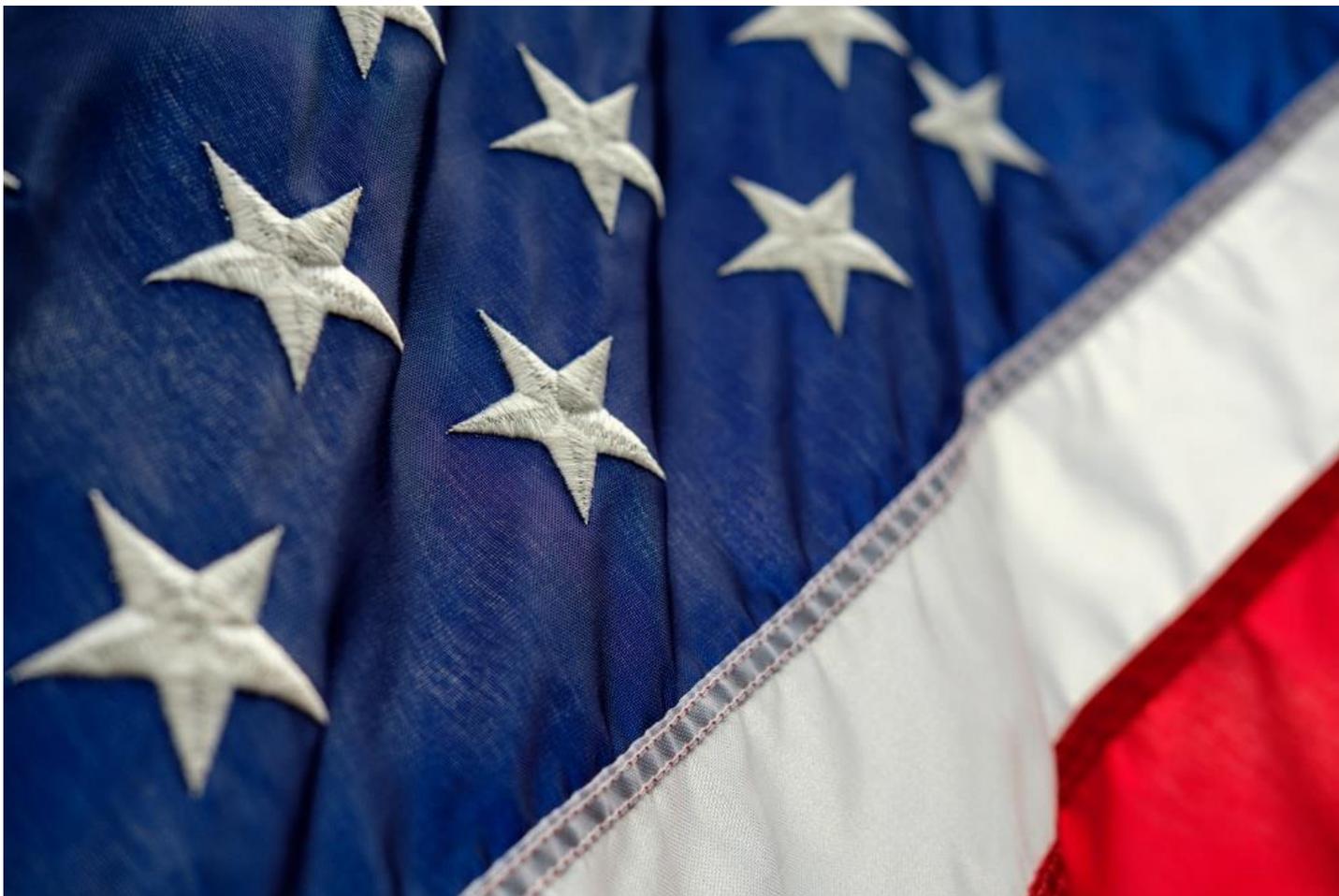


Prayer Devotions



July 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:

Tajikistan

Nepal

Central African Republic

Daily prayers for July... “It (Independence Day) ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, *by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty*. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more.” –John Adams

Thursday, July 1st: It is our choices that determine whether life’s hard hits take us to a bitter place or a better place. And the foundation for choices where hope wins is a cross on a hill and a tomb that is empty. Standing there, we are ready to confront the hurt and the loss that make hope so hard to hang onto. The Savior who carried a cross is there to help me carry my burden. And when I am too weak to carry on, He even carries me. This Savior who is weaving my life here into an eternal tapestry says in my dark time, “This isn’t the story – this is only a chapter.” This death-crushing Jesus stands by me at a fresh grave and whispers, “This isn’t the end; it’s the beginning.” It’s the unseen but certain hope that energizes a buoyant confidence, defying life’s deepest hurts and darkest valleys. Hope has a name. His name is Jesus. He is our living hope. God’s word says we do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope. With Jesus, yes, we grieve. But there’s something on the other side of the scale – hope – because of Jesus. We have hope because of His love and His heaven. Without Jesus, it’s just the agony of grief. Our embattled lives on earth are not all there is. This is the opening act – the warm up, the beginning. This is Hotel Earth – not home. We can think differently in our grieving because of the revolution made possible by the resurrection. Jesus added a transformative word to the word life – eternal. It’s in the “everlasting” zone that we find meaning for our pain, healing for our brokenness, and hope for our “hopelessness.” He is our hope. **Lamentations 3:21-23; 1 Peter 1:3-6; 1 John 5:13-14; Revelation 21:4**

Friday, July 2nd: A.W. Tozer in *The Crucified Life: How to Live Out a Deeper Christian Experience* wrote, “One important point many fail to understand is that the Bible was never meant to replace God; rather, it was meant to lead us into the heart of God. Too many Christians stop with the text and never go on to experience the presence of God.” I have a One Year Bible as well as a reading plan to facilitate reading through the Bible in a year, both of which I have used over the years to help me discipline myself not only to make my reading a daily occurrence but also to ensure that I don’t disregard some of the less, shall we say, exciting books – like Leviticus and Numbers. Unfortunately, the trap I can fall into no matter how lofty my intentions may be is that when I get to those books it can be both tempting and seemingly excusable to skim through them to complete the objective. And therein lies the problem. I’m approaching it as an assignment more than an appointment to meet with my heavenly Father and to try to glean something from the experience and to deepen my relationship with Him. When I remember to pray first in order to prepare my heart and mind to engage, I find that I can actually discover new and exciting things – even in Leviticus and Numbers! Ask Him to open your eyes and your heart to His word and to Him.

Psalm 119:10-18; Isaiah 55:9-11; 2 Timothy 3:15-17

Saturday, July 3rd: It has been so encouraging to see our church grow even in the midst of challenging conditions and obvious opposition in the terms of restrictions and fear. But a growing church is more than just growing numbers. A growing body of believers happens when the believers themselves are growing too. We have to be like the Bereans who heard the word being delivered to them with eagerness and joy and then went home and searched the Scriptures to verify and undergird what they had heard. We all have a personal responsibility to first of all be openly receiving the word being delivered to us, but then we need to actively affirm for ourselves the veracity of what we have received and decide how we are going to apply it in our lives. Only babies are spoon fed; even small children learn to feed themselves, and ideally as they mature, they learn to make healthy choices about what they consume, they learn to take responsibility for procuring their food, and they become parents who repeat this cycle with their own children. That’s what ensures a family legacy and that is what will promote the growth of a spiritually healthy body of believers who see that what they are being fed is absolutely necessary for their own well-being, is their responsibility to digest, and is essential to model and teach that to more vulnerable members of the family. Father, thank You for filling us with Your life sustaining word. Help us to be diligent to receive openly and joyfully, and may we always be eager to share with others the benefits of feasting on the true Bread.

Acts 17:10-15; 1 Thessalonians 2:10-13; James 1:21-27

Sunday, July 4th: Today we celebrate 245 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, even though it wasn't actually signed until August 2nd. The second paragraph of this document begins as follows:

“We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that *all* men are created equal, that they are *endowed by their Creator* with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the *consent of the governed...*” (emphasis added)

The freedoms that we celebrate are not only freedom “*to*” but also freedom “*from*”! The United States in which we currently reside would do well to reexamine the verbiage of this important document. It would first seem that it is no longer self-evident that the rights aforementioned are unalienable nor that they are universally believed to be endowed by a benevolent and supreme Creator. Rather His very existence is either ignored or mocked by many of those who sit in the seat of government. These elected representatives also too often forget that their power and decisions should be a reflection of the will and consent of those governed. In all fairness, we are still blessed to live in a blessed and free nation, but we can't allow ourselves to take this for granted. First and foremost, praise God that He has chosen to place us here, and by His grace we are free indeed. Freed from the tyranny of sin and free to speak out and stand up for those truths we hold dear. Then ask Him to show us how we are to live out that blessing in a manner that will reflect His goodness, mercy, provision, and the higher laws that have been instituted to govern us all.

Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 6:13-15; 1 Peter 2:16; John 8:36

Monday, July 5th: Long Life. I had the honor of celebrating my aunt's 100th Birthday on June 13, 2021. I traveled with some of my family to Springfield, Illinois so we could be there in person to sing "Happy Birthday" to dear Evelyn. My aunt has known Jesus as her Lord and Savior since she was very young. Her life is a reflection of obedience and surrender to the Lord. She has lived a life of bringing glory to the Lord as a teacher, pastor's wife, hospital volunteer and now a witness of God's love to the staff and those who live at St. Joseph's Home in Springfield. She is a testament to God's faithfulness. In fact, her favorite song is "Great is Thy faithfulness." I see so many of God's promises that are applicable to Evelyn's life. I can say with confidence the scripture in Psalms 119:90, "Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You have established the earth and it stands fast." He has renewed her life and sustained her in old age. (Ruth 4:15) Isaiah 46:4, "I will still be carrying you when you are old. Your hair will turn gray and I will still carry you. I made you and I will carry you to safety." My aunt had Covid-19 and the Lord healed her. Her faith in the Lord and the prayers of many friends carried her through so she could be a witness to others. My aunt is a joyful person and she always says I have everything and I need nothing. She is a delight, so full of wit and wisdom. Psalm 92:12-14 "But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit: they will remain vital and green. They will declare, "The Lord is just! He is my Rock." My Aunt Evelyn has made so many friends and has a big church family that loves her dearly. She is such an encouragement to all who know her. The Lord has sustained my aunt all of these years on her journey to becoming a Centurion. I see God's hand of grace and favor upon her life. God will never leave us or forsake us. When we live a surrendered life in obedience to Christ, He leads us all the days of our life and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. My aunt is looking forward to the day the Lord calls her home. She will hear these words: "Well done thy good and faithful servant..." **Matthew 25:21**

Tuesday, July 6th: Judgment can come in many forms, some of them more obvious than others, but we are admonished to be very cautious in how we assess others. In John 5:30 Jesus spoke, saying, "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." So, it would seem then that there is a righteous judgment, but it is that which is based upon first seeking the will of the Father. Jesus forbids any judging that is for the purpose of putting down others to exalt one's self. One of the caveats that He gives in determining how and whom we "judge" is to first examine ourselves. How can we expect to help another person with a few transgressions when we are overwhelmed with sin? Jesus simply teaches that in order to pass *righteous* judgment on another, we ought to first examine ourselves. We can jump to conclusions based on appearances, our own insecurities, and false information or assumptions, and these can lead to a more serious form of judgment – the kind that condemns another, often with the underlying motive of somehow elevating ourselves. This is the kind that we are warned about when we read that when we judge in this way we'll be judged by that same standard. Ask God to give us wisdom and compassion, forgiving us for times we have been unduly critical or prideful, and showing us how to extend His love, grace, and mercy according to His divine direction and righteous judgment.

Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 2:1-2; John 7:24

Wednesday, July 7th: One of the truly amazing things about the grace of God is that it is eternal. This means it not only encompasses when we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior that we can now walk in His power and authority and we know where we will spend eternity, but it means that our slate from the past has been wiped clean. We've been saved – past tense. God can go back in time and erase all the penalty, all the shame, all the guilt we may be tempted to dwell on or try to fix. When we are told that whom the Son sets free shall be free indeed, that means we don't wallow in the past. There are obviously some residual consequences for former sin, but we are not bound or defined by them. We are new creations who have been sanctified, justified, forgiven, redeemed, accepted in the Beloved, and rescued from the destruction we would have faced without Him. And all we have to do is believe Him – truly believe Him – that the debt has been paid in full. If we don't fully grasp the magnitude and finality of what He has done for us in the past, we will never be able to experience peace in the present or faith in the future. Instead, we will put pressure on performance in the present and may even have a fear for the future. Adrian Rogers once said, "Salvation is not a reward for the righteous; it is a gift for the guilty. Salvation is not a goal to be achieved; it is a gift to be received." So Merry Christmas in July and happy (new) birthday! Read the first chapter of Ephesians and notice that it is written to believers in the past tense: *has* blessed us, bestowed, chose us. And in the next chapter Paul reminds us that we *were* dead, but now *we have been saved*. Thank You, Jesus, for Your truly amazing grace.

Romans 1:17; Ephesians 1:3-8, 11-14, 2:1-9

Thursday, July 8th: Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “The ancestor of every action is a thought.” Thoughts and feelings are very closely linked because they are both something we can’t immediately control, and if we follow our feelings back to their origin, they were birthed in a thought about how we perceived a situation. Even though we can’t totally control what comes into our minds or the initial feelings we experience in a given situation, we can learn to regulate and replace those that are unhealthy with ones that line up with the heart of our Father. How often have you caught yourself saying, “I never would have thought...”? The same could probably be said for the woman with the issue of blood in Mark’s book. We are told that she had suffered for twelve years and had spent everything she had, but to no avail. Who would have thought that simply touching the hem of Jesus’ robe would be her answer? And yet we read that it all began with a thought – if she could just do so...she believed in her heart that He was the answer, and the result was that not only was she instantly healed and restored to physical health, but when she came to Him trembling to admit that she was indeed the one who had touched Him, He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well.” She was no longer simply “the woman” who had undoubtedly been shamed and shunned because of her condition; He called her *daughter*. Incidentally, Jesus was en route to heal the daughter of a very influential and high-ranking synagogue official, and in the course of this interlude she dies in order for Him to attend to the needs of an outcast that she may *become* a daughter of the King. This is the only recorded instance of Jesus addressing a woman as Daughter. Jesus, of course, went on to heal the daughter of Jairus, but only in the presence of those who believed He could do it. We are told that He put out all those who were laughing at the very idea – those who thought it was hopeless. We all need to regulate our thought life and bring it into conformity with what the Bible tells us is true and possible through the redeeming life of Jesus. **Mark 5:22-34, 38-42; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:5**

Friday, July 9th: It has been said that unforgiveness is like drinking a cup of poison and expecting the other person to die! Lack of forgiveness can also create a root of bitterness by which *many become defiled*. We may be tempted to think that our own issue with unforgiveness only affects us, but the sad reality is that it can also affect those around us in a very negative way. In fact, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, the root of bitterness we foster has the capacity to defile many. An unforgiving spirit cannot be contained and it can spread like a cancer to those around us. It can strain our relationships with them as they either become tired of listening to the constant replay of our bitter attitude, or they can become infected and encouraged to begin dredging up and dwelling on their own past offenses. Unforgiveness is classified in medical books as a disease. According to Dr. Steven Standiford, chief of surgery at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America, refusing to forgive makes people sick and keeps them that way. Research shows that unforgiveness is connected to high blood pressure, weakened immune systems, reduced sleep, chronic pain, and cardiovascular problems. In fact, forgiveness exercises are now being included in cancer treatment plans for patients because of the way that unforgiveness thwarts healing. And the greatest threat of unforgiveness is how it affects our relationship with God. How can we honestly say we love Him if we hate our brother? Our true fellowship with Him becomes broken. Jesus died for our sins that we might be forgiven and reconciled to our Father and to one another. Father, cause us to remember how much we have been forgiven and help us to extend that forgiveness to others.

Ephesians 4:30-32; Mark 11:25-26; Hebrews 12:15; 1 John 4:20-21

Saturday, July 10th: At a very tender and impressionable age I discovered some “romance” magazines under my grandmother’s bed. This was my *widowed grandmother* in a small, rural Midwestern community. Needless to say, since there was nothing else to occupy my time, or so I rationalized, I read several of the stories and was shocked, tantalized, and shamed as a result. And a seed of promiscuity was planted in my brain. My defense against this noxious seed was to be notoriously strait-laced to the point that throughout my junior high and early high school years I had a reputation that wasn’t always celebrated or revered by the “popular” crowd. Because I was insecure and had rather low self-esteem, I began to relax my standards and by the time I entered college I managed to blend right in with the rest of the fast crowd. I continued to live this life quite successfully for a decade, but then everything fell apart and I found myself searching for redemption. And I found it in Jesus. The only problem was that I was so ashamed of some of the choices I had made before Jesus that I was reluctant to admit them, and this can only be attributed to pride. If we don’t accept and confess our weakness without Jesus, how can we convince others of the freedom we can experience with Him? Don’t hide from who you were; rejoice in who He has made you.

2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:4-7; 1 Peter 1:4-5

Sunday, July 11th: Our God is righteous and holy, meaning He is just and pure; He is always honorable, blameless, and good; and through the blood of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are given that same nature! The fact that we are made in the image of God and have the power of His Spirit dwelling within us should absolutely knock our socks off. I don’t think we spend enough time contemplating that amazing reality or appreciating the significance of it. In fact, Jesus even told us that when we believe in Him, we will not only be empowered to do the works He did on earth, *we will do even greater works* because He has gone to the Father. How often do we take that promise seriously? The reality is that we serve the omnipotent, omniscient, creator of the entire universe, and yet He cares so deeply for each of us that it is His desire for us to be His friend. He has amazing plans for us all and has put within us all that we need to accomplish great things that will bring Him glory. Do you get that? We can bring glory to the One whose glory surpasses anything we could even imagine, and we were created to reflect His nature. That’s His gift to us – having the capacity to be His ambassadors. It’s honestly beyond our ability to comprehend, and yet He lovingly gives us glimpses of His divine nature and our potential to tap into all that He is. Praise Him for His immeasurable goodness, and pray that we would never take too lightly the magnitude of that gift.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 5:17-21; Ephesians 1:3-6, 4:24; John 14:10-12

Monday, July 12th: Most of us are familiar with the story of Mary and Martha, but Martha gets a pretty bad rap in most of the accounts we hear. In all truth, they were just different in their “bents” and the problem with Martha was that she got so wrapped up in what she was doing that she lost sight of why she was doing it. Martha was a detail person, a true servant – she was what we might refer to as an “A” type personality. “A” type people are task oriented, focused, very organized and highly focused on their goals. Jesus was coming to the house and she wanted to make sure that everything was ready and in order. Mary seems to have been more of a type “B” – more laid back and easy going, given to philosophical pursuits and enjoying the beauty in the moment. In all honesty, we need both of these types of people. When my daughter and I found ourselves at the peak of a mountain in the late afternoon, I was glad she was intent on getting us to the bottom the fastest and safest way possible without stopping to smell the flowers! The problem Martha had was she got so focused on the event that she forgot that the idea was to spend time with Jesus. She got so entrenched in the preparation that she even accused Jesus of not caring and interrupted His teaching so He could tell Mary to get up and get busy. When we lose the why, we lose our way. Pastor Levi Lusko of Fresh Life Church in Montana and Utah puts it this way – “If the things we do for God aren’t fueled by the time we spend with God we’ll begin to act like we’re God.” We need to accept the fact that we’re all different and have different gifts or bents, but the bottom line must always be centered in serving Him through His power, according to His purpose for us, and as a result of being in His presence. The goal is being empowered through that fellowship and sitting at His feet in order to become equipped for whatever assignment He may have for us. It’s not our gifting that empowers us; it’s the power of His presence that activates the gift.

Luke 10:39-42; Colossians 3:23-24

Tuesday, July 13th: No fear. It's an American lifestyle clothing brand which also offers energy drinks by the same name. It is meant to embody the idea of being invincible, unshakeable, and not given to any doubt. I'm curious as to how lucrative that brand was in the previous 18 months. So many were given to fears of something that was new and unknown with the rhetoric surrounding it constantly changing, only adding to the anxiety that created. The initial fear was a mysterious and virulent new virus, Covid-19, but that was followed by the valid fears of lost employment, lost freedoms, and feelings of isolation. The reality is, some fears are founded, but Jesus tells us not to worry because it isn't fruitful. Worry doesn't change anything except our level of anxiety. His answer is to seek first His kingdom and righteousness. This doesn't mean that we don't plan for any eventualities; it simply means that we put our plans in His capable hands and then be open to changing them if need be. And there are consequences to fear. Both Herod and Pilate caved to the fear of public opinion. Herod first protected John the Baptist because he was afraid of the general populace and then condemned him for fear of those at a drunken party. Pilate gave in to the crowd and allowed the crucifixion of Jesus. The apostle John walked on water, but then we read that he "saw" the wind he "began" to sink. First of all, you can't actually see the wind; you can only see its effects. Second, when you jump into a body of water, you sink immediately. There is no slow-mo of your body gradually lowering itself into the water. From this we can surmise that John still believed in Jesus' power but wasn't so sure about how it applied to him. The beginning of fear is doubt, and Jesus asked him, "Why did you doubt?" Why do we? When we build our faith on Him and His word, we can know without a doubt that nothing is going to happen to us that is beyond His capable and loving control. Don't fear those things that can kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body. That's a healthy fear, and when He's your Daddy, you've nothing else to fear.

Matthew 6:27-28, 33-34, 10:28; Psalm 34:4, 46:1-3

Wednesday, July 14th: I heard an intriguing message entitled “Beta Blessings”. A beta version is an early version of a program or application that contains most of the major features but is not yet complete. Sometimes these versions are released only to a select group of people, or to the general public, for testing and feedback. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, but we are in the beta stage, and Jesus isn’t waiting for us to reach the next stage to bless us; His desire is to walk with us through the testing stage to get the bugs out so we’ll be ready to enter the next phase of our journey. In fact, this is often when we need His presence the most. There’s an uncertainty about this season, and His provision may be specific for this season only to sustain us until we’re ready for public release. We may not even recognize His provision. When God was using Moses to lead the Israelites through the wilderness, He gave them manna to sustain them. At first, they complained about it, and their initial response was puzzlement as they asked, “What is it?” (Translation of manna) The manna was God’s blessing of sustenance for them for forty years. It was always provided, it was new every morning and there was always sufficient supply as long as the people followed God’s directions on gathering, using and storing. And once they reached the Promised Land, the provision of manna ceased because they were now ready to enter their next assignment and had the resources and ability to sow and reap. This beta phase of transition was completed, but they would continue to face new seasons in which they would desperately need His beta blessing of provision until He had refined and prepared them for their next adventure. It’s all a matter of trust and obey. Malachi 3:10 addresses so much more than finances. We need to be willing to offer Him our time, our talents, and our reputation to use as He pleases, but His promise is that we’ll have to build bigger barns to store the overflow of blessing He will pour out. And remember, the “blessing” may be in a form we don’t immediately recognize as such, but it just could be what will sustain and prepare us for something bigger than we could imagine.

Joshua 5:10-12; Isaiah 43:19; Romans 12:1-2

Thursday, July 15th: The Anchor of my Soul. Have you ever considered why the author of Hebrews called our hope in Jesus “the anchor for the soul?” **Hebrews 6:11-12, 19** “We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹²We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged...¹⁹We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Picture the Word of God as the chain that attaches the ship to the anchor. The stronger that chain, the less chance the ship has of floundering. As we spend time immersing ourselves in God’s word, our hope is “greatly encouraged.” During a storm, an anchor cannot be seen. It holds the ship securely in the midst of high winds and waves. Jesus also holds us, even when we don’t sense His presence. The anchor, unseen, is still tethered to the ship, holding it steadfast. Despite your present stormy circumstances, Jesus has you. Let your soul hope in His love for you and His power to keep you.

Friday, July 16th: In his book [Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World](#), author Cal Newport writes, “The tycoons of social media have to stop pretending that they’re friendly nerd gods building a better world and admit they’re just tobacco farmers in T-shirts selling an addictive product to children. Because, let’s face it, checking your “likes” is the new smoking.” And in reality, it’s not just children, although they are the ones being programmed at an early age to not know anything different. In addition to social media, there is a free app for virtually anything you could imagine, but as the old saying goes, there’s no such thing as a free lunch, and in fact they’re eating our lunch. Every “free” app is paid for by an advertiser who is gathering information to manipulate those accessing the app to their advantage. And they intentionally control certain aspects to create an addiction to their particular application. It’s all to distract us from more productive pursuits, like perhaps spending time with people face to face, enjoying physical activity and the beauty of God’s creation, and getting to know Him better. Our technology can keep us so busy and sidetracked. There’s a difference between being busy and being engaged. Busy is a choice and a state of mind. We all have responsibilities that need to be addressed, but think of Jesus. His task was *simply* to carry the burden of sin for every person – past, present, and future – and to give His life on the cross. And He had three years to let enough people witness the Presence of His Father that the message would be perpetuated after His miraculous resurrection. Yet He took time to attend a wedding and do some catering, to stop on a crowded street to attend to the need of woman who would have been considered untouchable, and to take children on His lap to demonstrate the value of all and the purity of their simple faith. If Jesus can be in the moment, shouldn’t we aspire to do the same? It’s heartbreaking to see a family in a restaurant all sitting at the table checking their phones, oblivious to those sitting right in front of them! Jesus said the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy (productivity and relationships) but Jesus has come that we might have life (true and authentic life) and to have it abundantly!

John 10:10; Luke 10:41-42; Hebrews 3:13-14

Saturday, July 17th: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: When you were in your mother's womb, I saw your tiny body being formed. I created you in my image. I created your inward parts and I knitted you together in your mother's womb. You were fearfully and wonderfully made. I looked upon you and numbered all your days in My book. I set My love upon you and was with you as you grew. The day came when you left the comfort of your mother's womb and entered into the world...a tiny, tiny, babe. Scripture says in Psalm 8:4 6 "What is mankind that You are mindful of them, human beings that You care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of Your hands; You put everything under their feet." You are loved with an everlasting love. I have placed eternity in your heart. There is a longing in your soul that only I can satisfy. That desire can be satisfied when you search for me with all of your heart. You were created in My image and for My pleasure. Seek Me and spend time in My presence. Together we will climb the mountaintops and at times walk thru the valleys. I am always with you and hear your faintest whisper for help. Remember My sons and daughters that I have made each of you uniquely in My image and My plans for you are only for good. I love you. I have engraved you on the palms of My hands. YOU ARE FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE.

Psalm 139:13-14, Jeremiah 31:3, Ecclesiastes 3:11, Psalm 107:9, Jeremiah 29:13, Revelation 4:11, Jeremiah 29:11, Isaiah 49:16

Sunday, July 18th: When Jesus told the disciples to go and make disciples of *all the nations*, He was extending that command to all of us. A disciple is a learner who sits at the feet of their teacher and accepts in his/her mind and life the views and practices of that teacher. “All the nations” is pretty inclusive; the term is actually all ethnos, so in essence it’s saying every person on the face of the earth, encompassing Glendale to Ghana, heathens and Hindus, Republicans and Democrats, and everyone in between. This is not merely a suggestion. This is a mandate! It’s the natural progression from the great commandment to the great commission. We are to first love the Lord with our entire being – heart, soul, and mind – and then we are to love others as ourselves. This will inspire us to accept our commission to share this love with others. My friend and a beloved mentor Dr. Hugo likes to teach that these two are inherently inseparable, and he is the embodiment of that belief. Dr. Hugo Gomez is co-founder and CEO of Global CHE (Community, Health, Evangelism) Enterprises which serves to wholistically (meeting the needs of the whole person) lift communities in Meso-America from poverty to health in every aspect of their being. Dr. Hugo sits daily at the feet of his teacher in order to make disciples who will make other disciples – in Guatemala and wherever those disciples may travel. Around the corner or around the world. Pray for daily opportunities to lovingly share His good news with anyone and everyone who needs to hear. **Matthew 22:37-39, 28:19-20; Psalm 96:3**

Monday, July 19th: We are so blessed to have a God who is called Love. Of the approximately 99 names of Allah, not one of them is love. This means that we have something of great value to share. Muslims need to know about the God who loves them, and they already know through the Quran about Isa – their name for Jesus. They see Him as a great prophet who lived a perfect life and did many miracles like no other person has ever done, including raising the dead. His most famous title in Islam is **Al-Masih** which means “The Messiah”. Also, Muslims believe that whenever a human is born Satan touches him on the two sides of his body, but Isa was uniquely not touched at his birth. We have such an inroad to introduce Muslims to the true Messiah who not only lived a perfect life and did greater works than Mohammed, He is the God who loves them and died for them. We need to see those who don’t (yet) believe in Jesus not as our enemies but as a field white for harvest. We know that God loves us lavishly and through His Holy Spirit dwells in us, so that abundant love should fill us to the extent that it oozes out of our every pore and spills into the lives of those around us! Pray for this to be our reality. **John 15:9-17; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:8-19**

Tuesday, July 20th: Learning any foreign language can be confusing and frustrating at times because almost every language has words that have multiple meanings, and without context it can be difficult if not impossible to understand what it being said. For example, in Spanish the word porque can mean both why and because, so one person could ask, “¿Porque?” (why) to which an appropriate answer could be the same word – porque (because). The same can be said for Hawaiian where aloha means both hello and goodbye. The Beatles would have had fun with that – I don’t know why you say aloha, I say aloha. This could also cause a problem in dating situations – is the other person encouraging you or trying to make a fast getaway? We can encounter the same kind of potential misunderstanding when we try to take Bible verses out of context. That said, there are several types of contexts that should be considered. The first is historical and cultural context. We need to understand who the audience is, who is speaking or writing to them, and how it related to the cultural practices of that time. As we learned from the message on salt and light, the relevance of salt in the Old Testament was extremely important and it helps us to comprehend with greater appreciation what God wants us to learn when we place it in that context. We also need to avoid the temptation to isolate passages without considering that every word is part of a sentence, part of a paragraph, part of a chapter in a book. You wouldn’t open a history book, read one sentence in the middle of a random chapter, and assume that you understood the relevance of that particular bit of information as it related to an entire period of time. We need to take into account the whole picture or we run the risk of seriously misunderstanding and ultimately misusing God’s word. But the more we see the big picture, the more we study and learn the way His word is presented and aptly applied, the less chance of finding ourselves asking why when God is lovingly explaining to us the glorious because. When we see the integrity of the framework surrounding and upholding it, it will become more familiar and less foreign to us.

2 Timothy 2:14-15; Acts 17:11; Revelation 22:19

Wednesday, July 21st: The ramifications of every human being created in the image of God are extensive. One of these is that God has placed a destiny and a dream into each of us, but we also have an enemy who has plans to thwart God's destiny and to lead us in a different direction that will ultimately lead to eternal destruction and separation from our Father. And it all comes down to which destiny we choose to pursue; anytime we're not walking intentionally towards God's purposes for our lives, we're walking towards the enemy's and he will do anything and everything he can to convince us that his path is more inviting and that any dreams that we may feel God has placed within our hearts are too difficult, too big, or in any other way unrealistic. What we will go through in the process of determining which path we choose will be times of testing – we will be tested by how well we follow the established and living word of God in order to determine when we are ready to embrace the word (dream) we believe we have been given in order to walk into His destiny. We need to fully grasp that God has created us with heavenly purposes, and His purpose will be accomplished whether we cooperate with Him or not – it just may not be through *us*. Even Joseph was tested multiple times before his dream became his destiny, and imagine the impact on history and his family had he not remained steadfast in relying on the Lord and His timing. Although he allowed pride to interfere with the purpose of the dream he received as a very young man, yet we see in the course of his journey how his unwavering dependence on his Lord gave him favor and ultimately led to a fulfillment beyond anything he could have foreseen. We don't know fully what God's destiny is for each of us, but what a tragedy if we would miss it because we had chosen to chase after the glitter instead of the glory, believing the lie of instant gratification and self-promotion rather than standing of the promises of the King.

Psalm 105:19; Habakkuk 2:3; Jeremiah 17:10; Ephesians 2:10

Thursday, July 22nd: I seriously think that the enemy controls the fashion industry, the automobile industry, and a lot of other entities that dictate to use what we really need in order to fit in and feel good about ourselves. Will it be skinny jeans or bell bottoms? Stiletto heels or chunky? Earthy tones or vibrant colors? Sleek sedans or SUVs? The choices are endless and ever changing, and not to use a play on words, it's by design. As long as we can be convinced that we *need* the latest and greatest, we will continue to stress about fitting in. But we weren't created to blend in with the rest of the culture to the point that there is no differentiation between us and the rest of the world. If we're to be a beacon of hope then it's important that we stand out from the madding crowd. I'm not saying that it's sinful to wear stylish clothes or drive a new vehicle according to your personal taste and needs, but when it becomes obsessive it begins to sound a lot like the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life. We need to learn to differentiate between needs and wants. God has promised to supply all of our needs, and He is even gracious and loving enough to bless us with many of our wants when we are putting Him first. In fact, if we're more interested in giving and abiding than we are in getting, what we receive just might be good measure, pressed down, shaken together and overflowing! What's even better than being sparkly and stylish on the outside is shining from the inside. That never goes out of style.

Luke 6:38; Matthew 6:33, 5:14-16

Friday, July 23rd: “Cast your anxiety upon Him, for He cares for you.” What a precious verse from **I Peter 5:7**! We often use this verse to receive comfort and it is so sweet that the Lord cares for us and desires to encourage us with His love. However, we rarely look at this verse in the context of the situation Peter was writing about. He is urging the church to serve one another, a similar message that he heard from Jesus at their last Passover meal together. At that time, Jesus had taken the lowest job a servant could have, washing the dirty feet of the guests. He had gone to each disciple and washed their feet and then explained that we are to love each other in such a way that we always put others before ourselves. Andrew Murray, a Dutch Reformed Church missionary who lived in the 1800s, wrote much about humility, which is the attitude of the mind and heart that we need to serve others. One of my favorite quotes is, “Humility is the only soil in which the graces root; the lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with others; it is the root of all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all.”

Peter is telling us in chapter 5 that when we have a difference of opinion with other believers, we need to “clothe ourselves with humility toward one another.” And when we have strong convictions that our way should be followed, our way is better, and there is conflict, we need to cast our anxiety about this person/situation to the Lord and let Him handle it. He cares for us. We need to trust Him, rather than trying to force the other person to bend to our will or manipulate the situation so we get our way.

Throughout God’s word we read instructions to humble ourselves. As we depend on God rather than ourselves, we will bring Him honor and glory and find that He does indeed care for us!

Saturday, July 24th: New Beginning: Today, I see you perfectly still in My presence. I am filling you with peace in the deepest place of your soul. You are a chosen vessel of honor and I love you. Today I want you to know that I have given you a new beginning. The past is the past. You have a new image now. You are reflecting the beauty and attributes of Jesus. Your life has fresh meaning. You have been forgiven and cleansed by the blood Jesus shed on the cross. Give Me your heart in fresh surrender and let Me bring you to a higher level in the spirit. Pursue Me with your whole heart by abandoning the temporary joy of "things". Let Me fill you with real joy and real peace. Be still and know that I am God. I delight to give you the joy that is only found in knowing Jesus. Call unto Me. I delight to answer your heart cry. Trust Me in all circumstances because I know the best outcome for the situation. Let go of all that would weigh you down. You can trade your burdens for My peace. I am calling you to come up higher. You now have a heavenly calling. That is, you are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. So... come up higher. **2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:7, Psalm 46:10, Ephesians 2:6**

Sunday, July 25th: In 1953 Dr. Norman Vincent Peale wrote the best-selling book *The Power of Positive Thinking* which gave practical, biblical techniques that helped transform the lives of millions of men and women. A little over a half century prior Johnson Oatman had penned a hymn which offered much of the same advice, but in a much more basic approach. His counsel was for those who felt burdened, discouraged, and facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles to focus rather on the many blessings they had been afforded through their relationship with the Lord, carefully and thoughtfully enumerating them one at a time. When we train ourselves to direct our thoughts towards those things that He has already done for us and on the amazing benefits of belonging to Him we'll begin to realize that there was never any real reason to be downcast. You're alive, you're able to read this, you live in an affluent country that still affords you the right to worship openly, and you have a heavenly Father who not only loves you to the moon and back, He is preparing a dwelling place for you in Paradise where you will never be without and where He will personally wipe away every tear. Start making a list and you may find yourself amazed at the number of blessings you can count. Then make a practice of thanking Him and asking Him to reveal more and more to you the many benefits and blessings you enjoy in Him.

Nahum 1:7; Luke 12:22-32; Philippians 4:4-9; Revelation 21:4

Monday, July 26th: As a former teacher, I have always had something of a problem with the idea of giving everyone ribbons for simply participating in something that was a requirement. However, I then realized that in reality we actually do get rewarded for everything – it’s just sometimes they’re called blessings and other times consequences. The determining factors are motivation and the action or attitude that is being “rewarded.” A reward is something that is given or received as recompense for an effort, so when we are doing the right thing for the right reason it makes sense that there will ultimately be a positive result. However, we also need to understand that when we aren’t doing what we’re supposed to or when we might do it but it’s for the wrong reason (personal recognition) or with a bad attitude, we shouldn’t be surprised if there’s a negative outcome. Admittedly, there will be times when we or others don’t see the results immediately, but that’s something like fudging on your taxes for years and getting away with it...until you get caught. But we are told that when the Lord comes, He will bring to light all of our deeds as well as our motivations, and at that point it will be too late to change our ways. He warns us in order to give us the opportunity to repent, meaning to turn away from the evil and instead run after Him. True athletes don’t wait until opening day of the Olympics to begin training because they know the stakes are high and the rewards are something they’ve anticipated for a long time. The stakes for us are eternal, so let’s not lose sight of the fact that it’s a marathon, not a sprint, and there are rules to be recognized and rewards to be reaped. Go for the gold.
Colossians 3:23-25; Galatians 6:9; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Romans 3:1-8

Tuesday, July 27th: Erma Bombeck wrote a book in 1983 entitled If Life is a Bowl of Cherries, What am I Doing in the Pits? The book is both hilarious and relevant at the same time because all of us at some time find ourselves in that uncomfortable location – a pit. Too many followers of Jesus have the impression that once they become believer's life is going to become easy sailing, but that is definitely not a Scriptural principle. In fact, some very notable figures in the Bible found themselves literally in a pit. Daniel spent the night in a pit with a bunch of very hungry lions. And Joseph was thrown into a pit by his own brothers and was lifted out of the pit only to be sold into slavery in a distant country. So that should lead us to ask some reasonable questions when we find ourselves in a pit. We need to first determine why we're in the pit in the first place. Did we do anything either positive like Daniel, like something that would put us on the enemy's radar, or perhaps prideful like Joseph? Rather than complain and cast blame on others or circumstances for our position, we need to next ask God to help us gain His perspective about where we find ourselves and seek to understand what He desires to accomplish in and through us as a result. Remember that the first one to show up when we're in a difficult situation is the accuser, and he'll give us all kinds of reasons about why we're there, who else is responsible, and we will begin to feel condemned and combative. If we wait on the Lord to gain His perspective, we may feel some conviction, but never condemnation, and it could be that He will reveal to us that the pit is a pathway to bringing Him glory and facilitating something magnificent. This will help us to understand the purpose of the pit – shaping us and showing us that when we are in affliction, it's the perfect place to cry out to Him.

Psalm 40:1-2, 103:1-5; Jonah 2:6-7

Wednesday, July 28th: Those who are winter visitors to the Phoenix area from back east experience a little slice of heaven compared to where they've come from. However, this time of year it's more like the opposite alternative, and time outdoors is usually limited or spent immersed in a swimming pool. You don't see a lot of campgrounds for summer visitors in Phoenix. Let that be a reminder to us that there are places in our city where you can witness outdoor camping, but it is often because that is one of the only options for the homeless. According to an article released by the Phoenix city council in February of this year, Maricopa County is home to nearly 7,500 individuals experiencing homelessness with less than 2000 available beds at shelters to accommodate them. More than half of those people lack any kind of adequate shelter, and that number is growing steadily. We know that we will always have the poor with us, but that doesn't mean we are to simply accept it with an attitude of indifference or resignation. Pray for wisdom and direction as to how He would want us as a church family to address this need. LifeBridge is one resource for assistance and they can always use volunteers and donations, and there are other agencies in the city like the Phoenix Rescue Mission which offer valuable aid through Christ-centered programs. Every such organization can always use financial support as well as prayer support. Ask God to protect and provide for those who are living at the mercy of the hostile environment of a Phoenix summer. Pray that they would find shelter and relief, pray that they would know they are seen and valued by a loving God, and pray that we would be willing to be His hands and feet.

Psalm 82:3; Proverb 19:17; Isaiah 58:6-10; James 2:16

Thursday, July 29th: **Cuckoo Birds are Real!** Isn't it cool how the Lord shows us things through His creation? I am living in a very hilly area outside the United States now, and every time I hike up the mountain near my home, I hear a cuckoo bird. I thought these birds only existed in cartoons or clocks made in Germany! I never knew they were real because I had never seen or heard one in real life. Have you ever spoken to someone who regularly scuba dives? They will tell you about amazing things under the sea—vivid colors and such unusual-looking creatures that you may find hard to believe their descriptions. This is the same story for those who have never heard about Jesus! We must tell them! We must share with them His amazing love and the freedom He gives us when we acknowledge our sin and receive His power/His life to change us from the inside out. They may not believe us at first, just as I questioned my ears when I heard the "cuckoo" on the mountain. But over time and with our prayers and love for them, they will experience the reality of Jesus and hopefully make a decision to embrace the Life He offers. **Romans 1:20-22, 10:14-15; Acts 14:15-17; Colossians 1:15-17**

Friday, July 30th: The Fragrance of Praise. Just as the morning mist rises, let your praise arise to Me. So as the dawn brings the new day, start your morning with a song of praise to Me. Lift your praise to Me before you anticipate all the challenges of the day. Your praise stops the enemy from stealing your joy as you praise Me. I work in the midst of your praise to bring about peace for the day ahead. I am for you and together we will work out the details of all the tasks waiting for you this day. Your praise is like sweet smelling incense to Me. Sometimes it is a sacrifice, but your praise always rises to Me. Just praise Me with your whole heart. The melody of your praise will lighten your “to do” list. Your praise chases the enemy from your thoughts and your load just becomes lighter. I am with you in all that you do. I am waiting for your invitation to walk with you throughout the day. Let us commune together and tackle the details of the day. I am your rock and your helper. I inhabit the praises of My people. Start this day with the fragrance of praise and thanksgiving. Psalm 103:1 “Let all that I am praise the LORD; with my whole heart, I will praise His holy name.” **Psalm 18:2, 22:3.**

Saturday, July 31st: Sin is Serious! How many of us don't take sin seriously? We truly aren't repulsed by sin. We don't acknowledge the horror of its effects. We cozy up to it, some of us embrace it, but most of us in the church learn to "manage it" (or so we think!). Check out this passage from the book of **Judges 1:27-35**. Here's an excerpt: "But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land. When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely. Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them." The passage continues repeating this same situation for tribe after Israeli tribe. Instead of obeying God and forcing out these people whose culture included child sacrifice and other grievous anti-God practices, Israel allowed them to live with them and managed them in performing hard labor/menial tasks. Sounds smart, doesn't it? Makes life easier, right? It's so interesting to me that often choosing the easier way destroys our souls.

Notice that the Canaanites – this is Israel's enemy— "were determined to live in that land." We have an enemy, and he would like nothing better than to camp out in our lives. He would relish our "management." But God doesn't want us managing our sin. He wants us to walk in freedom, in joy, in peace, and in power! That can only happen when we agree with Him that our wrong thoughts and actions are indeed hideous and need to go. Many times, we are not even aware of our sin and we must continue to ask Him to "search my heart and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the Way Everlasting." **Psalm 139:24**. He is faithful to answer this prayer and as He gently shines the light on the darkness in our lives, we must turn from it with the enabling of the Holy Spirit, and live-in freedom from our enemy. This is glorious living! It is not easy, but it is full of purpose and satisfaction and joy—no better way to live.

So, think about your life – are you trying to manage your sin? Or is your heart's desire to obliterate it through the precious blood of Jesus Christ?