. We can't approach a holy God if we are not pursuing holiness, but it isn't an impossible task. God would never require something that was unattainable and through Jesus He has provided an avenue, but it's our responsibility to follow His guidelines. We need to take an honest appraisal of our heart condition and then begin clothing ourselves in the robes of His righteousness, thus displaying our respect and holy fear of Him. This is the only garment we need, but it is essential.

Romans 13:11-14; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 3:27

Monday, May 17th: The story of Hagar is interesting in how it represents us. She was the maidservant of Sarai and at the behest of her mistress was given to Abram to take as his wife in the hopes of producing an heir since Sarai was childless. It isn't too difficult to see that the root of the problem was in a lack of understanding and trust in God's promise. So when Hagar becomes pregnant she forgets where she came from and that fact that although she has received a blessing, she is still a maidservant. Consequently, she becomes smug in her attitude toward Sarai, and even though it was originally Sarai's idea, in typical female fashion she turns around and places blame on Abram. And from here the story continues to go downhill. Sarai now resents Hagar and treats her harshly, and Abram's response is to basically throw it back at Sarai and tell her, "Hey, she's your maid (doesn't use her name or even refer to her as his wife), do whatever you want! By now Hagar is beginning to see the writing on the wall, so to speak, and takes off into the desert, but the Lord finds her and tells her to go back and *submit herself to the authority* of her mistress. Even though the son she is carrying will not receive the promise, God will prosper him, and in typical God fashion, He is true to His word. When I forget that grace is a gift and forget that I am a servant, when I develop an attitude of privilege, I am being a Hagar. When I become too doubtful of God's promise or try to take matters into my own hands for Him (pride played out in both my attitude towards Him and others), I'm being a Sarai. And when I allow others to influence me to make a decision that I know is contrary to what He has said and then not take responsibility when it blows up in my face, I'm being an Abram. God used each one of these people, and in His typical beautiful fashion wove their failures into His future, but I wonder sometimes if there might have been a Plan B. It's a moot point, but it personally makes me want to be very intentional and aware of what He has said when I make decisions because I want to always be working with Him rather than without, or even worse, against Him. (Gen. 16:9)

Proverbs 3:5-6; Romans 12:2-3; James 4:17

Tuesday, May 18th: *Fight or Flight?* I'm in the flight camp, or at least I've always been until now. Lately the Lord has been shifting my thinking. I have had a tendency to run from anything unpleasant: from something that was just annoying (like a neighbor who talks on and on), to the pain of a relationship where I felt rejection. If my job was too difficult or I wasn't succeeding, I would simply quit and find another one.

This is not a good pattern and certainly not a godly one. God's word teaches us to persevere and to wait on Him, but we need to desire to know Him above everything else in order to do that. I think that's the question we need to ask ourselves: "Do I really want to know God? Am I willing to endure this thing, however unpleasant or painful, so our relationship is closer and I know Him better?"

The Apostle Paul writes in **Philippians 3:10,11**, that nothing in life compares to knowing Jesus, and that we can experience Jesus-- becoming more thoroughly acquainted with Him, understanding the remarkable wonders of His Person more completely-- as we share the **fellowship of His sufferings**. God often uses pain and suffering to conform us into His image and to meet us in the midst of that hurt in a very special way.

"Fellowship of His sufferings' means that we become friends, we have communion and share ourselves in a special way. It is what leads to intimacy, and there is no better thing on this planet than that kind of closeness with Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit!

So, I am trying to remind myself when encountering a painful situation that it may be an opportunity to know Jesus in a deeper way and to take a deep breath, asking the Holy Spirit to give me the strength to stay, to pray, and to trust God for His grace and presence in order that (along with the Apostle Paul), "I might know Christ more intimately, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it."

Wednesday, May 19th: We all have questions. Why am I/are we going through this? When is it ever going to end? What am I supposed to do now? A better question for us to be asking might be, what does it matter? It all boils down to this – God does have a purpose, it will ultimately be to refine us and to bring Him glory, and everything we do needs to be related to those truths. In other words, if it doesn't support His purpose then it doesn't have any eternal value. That's what matters. We often spend far too much time worrying about what other people think or about temporal matters when our time would be much better spent asking God to direct our thoughts to Him first. Let's face it, people are fickle and although we should respect their right to their opinions, what God has to say about a matter trumps every other opinion. The enemy has been doing a pretty good job at distracting and discouraging us, making some to question whether God really is good or if He even sees or cares. That would be a resounding yes to each of those questions, but we won't see it if we're too hung up on the circumstances. The bottom line is that we're here now and it's no accident. God wasn't caught off guard and His timing for us has a purpose. Rather than blaming a political party or any other source, pointing fingers and try to figure out who's responsible, let's instead seek to understand the why behind it. Nobody asks or cares who puts the microphone on the stage because we understand why it's there. It has to be there in order for the message to be amplified and heard. Perhaps we should see this as the perfect platform for His message to be amplified. *Who knows but you have come to this place for such a time as this! (Esther 4:14)*

Proverbs 16:4; Ephesians 1:9-12; 2 Timothy 1:7-10

Thursday, May 20th: We can't ask someone else to diet and go to the gym for us and expect to see any results in our physique! Without personal investment and discipline it is impossible to get in shape physically. In the same way, our faith has to be personal. Just because we were raised going to Sunday school and now we attend weekend services at least most of the time, there's no guarantee that we have a solid faith or that it's growing the way it should. According to Billy Graham – *Faith* simply *means* believing that something is true, and then committing our lives to it. The extent of our faith will be demonstrated in how we live. If we believe that what God says is true and that He knows what is best for us, we will obey Him even when we may not understand the reason for His commands and when doing so may cause us a certain degree of discomfort, embarrassment, or even persecution. We are told to trust Him with all our hearts, in all our ways acknowledge Him and *then* He will make our paths straight. And we are to persevere in following, in it for the long haul and willing to stay the course even when we don't see immediate results. We wouldn't give up bread for one day and then give up the diet because the number on the scale the next morning hadn't changed! We need to have a solid belief that God really is who He says He is because without faith we are told that it is impossible to please Him. As all parents know, if your children are not minding you or doing those things that are pleasing you won't love them any less, but you also will not be rewarding them. The same is true of our heavenly Father. Isn't His favor something we all desperately need and hope for? Faith is our assurance.

Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 11:1, 6; Romans 15:13

Friday, May 21st Created to Shine: I have created the stars and even named them. Everything has a purpose. When you look at the night sky, you see My handiwork providing light. You can see the beauty of those stars that shine so brightly for you. Just as the stars have purpose, so you also have purpose. Just as I know the name of each star, I know your name. Did you know that your name is engraved on the palm of My hands? Just as the stars do shine, you were also created to shine for My glory. **Revelation 4:11** "You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For You created everything, and it is for Your pleasure that they exist and were created." I have created you with unique gifts and callings. My desire is to shine My light upon you so that you will be a reflection of the love of Jesus to others. I am the fountain of life. I will give you beauty for ashes and your life will shine for others to see. You are now a new creation. The old nature is gone. You are radiant! I will lead you day by day and show you the way. Isaiah 30:21 "Your ears will hear a word behind you, this is the way, walk in it, whenever you turn to the right or to the left." Walk with Me in My presence and I will make My face to shine upon thee.

Saturday, May 22nd: I have a constant battle against weeds in my lawn, and I know that if I use pre-emergence or pull them when they first appear they are much easier to control. Unfortunately I don't always do that, either because of time or weather issues or because I just choose to ignore them until I realize they absolutely have to go. When they've been allowed to establish healthy roots they are much more difficult to eradicate, but I've found that if I deep water the lawn they are so much easier to get rid of. Some are harder than others and I need to use a digging tool to ensure the roots are loosened, but others can be pulled with little effort. The Lord used this to remind me that the same is true of those undesirable attitudes and practices in my walk with Him. They're just as unsightly and detrimental to my spiritual health as weeds are to my lawn, and if I ignore them they will eventually take over and crowd out the healthy growth. When I procrastinate or just plain ignore them, they take root and put up a formidable challenge to being eliminated. However, if my "soil" is dry and hardened I know I'm going to have a much greater task ahead of me. The obvious solution then is to be proactive and address the issues when they first appear, but when I discover that some of them are beginning to get out of hand, I need to begin softening my heart with the water of the Word. Then He can help me dig out any stubborn roots of bitterness or disobedience that are competing against the healthy seed that He has planted in me and are keeping me from displaying His goodness and beauty. Lord, help me to remember to soften my heart with the watering of Your word every day and to be diligent to address every noxious thought that seeks to take root.

2 Corinthians 10:5; Proverbs 28:13-14; Galatians 6:7-9

Sunday, May 23rd: 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 are reflecting to those around us the indescribable peace and joy of God. And when we practice these things, we are promised that the God of peace will be with us.

Philippians 4:4-9; Romans 15:13

Monday, May 24rd: For many the thought of witnessing is intimidating at the very least. What if we offend the person we're speaking to or they become confrontational? Then what? One of the biggest problems is that they don't even know they need saving and their reluctance is just putting them in jeopardy. In seamanship training we had to do periodic "man overboard" drills, and one of the tactics that needed to be employed was if the person being rescued began to fight when you were trying to pull them to safety, you shoved them under water to render them first startled and thus less defensive. There wasn't much concern with whether or not this offended them. Obviously we aren't going to do something quite that drastic, but we need to have a strategy for getting their attention and for stating our case. Pray for God to give you creative ideas so you will be prepared ahead of time. We are called to be His witnesses. Think of it as a fireman fulfilling his calling to enter a burning building. He doesn't do so without the protection of fire gear that shields him from the flames. Our God is so much more than that. And in the process, He is refining and strengthening us to become more and more of who we were created to be, and right now there are a lot of folks needing to be snatched from the fire. Gear up and go.

Mark 16:15-16; Ephesians 6:10-18; Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15

Tuesday, May 25th: To God be the Glory!

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...” **Isaiah 64:6**. "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone." **Mark 10:18**

Here's my question to you: Do you truly in your heart of hearts believe these verses? For example, when people have said to you how good you were, did you agree deep down with them? See, I think the truth is sometimes very hard to swallow. We want to believe that we ARE good—or at least better than the next person! Yet, here is God's Holy Word in black and white telling us that there is not one spec of goodness in us, unless it is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Recently our Heavenly Father, our wonderful vinedresser (**John 15:1**) has been snipping away at my ugly self-righteousness, showing me over and over that the only righteousness we can experience is when we come to Jesus and abide in Him.

And here's what happens when we think we, rather than God, are the author of our goodness: we get self-righteous, and self-righteousness leads to judging others and an attitude of contempt. It also leads to a desire for glory (credit for being or doing good). This is very dangerous, as God's states in **Isaiah 42:8**: "I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another..." Make no mistake that accepting the glory for yourself leads to destruction (**Proverbs 16:18** "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.").

One example in scripture from the Old Testament describes a Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who looked at his kingdom and concluded, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" God humbled him in a dramatic way! Read **Daniel 4** to find out what happened.

Another example is in **Acts 12: 21-23**: "So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died." The next time you're tempted to give yourself a pat on the back, flip your hand over and raise it to the ONLY ONE who is truly good and deserves ALL the GLORY!

Wednesday, May 26th: If we are truly just the product of chance, then there's no reason to search for purpose in life. It would make no sense to expect to find a purpose in chaos and random occurrence. But if we were actually intentionally created for a reason, then our primary goal ought to be to discover that purpose and do everything within our power to maximize the fulfillment of it or we will have totally missed the point. How we live out our lives is evidence of which of these two ideas we believe, or rather how fully we believe them. If we're only the product of years of evolution from primordial slime that somehow randomly came together as humans, why are so many people obsessed with finding the meaning of life? And I've always been curious as to why we don't still see examples of these in-between homo sapiens wandering around. Why would anyone expect to find meaning and purpose in totally chance happenings? But conversely, if we believe in a Creator whose intent for our lives is to know Him and to make Him known and that each of us has a particular bent and calling, why are so many Christians simply professing the existence of a Creator while they go about their lives pursuing other things? We need to be willing to defend our understanding that all things were created by Him and for Him and that each of us is uniquely and wonderfully made to promote the plans of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Knowing whom we serve, we need to consistently be asking Him to reveal to us His specific plans for us as individuals, and we also need to be reading His word to have a firm grip on the broader expectations.

Ephesians 1:1-5, 2:10; Colossians 1:16; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 4:11

Thursday, May 27th: There have been some misleading teachings by professing Christians on the doctrine of grace. Their definition of grace is that it is divine enablement, and the meaning that they attach is that grace is what enables us to do the works that we need to do to attain righteousness. That can create a very slippery slope because the implication becomes grace plus... There is no salvation or righteousness apart from grace, and neither can be attained by any action on our part save that of accepting His free and unmerited gift. When it comes to salvation there are three principles that apply: justice is the principle of receiving what is deserved, mercy is not receiving what we deserve, and grace is receiving what we do not deserve. It's the unmerited favor of God and it is a gift. We are specifically told that it is not as a result of works, and if we try to attach works to the equation then it is no longer a gift. In essence we would be saying that the death of Jesus wasn't adequate! Think of it this way – how would you feel if someone gave you a beautiful birthday present, you received it joyfully, and they then informed you that you owed them \$87.50? Would it still be a gift? And to carry the analogy a bit further, what if the one giving the “gift” were to ask for three trillion dollars? That would make it beyond any hope of attainment through our own efforts and resources. But if it were indeed given, truly given as a gift, wouldn't your appreciation and thankfulness be beyond expression? All we are asked to do is to receive His gift in faith. And this extravagant gift will most certainly enable us to do great things, but it will be our choice as to how we appropriate it. Hopefully if you were given the priceless formula to the cure for cancer, you would choose to share it. You would use it for the purpose for which it was created. Through the priceless gift of grace we have been saved and equipped for good works and to proclaim His excellencies. Lord, may we never trivialize or hoard the amazing gift of grace. Help us to fully comprehend that there is nothing we could ever do to earn it, but instead to grow in our understanding and gratitude that You would choose to give us this incredible gift.

Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 2:16-21; Romans 11:6

Friday, May 28th: There is no doubt that we are engaged in a spiritual battle for the name of Jesus not to be rendered as insignificant, irrelevant, or intolerant. As Christians we need to be prejudiced against the sin but never the sinners. They are merely where we were before we came to know Him, and that has made all the difference. Our true adversary is using a full arsenal against the knowledge of Christ and those who have placed their full trust in Him, and one of his most effective strategies has been to depict us either as just one more option in the long list of religious choices or as a group of narrow-minded and elitist bigots. There can be no compromise on the singularity of Jesus being the only source of life and of God the Father being the one true God. Jesus made it pretty clear when He said that He is the way, the truth and the life. He didn't say one of the ways – He said **the** way and clarified by adding that no one comes to the Father except by Him. There is no plan B. We have to be unwavering in our conviction and presentation of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God who died in our place to satisfy once for all the penalty of sin. Any watering down of that makes Him out to be a liar or a lunatic. We have to offer more than a program to improve your morale or your morality; we have to offer the promise of eternity. So to combat the father of lies, we must stick to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. When we **lovingly** and **earnestly** do that, He will take care of the rest.

John 10:9-10, 14:6; Acts 4:12

Saturday, May 29th: For many of us, the idea of waiting will always be a challenge, but He will neither forsake nor disappoint. We may not feel joy in the waiting, but we should feel confidence and reassurance that we are not alone, and we will come out on the other end. Isaiah 43:2 tells us, “*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the waters, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you.*” He has even given us proof of those two promises: the Red Sea, the Jordan River, and three Jewish boys in a fiery furnace. He doesn’t say He will immediately (or ever) remove the trial, but He does promise to be with us and to do everything we need to help us get through it. We are even told not to be surprised at our own fiery trials because they are refining us and producing endurance, and the very word endurance suggests that there will be a time element involved in which we will need to wait on the Lord, anticipating His faithful deliverance at just the right time. We will never escape the testing of our faith, but we are assured that we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. He tells us to wait, to be of good courage, and He will strengthen our hearts! Amen to that.

Psalm 27:13-14; Lamentations 3:25; 1 Peter 4:12-14; James 1:2-4

Sunday, May 30th: I heard an intriguing phrase this past week – pretty ugly people. We so often form an unconscious first-impression opinion of others based on their appearance...or their perceived intelligence...or maybe how they smell. But just as all that glitters isn't necessarily gold, the converse can also be just as true – all that's gold may not always glitter. Some people are beautiful to look at and painful to be around. And then there are the people whom others may choose initially to shun, but once you really know them you realize how much richer you are as a result. I'm reminded of a time when I was in Junior High and a relative died. The funeral was in another town, and we had the dubious pleasure of transporting my mom's Uncle Alvin to the service. Uncle Alvin was rather simple and in want of a bath, and he jabbered almost incessantly the entire time he was in the car. My brother and I, who had the honor of sharing the back seat with him, would periodically shoot looks of alternating amusement and frustration behind his back. We could see the signs of mild irritation even on the faces of our parents. And then when we dropped him off at his home, he shyly smiled, thanked us, and then said, "Like Jesus said, even as you have done it to the least of these, you've done it to Me." We were cut to the quick. As we were smugly suffering through what we saw as a challenging inconvenience, Uncle Alvin was thanking God for seeing his need and providing for him through our perceived sacrifice. How self-righteous we were in our complete failure to see with the eyes of Jesus one of His servants, made in His image. Father, help us to see others as You do and to extend to them Your love, grace and mercy. Unless we receive an undeniable prompting from You, we leave any form of judgment solely in Your hands.

Luke 6:36-38; James 2:1-9, 13; 1 Peter 1:17-18

Monday, May 31st: On this Memorial Day, let us take a moment to remember all those who have served or have given their lives for our country. Let us also pray for and convey our thanks to their families and to those who are still serving. We cannot fully express the gratitude, appreciation, and respect they deserve in light of the sacrifices they have made. To everyone who serves in our military and to everyone who loves someone who serves in our military, thank you. The freedoms we enjoy were often won far from home in battlefields on foreign soil, and the price that was paid was so dear that few of us can even comprehend the cost. In many cases, their sacrifice was not only unappreciated, but they were even treated with disdain and now many of our veterans suffer from the ill effects of what they endured and, in many cases, don't receive the help they need. This is nothing short of a travesty. The following are some scriptures you can share with them and pray over them, and then let them know how much you value their willingness to fight for your freedom.

*We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers. We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. **1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 CSB***

*Give to everyone what you owe them: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. **Romans 13:7 NIV***

*No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. **John 15:13 CSB***

Lord, we ask that You would mightily bless and comfort those who have served or are currently serving in our armed forces. Protect and encourage them, and remind us to convey to them our gratitude and respect. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.