

Prayer Devotions



January 2022

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:

North Korea

Afghanistan

Somalia

Daily Prayers for January And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.” And he replied: “Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.” M.L. Haskins

Saturday, January 1st: People so often make resolutions at the beginning of the New Year. They determine to lose weight, go to the gym, eat a healthier diet, or maybe even read their Bible more faithfully. All of these are worthy aspirations, but unless they were something that Holy Spirit has prompted you to do, chances are quite good that by the end of the month you’ll have fallen back into old patterns. Why not make a resolution to spend some quiet time before the Lord and ask Him what He wants you to prioritize in this season? Even though it’s only a date on the calendar, there’s a mental shift that takes place at the beginning of each year. It can feel like a fresh start. There’s a natural rhythm to life that God Himself created; it’s called seasons. In the desert the distinction between the various seasons is not as pronounced as in other parts of the country, but we still feel the ebb and flow. There are also different seasons in our physical lives as well as our spiritual lives. Ecclesiastes 3 delineates a number of these. For example, a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to be silent and a time to speak. We’re definitely in a change of season, but we know that He has made everything appropriate in its time, so rather than disparage over what is different or perhaps what has been lost, focus on what new thing He is doing and lean into it. So often we decide what we want to do and then ask God to bless our plans. If we allow Him to set our priorities, we know that He will amply equip us to accomplish what concerns us. Is it time for you to tear up or plant, to keep silent or to maybe find your voice? He will be faithful to reveal His perfect plan for your next season. All you have to do is ask.

Isaiah 43:19; Psalm 138:8; Philippians 3:13-14

Sunday, January 2nd: Raise up a child! Proverbs 22:6 When our first child was born, we understood it was our duty to teach him how to live appropriately both in our family and the broader community. Unfortunately, many children today do not have two loving, caring parents to guide them through the obstacle path called life.

As Christians we too need the guidance of a loving, caring parent. A parent who will teach us how to live appropriately as members of the family of God. Our parent showed His love by putting the directions we need in His Word, the Bible. Personally, I think of the Bible as a kind of Programmed Learning text filled with lessons on how to walk with God and do His will.

There are many lessons in that book, but it is important to start with the first lesson before any of the others. This is the lesson on repentance. It reminds us "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Another important lesson is to lay up treasures in heaven. I'm a slow learner and I don't test well. God kept telling me not to worry. Then he pointed me to the most important lesson: I am the vine; you are the branches. "Just remember to stay close to Jesus," He told me, "and the test will be a cinch."

Lord, I am sad many children in this country are not told about you. Help me to share Your story with them. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet. **Psalm 119:105**

Monday, January 3rd: Maybe this is the year that if you aren't already involved in something beyond church attendance you will find a place where you can volunteer. One of the problems many churches face is when we who call someplace our church home are avid consumers but reluctant servants. If the only time we set foot on campus is to be fed the word, we're missing out so much more that God intended for us and honestly that He expects of us. We hear so often the phrase "Becoming like Jesus for the sake of others." The depth of that statement is profound because it entails a perpetual process of transformation, not only in who we are becoming but the why behind the metamorphosis. It goes so far beyond just making each of us a better person, although becoming more like Jesus will certainly do that. However, we need to consider what it means to be more like Jesus. First of all, we know that Jesus emptied Himself and took on the form of a bondservant. *Doulos* is the Greek word translated as bondservant, and it means "one who is subservient to, and entirely at the disposal of, his master; a slave." He who was (and still is) fully God submitted Himself in every situation to His Father's will. Jesus is our Master, and besides His ultimate act of service on our behalf by giving His life as a ransom for ours, He also demonstrated what it means to be a servant by humbling Himself on the very night of His betrayal and washing the feet of His disciples – even the feet of Judas who He knew was the one handing Him over to His enemies. For the sake of others. It takes on such greater significance when we think of it in those terms. There are so many opportunities for serving, and the need is great but the rewards are even greater. He would never call you to do something that He hasn't already prepared ahead of time and for which He won't amply equip you. Ask Him to show you where He wants to grant blessing to you and through you so you can bless others for whom He died. The body of Christ cannot flourish and grow healthier without servants willing to be at the Master's disposal, humbly submitted to carrying out whatever assignment He gives them.

John 13:3-5, 12-17; Philippians 2:5-7; Luke 10:2; Ephesians 2:10

Tuesday, January 4th: Maybe you're still mulling over ways to "turn over a new leaf" or "begin fresh" for the coming year. I think maybe we should all be considering that all the time, but it seems that the beginning of a new year somehow feels more like a clean slate. Such resolutions usually have to do with ways we wish to better ourselves and our lives in general, and one of the ways we may approach this would relate to finances. If you are already a faithful and generous giver, you know that there is no way to out give God. In truth, He doesn't need any of our resources. In fact, in Psalm 50:12 He tells Asaph that if He were hungry, He wouldn't be asking him for anything because it all belongs to Him in the first place! If you had guests staying at your home, you wouldn't ask them if you could get something out of your own refrigerator, but as a good host you would probably tell them to help themselves because you had intentionally stocked it with things that would bless them. God has blessed us with resources. Our first response should be to give thanks. Then He would expect us to use them to honor to Him in how we budget what we have been given and to accomplish His purposes with the surplus. He makes it pretty clear that He owns it all and He expects us to use the first 10% to honor Him. He even goes so far as to say that failure to do so make us thieves. We're actually stealing from Him, and when we do that we are setting ourselves up for a curse. God makes it very clear that He expects us to demonstrate our faith in His provision by giving a tithe of our "first fruits", trusting that He will bless what remains to meet our needs. In Malachi 3 He warns us against robbing Him in our tithes and offerings, but He promises that if we will honor Him in this He will open the windows of heaven and pour out for us a blessing until it overflows! This is the one time when He challenges us to test Him. And the test doesn't stop at ten percent; if He moves on your heart to be more generous than you already are, just remember that He's the God of multiplication who promises to supply all our needs according to His riches in glory. And remember, in His economy all tithes are equal because it's the same percentage for everyone, so your ten percent is no greater than a pauper's or smaller than a millionaire's. Take God at His word and show Him you acknowledge it's all His to begin with and you trust Him to bless you to accomplish more with the 90% you keep than you would if you held onto the whole amount of what He's allowed you to accumulate. It's faith in action.

Malachi 3:8-11; Leviticus 27:30; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Wednesday, January 5th: You know what phrase I absolutely cannot stand? “Well, as long as you’re happy...” I inwardly cringe when I hear these words. It is like the most passive spoken permission to do whatever you feel, whenever you feel like it, to whomever you want for as long as you feel happy. Look around for a few seconds and it is not hard to see that we are an entire generation of people chasing happiness when happiness is fleeting. So, fleeting.

Right now, the heavy weight of grief is overshadowing my happiness. The past couple of years have been among the most difficult and heartbreaking years for me as well as for so many others. Can I still choose to focus on what is good in life? Yes. Can I still find space for gratitude even in the hard and in the midst of countless unknowns? Again, yes. These things do not depend on my happiness. They require intentionality. My eyes search for embers of beauty to behold like the finest specks of gold that they are. This is what I choose to broadcast to the world: Beauty. Not because the pain is not deep. Not because I am being fake. But because I am all too aware of the reality that the world does not need more pain. The world needs more beauty.

My soul desperately needs something solid to grab hold of to settle my chase for an elusive happiness. I refuse to be swayed by something that comes and goes. I am trading temporary happiness for lasting joy. I want the real deal: a deep-down joy birthed from a place of longing for something better than my own self could offer. A joy that demands a daily leaning in, a heightened awareness to the beauty around me, and eyes that truly see it. A joy that takes notice of hidden gems and delightful surprises. A joy that drinks deep of wonder.

I am not perfect at this. I pray daily for eyes to see. I pray for God to transform my view and enhance my perspective. I pray for His eternal vision beyond present reality...I know there is beauty there. And that’s where joy lives.

John 16:22; Psalm 8:3-9, 16:11; Romans 15:13

Thursday, January 6th: Wouldn't it be nice if godliness just came naturally? Unfortunately, the chances for that are as likely as the chances that a diet of Krispy Kreme and Doritos will help you get into shape...well, we did not specify what the shape would be, and round *is* a shape. The point is desirable outcomes require some intentional action on our part. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he told him to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness and to fight the good fight. Pursue and fight are both what we call action verbs, and they involve a concentrated effort on the part of the one doing the pursuing and fighting, nothing passive about it. In addition, Paul admonishes Timothy to flee from those things that would entice him away from the faith and as a result cause him great grief. Paul lists a number of things, but it is not an exhaustive list. What tempts me may not be a problem for you and vice versa. The underlying message is that first, we need to be aware of those things that have the potential to take us down a path that leads away from placing our faith and fulfillment in Jesus. Most of us are already aware of what some of those would be because we find ourselves feeling a twinge of conviction when we indulge in them. But chances are there are some that we may not even realize, and we need to ask Holy Spirit to reveal them to us and then help us to resist and to choose instead to actively, vigorously chase after the better things: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. It may involve some wrestling between spirit and flesh, but we are promised that when we "fight the good fight" we will take hold of the eternal life to which we have been called. We really can accomplish this when we ask and allow Him to be our strength.

1 Timothy 6:11-12; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 12:1-2

Friday, January 7th You have probably heard the acronym for grace: **G**od's **r**iches **a**t **C**hrist's **e**xpense. That alone should cause us to take time every day to thank Him profusely for what we have been freely given and what we never could have acquired through our own means. Add to that the fact that, imperfect as it may be, we have been blessed with living in one of the most blessed of countries compared to just about anyplace else on earth. So why it is that most of us can so easily find ourselves or those around us frequently grumbling and complaining? We complain because we have to sit for an hour in an air-conditioned waiting room to see the doctor; try having to wait six months or more to even get an appointment or having to walk for miles just to see a practitioner. We get upset if someone is sitting in "our" seat at church; we complain that the music is not to our liking; we grumble about not being able to find a closer parking spot; we are annoyed if our specialty coffee is not exactly the way we wanted it. We become like the children of Israel who were rescued out of four hundred years of slavery and deprivation, miraculously delivered from Pharaoh's army by having the waters of the Red Sea part, fed with bread from heaven, their clothes did not wear out for 40 years, and yet they were known as grumblers! They complained about their lack rather than showing gratitude for their provision. In part this may have been because everything they were experiencing was unfamiliar and new to them, including their newfound freedom. Freedom comes at a cost. There will always be things that we thought we needed because they were familiar, but if we refuse to let go, we will never be free to experience the blessings to be found. When circumstances change, we have a choice to make: will we complain because things are different, or will we ask God to show us His blessing in the new unknown? Stop complaining – grumbling and gratitude are both choices. The outcome for the Israelites who grumbled against God and His anointed was a loss of entering into the promise. Our God is still a consuming fire, but He is also a God of grace and mercy. Choose your responses wisely and lay hold of His promise.

Hebrews 12:28-29; Romans 1:21-25; Colossians 3:12-15; Psalm 100:1-5

Saturday, January 8th: I have always considered the passage in Hebrews 10:25 as a call for us to go to church, and I'm sure that's part of what the writer is encouraging us to do. We all need to be in the rows of the sanctuary soaking in the worship and the word of God. But when we are only in rows, we miss out on the wealth of fellowship that we all so desperately need if we're going to thrive. If we are going to meaningfully impact and encourage one another, we are going to have to go deeper in our interactions than simply sitting alongside them and possibly exchanging some pleasantries. And that is also what it is going to take for us to receive the same. We need to relate heart to heart. It is why we hear about getting out of rows and into circles. We need a crew – a group of people working together, friends, iron sharpening iron, carrying one another's burdens, inviting in the presence of Jesus Himself. These are the upside of being part of a community, and this is what we all need if we are going to grow in our relationships with one another and ultimately in our walk with the Lord. We were created in His image, and the Trinity is the ultimate example of relationship. We were created to be in relationship just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are individual entities and yet part of a whole. What better way to reflect Jesus and to strengthen ourselves and others than to have meaningful relationship with one another, considering how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Find a circle.

Hebrews 10:23-25; Proverbs 27:17; Acts 2:42-44

Sunday, January 9th: Pastor Patrick gave a message last November about the fruit of peace in our lives, and one of the points that he made that I found especially impactful as well as convicting was about how our peace *with* God and the peace *of* God are both gifts to enable us to handle any circumstance without having to lose our cool. None of us are going to master that 100% all the time, but something that was shared was that when we find ourselves in an especially trying situation and we're tempted to "give someone a piece of our mind", we need to remind ourselves that giving in to that temptation is going to be forfeiting some of the gift of peace that He has given us. Every "piece" we hurl at someone else diminishes a portion of our own peace. And to be quite candid – some of us can't afford to lose either! (Piece of mind or peace of mind.) In Greek the word for peace is *eirēnē*, from *eirō*, meaning to join or tie together into a whole. In other words, it's the wholeness that's gained when all the essential parts are joined together; it's God's gift of wholeness. We were once separated from Him, but now we are eternally joined together with Him and that gives us an essential wholeness... Emmanuel – God with us and in us. So when we find ourselves in one of those peace threatening situations, we can check ourselves and allow Him to fight our battles for us. It occurred to me that the peace sign from the old hippie days is the same as Winston Churchill's iconic "V" for victory from WWII. When we have His peace we will always be walking in ultimate victory. Isaiah 26:3 reminds us that He will keep in perfect peace the one whose mind is stayed on Him. Don't let anyone or anything rob you of your peace (Col. 2:18) but instead let His perfect peace act as umpire in your heart. (Col. 3:15) In a commentary it was explained this way, "Let not the deceivers decide against you, but let the peace of Christ decide in your hearts" (Cramer's 'Catena'). Cherish His amazing gift of peace and don't ever take it for granted, treat it casually, or allow anything to try to trick you into forfeiting it. Then you can do your victory dance.

Ephesians 2:13-18; John 14:27, 16:33; Philippians 4:6-7

Monday, January 10th: Most of us probably don't go through a day without receiving an important phone call warning us that our car warranty is about to expire, our computer has been hacked, our social security number compromised, or if not that, we're exposed to innumerable commercials advising us of our need for more protection for our home, family or health. The list is endless. And we actually should have insurance policies to protect those things that are important, but above all of those we need to have some security insurance on our hearts. In fact, the wisest man who ever lived warns us to guard our hearts above all else because everything we do flows from that source. That would beg the question – how do we guard our hearts? We can't trust in our own resources because Jeremiah warns us that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked...who can know his own heart? But praise God, He has given us a really good friend to empower us to do what we could never do for ourselves. He is called *parakletos*, aka *Holy Spirit*, and it means our helper or one who comes alongside us to advocate for us, intercede on our behalf when we can't even find the words, and to guide us into all truth. That, my friends, is an iron clad insurance policy that costs us nothing except our dependence upon it. Praise God for His indescribable gift. Father, help us to guard our hearts and through the help of Holy Spirit to keep anything that would be dishonoring to You from ever entering. We confess our own inadequacy to accomplish this without You, and we thank you for Your divine provision in protecting and guiding us. **Proverbs 4:23; Romans 8:1-17**

Tuesday, January 11th: In the opening chapters of Ezekiel we are told five times that the house to which the prophet is being sent is a rebellious house of obstinate and stubborn children who won't like his message. Yet he is told that whether they listen or not he is to give them the message. Ezekiel is also warned not to rebel like those rebels but to "eat what is given to him." We have also been told to take a message to those who may be less than receptive, but we shouldn't feel like failures if they don't give us a warm welcome. All we're asked to do is to respond in obedience and leave the rest up to Holy Spirit. Eat what is given to us – His words – and digest them. When we begin making excuses, the implication seems to be that we're really not much different than those we're asked to reach out to. "They may not like what I have to say" – probably a given. "They may ridicule me or even get nasty" – duly noted. As long as you're being obedient and relaying the message you've been given you've done your part, and God told Ezekiel that even though they would be like spoiled children who would only listen to what made them feel good about themselves and justified their selfish, sinful behaviors and attitudes, at least they would know that a prophet had been among them. According to the website www.biblestudytools.com, the definition for prophet is as follows: "Simply put, a prophet is someone chosen by God to speak for God. Their job, whatever the time period or tidings, was to accurately impart His message." If we profess to be His, we should know what His message is and be able to accurately speak it when we know He is asking us to do so. And we also all have the ability to accurately relay to the lost what their future holds if they continue in their rebellion and unbelief! According to the instructions that were given to Ezekiel, failure to do so had some pretty harsh consequences – if the person died in their sin and Zeke had failed to warn them when God prompted him, he would be held responsible. We have good news to share and a responsibility to

share it that doesn't depend on whether it will be received. The outcome is in His hands.

Ezekiel 33:8-9; Romans 10:14; 1 Peter 3:8-16

Wednesday, January 12th: Somewhere along the line it seems the church has lost its fear of God. Yes, He is our loving, gracious and compassionate Father, but He is also a holy God and He requires from us that we fear Him, walk in all His ways, love Him and serve Him with all our hearts and souls. The way fear is used in this sentence denotes showing reverence and honor. It doesn't imply that we are to shrink back in terror but rather that we are to have a healthy respect for just who He is. And contrary to what some people may want to concede, He is the boss of us! We all know that there is such a thing as healthy fear. Anyone who owns firearms understands the importance of respecting the potential of a loaded weapon. Whenever you handle a weapon, you make sure the safety is on and you don't play games with it, point it at anything other than a bona fide target, and you always must assume that it's loaded. The tragic consequences of not following these guidelines was evidenced in the accidental death of a camera person on a movie set recently. God is infinitely more powerful than a firearm and He demands that we respect Him – not in an overbearing manner but as a parent would demand respect from a child in order to guide and protect that child. He so wants to see us prosper, but He will not impose His will on us, and if we arrogantly refuse to revere Him as we ought He will allow us to stumble along and quite possibly shoot ourselves in the foot – or worse. We need to remember that we serve at His pleasure, and in the back of our minds our every decision should be weighed against the question, “What would the Boss think?”

Deuteronomy 10:12-13; Psalm 19:9-11; Proverbs 15:16

Thursday, January 13th: We can all relate to the frustration of finally finding the restroom, only to see a sign on the door reading “Out of order.” Those three simple words tell us that it isn't functioning properly. Certain vital operations are out of sequence for some reason, so everything isn't “flowing” the way it is intended. In Psalm 37 David writes that, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way.”(NKJV) Any strategy for success needs to have order and David lets us know that before anything else we do, we must first submit to God. When we try to come with the strategy first we're out of order, but when we begin by acknowledging His sovereignty and then present our requests to Him, we can be assured that He already has the best plan and outcome for us and will show us, often one step at a time. We need to listen before we can receive the lesson. David learned to be king by first being a shepherd, and he learned that it's important to not skip steps, even when they may seem counterproductive. Just remember that when you're resting in Him, every step is established. Jesus had to go to the cross and die in order to defeat death. And leading up to that, He submitted to the plan of being human and vulnerable, just as we are, in order to empathize with our every weakness and temptation. “...Although He existed in the form of God, (He) did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant...” We need to be willing to empty ourselves of all that would cause us to feel or seek worthiness on our own merit; only in our emptiness do

we allow room for Him to fill us. And He promises to fill us to overflowing. Thank You, Jesus!

Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5-8; 1 Peter 2:21

Friday, January 14th: SEEK ME EARLY: I am your Creator and I long to plan the day with you, so when the day begins, look up to Me. Give Me all of your cares and invite Me into the midst of your challenges. You can do everything through Christ who strengthens you. Spend time alone in My presence and let go of every burden and worship Me in our quiet time together. As you worship Me, you will feel your burden become lighter because I will lift the load. This time together will bring a blessing as I guide you for the day ahead. Let your heart be filled with the joy of knowing that I love you and I am watching over you. Trust Me and acknowledge Me in all your plans. Lean on Me and see that I will supply all your need. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) My light is shining in you as a beacon to those who need hope. As you spend time in My presence, your light will shine brighter and brighter in the darkness. Joy comes in the morning to those who seek Me early. Seek Me with your whole heart and I will pour out My mercy and grace upon you, to demonstrate My love for you. If you search for Me and seek Me with all your heart you will find Me. Come closer to Me and I will come closer to you.

Philippians 4:13, 19; Proverbs 3:5-6, 4:18; Psalm 30:1; 1 Timothy 1:14; Jeremiah 29:13; James 4:8

Saturday, January 15th: Maybe one of the best examples of a powerfully united body of believers would be the first century church in Jerusalem described in the book of Acts. This was authentic community. We read that they were all with one mind continually devoting themselves to prayer, and one of the results of this unity of mind was the Day of Pentecost when they were all filled with the Holy Spirit in the miraculous appearance of tongues of fire being distributed and resting on each of their heads! Fire is representative of the Holy Spirit and prior to this the temple held the Ark of the Covenant which represented the Presence. But initially, God had instructed Moses to construct a portable tabernacle for His people to congregate together to worship Him. To assure the people of His constant Presence, He led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Whenever Moses would enter the tent, the cloud would descend and stand at the entrance to the tent. There Moses would meet with God face to face and we are told that his face shone from having been in the presence of the Lord. Tabernacle means to dwell, and we are now living sanctuaries of His Spirit. Before Jesus, the fire of the Presence dwelt in one place, but when we became His tabernacles the fire multiplied and filled each one of us. We can individually be on fire for Him, but when we are in true community with others carrying the fire of His indwelling the impact can be exponential. It becomes dunamis power – the dynamic force exhibited in that church in Jerusalem where they were happy, they were walking in signs and wonders and the Lord was adding to their numbers daily. Jesus promises us that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there in their midst. What more could we ask for?

Let's shine!

Matthew 5:16, 18:20; John 1:14; Acts 2:44-46, 5:12-16

Sunday, January 16th: Don't be surprised when you begin seeing breakthrough and suddenly find yourself experiencing backlash. Complacent couch potatoes aren't much of a threat to the enemy, but when you're making headway in the purposes of God's kingdom you can bet there will be opposition. Intense faith will most likely ignite intense pushback. This is when it becomes critical to stand firm. Consider the early church. It was literally on fire – refer back to yesterday's entry – to the extent that people would clamor to bring their sick friends and relatives out into the street when Peter was going to be walking by because he was so filled with the power of the Holy Spirit that people were being healed when his shadow touched them. Similar to the woman touching the hem of Jesus' robe. What brought about these miraculous occurrences was walking in obedience to the Father combined with faith in Him. We might say they were living the dream, but there was a price to pay and it was exacted from the very community that by all rights should have been the most elated at the new spiritual power being demonstrated and the number of people deepening their faith. The root of the opposition was jealousy masked by false piety. The high priest and his cronies could not stand to see their influence being overshadowed, not accepting the fact that it was never their influence to begin with. Rather than applauding the awakening, they sought to squelch it by putting the apostles in prison. Much to their chagrin, an angel intervened, opened the prison doors to release the apostles, and the result was a greater witness than even before. Sadly, rather than accepting the truth of the message and admitting their own guilt, the religious leaders sternly warned the apostles to be silent, flogged them, and released them. The response of the apostles was to rejoice that they had been considered worthy to suffer for Jesus' name. And they kept right on preaching the good news with unparalleled success and continued opposition. The greater the achievement, the greater the resistance. This is not intended to dissuade you from stepping out in greater faith; it is instead meant to prepare you for the battle and inspire you to count it all joy. Sometimes difficulties are a sign of imminent breakthrough and victory if you will just stay close to your source of power and stay the course. Remember whose battle you are fighting and who's fighting your battle.

Acts 5:12-19, 41-42; Romans 8:31, 36-39; John 16:33; Isaiah 54:17

Monday, January 17th: When we read the story of Adam and Eve and how they believed Satan's lie over God's truth, their very first reaction after having fallen was to cover themselves to hide their nakedness. When they were abiding in God's presence in perfect harmony with him, there was no shame. Shame is the result of sin whether we realize it or not. Adam and Eve immediately covered themselves when they ate of the forbidden tree because they suddenly became aware of their nakedness. They tried to cover their shame by sewing fig leaves together, and then when they heard the Lord in the cool of the evening coming to meet with them, they hid. Covering up is a poor substitute for the Lord's antidote for sin and shame. They made a makeshift covering out of perishable fig leaves. God provided a better garment, a more durable covering. It was made from animal skins which meant that there had to be a death and the shedding of blood in order to atone for their failure to fully trust that He knew what was best for them. The enemy will help us rationalize that there may be doubts about what God really said, that we can dabble with the grey areas, and that we can disguise our guilt with our own paltry attempts to hide or deny the shame. It is as foolish as thinking if you only try something once it won't affect you, but how many drops of rationalized poison will it take before we kill the conscience of our spirit? We may be able to fool others and maybe even ourselves into believing that we're standing firm in our faith, but the One with whom we have to do sees it all, and He has already provided the cure. Run to the loving arms of the Father, and in His house we can *check our shame at the door cause it ain't welcome anymore!* (from "The Father's House" by Cory Asbury) *We've been given His robe of righteousness (right standing) and washed clean by the blood of the spotless Lamb. Rejoice and walk with confidence in the newness of life in Him.*

Revelation 3:18; 1 John 1:6-9; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 6:3-7

Tuesday, January 18th: David really knew what it was to feel threatened and in danger, and he also really knew how to worship. As he pens in Psalm 27, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?" David was never afraid of the dark because he knew the true source of light and life. The world around us seems to be getting darker and darker, but that should be no cause for fear or discouragement for us. Instead it should be an invitation and impetus for us to seek more and more to seek out and to walk in His light. We can be the picture of His goodness and mercy and redemption to those who are still walking in the darkness. Just like any good photographer knows, it's all about framing and light. If we accurately capture and frame His message in the correct light – the light of His word – it will not only cleanse us, but it will also create greater fellowship with others and will offer words of hope and life to show the lost the path to the promise of eternal life. 1 John 1:5-7 – "5 This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one

another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.” Lord, we pray that Your light would shine on us, in us, and through us. Give a boldness that only comes from You, and let us never fear the darkness because in You we know that we have a greater and eternal light.

Isaiah 9:2; Psalm 18:2, 119:105; John 8:12; 1 Peter 2:9

Wednesday, January 19th: PREDESTINED: “In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:11-12)

I have engraved you on the palm of My hands. My thoughts toward you are only for your good. I have poured out My grace and mercy upon you. I have given you My favor in all circumstances. I am near to those who call upon Me in truth. I am searching for those whose heart is perfect toward Me, so that I can show Myself strong for you. If you will sit in My presence and rest, you will hear My still small voice. Just a whisper, so listen carefully as I desire to guide you along the narrow path. You will hear a voice behind you saying “...This is the way walk in it.” (Isaiah 30:21) I am with you always even to the end. I will go with you thru every circumstance: the times of great joy and the times of great trial. I was with Daniel in the lion’s den and so I shall be with you. In the day of trouble call upon Me. Seek My face always. I love you with an everlasting love and I am working everything out for your good according to My plans for you. As you yield to Me, I will work out the destiny I planned for you long ago. You are to Me a vessel of honor made holy and I am pouring the oil of joy over your life. Your part is to receive your inheritance. Open up your heart to Me so that I can pour in the oil of joy. Rejoice My beloved, you are chosen and predestined for My glory.

Isaiah 49:16; Jeremiah 29:11, 31:3; Psalm 45:7, 18, 50:15, 105:4; 2Chronicles 16:9; 1Kings 19:12; Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 2:21

Thursday, January 20th: In an effort to be non-judgmental we have become a people who have forgotten our heritage. What makes our country so desirable that those of other countries are willing to risk their lives in an effort to come here? What is it that even those who already live here want to enjoy more of and are fighting for, even though they are missing an important element? It’s our freedom and the blessings we have experienced. It has been God’s favor on a country that was founded upon His principles. The problem is that they want the favor without having to follow the format. We enjoy our liberties because our founding fathers were willing to fight for them, and they based their standards on the word of God. They believed that when they were following and adhering to the standards of Almighty God, they would walk in His favor and blessing because they knew that He was the one who was guiding and providing in their quest. As such, they gave honor, acknowledgment, and thanks to Him and subsequently based their founding documents and laws upon His word and His principles. That is what has made us a great nation. To a degree, the old saying “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” would apply; we agree that there have been times when we’ve had to address our own sinful behaviors due to ignorance or lack of alignment with His values, but as long as result was a realignment that we might better reflect Him, it only made us stronger and better. Unfortunately, we’ve seen a drifting away from the gold standard in our laws because there has been a shift to reliance on the dictates of culture and deviant behaviors becoming prevalent and demanding self-serving “rights” that are bringing about a foundation

that is no longer firm. Lord, forgive us for not honoring you as the only worthy and reliable judge in all things; remind us of our roots, established in the rich soil of Your word, and may they continue to be the source of our health and growth.

Proverbs 3:5-6; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Luke 6:43, 47-48; Revelation 2:5

Friday, January 21st: 1 I like words. Choosing just the right word can be so powerful, and often there are subtle nuances to a particular word that can add such a depth of meaning in its use. One such word is *sanctify*. Peter urges us to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts so we will always have a ready answer for anyone who wonders where our hope comes from. What he's telling us is to understand with utter confidence and assurance that He is indeed over all, in all, and in control. When we really know and accept this, there's nothing that can faze us! Sickness? He's got that covered. Finances? That too. Relationship woes? All means all. Walking through these things may not always be easy, but we have this hope – this confidence in the One who is walking beside us and can be trusted to always lead us in our best interest. Let's *sanctify* Him in our hearts: set Him apart as holy, act with confidence and proper respect, and regard in our actions that He is indeed Christ our Lord.

Peter 3:15; Isaiah 41:10; Psalm 56:3

Saturday, January 22nd: We have all been given a mission. The definition of mission is: a specific task with which a person or a group is charged. Jesus gave it to us just before He was taken up into heaven; it is referred to as the Great Commission, and it cannot be accomplished by an individual. It is a group effort. It has to be because no one person can go into all the earth preaching the gospel and making disciples. It has to be the combined effort of the church – all of us – working together to accomplish the task that was given to us. The prefix *com* denotes with or together, so it is a mission to be shared. It's iron sharpening iron. A cord of three strands is not easily broken. Some commentators have interpreted this as meaning where two are closely joined in fellowship, Christ will by his Spirit come to them, and then there is a threefold cord. This idea could be supported by Jesus' own words when He told His disciples that wherever two or more are gathered together in His name, He will be there in the midst of them. What better partnership could we ask for? This affiliation is what ensures the success of the venture. It's like each of us, individually and as the body of the Church, is a part of the greater workings of an intricate machine. When we are all together in harmony there is great potential and it can be a beautiful image, but until it is all tapped into the power of the indwelling Spirit it's simply an attractive shrine. And each part by itself may be useful to an extent, but not to accomplish the purpose for

which it was created – its mission. The potential is exponential! Lord, give us hearts that seek to accomplish Your purposes in a spirit of humility and cooperation with those communities in which You have placed us. With You literally anything is possible.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Ephesians 4:1-13

Sunday, January 23rd: WINDOWS OF HEAVEN: “But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.” (Psalm 3:3) My child, you are My beloved. I desire to shower you with blessings from heaven. As I have said in My word, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you will not have enough room to take it in. Put Me to the test!” (Malachi 3:10B) I pour My favor upon you through your obedience to My word. Trusting Me and following My word is the key to your blessings. Seek Me early in the morning. Turn your heart to Me in prayer. Seek My face evermore. Come into My presence with thanksgiving. I am watching over you with tender mercy. I want to give you life more abundantly. The surrender of your will to Me opens doors that have been sealed shut in the past. When you open your heart to Me, you are giving Me permission to heal and restore you and lead you along the path of righteousness. The path of righteousness is for all who call upon My name and seek Me with a consecrated heart. I can do above all that you can ask or think, but it begins with your will surrendered to Mine. The path where I lead is what I purposed for you long ago. Trust Me and do not shy away from surrender. “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land.” (Isaiah 1:19) I am calling you to come up higher. Come to the table of the Lord and be satisfied. Give Me what is in your hand that I might open the windows of heaven for you. COME UP HIGHER!

Proverbs 8:17; Psalm 105:4, 100:4, 23:3, 107:9; John 10:10; Ephesians 3:20, 2:10; Revelation 4:1

Monday, January 24rd: Ghrelin is what is known as the hunger hormone, and it’s what makes your stomach growl when you’ve been fasting for a while to remind you that you need to put something into your stomach. Recent research, however, has shown that its benefits go beyond just being an appetite stimulant or reminder. It also can help reduce the risk of heart attacks, prevent muscle atrophy, and regulate bone formation and metabolism. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we all had spiritual ghrelin? Something that would remind us when we haven’t been feeding our spirits with the nourishment that would keep us strong and healthy, prevent atrophy, and protect our hearts from ceasing to function in the way they were created to keep the lifeblood flowing through our veins. I truly believe that everything – *everything* – in the physical world has a spiritual application in our lives. God created us with a hormone to remind us to nourish our physical bodies. The interesting thing about ghrelin is that its levels are actually lower in persons who are obese. Perhaps this would suggest that when we are constantly “feeding” ourselves with things that are not healthy for us, we suppress the still small voice that is reminding us to take in what will truly nourish us and restore our well being. We need to be daily filling ourselves with

the word of God and the Word – Jesus, the bread of life. Ask Him to make you more aware of His still, small voice – our spiritual grhelin: grace-filled, refreshing, healing, encouraging, life-giving, inspirational nudges to remind us of what is truly needed.

Luke 4:2-4, 10:38-42; John 6:33-35

Tuesday, January 25th: It's now been one month since we celebrated Christmas, so my question for you would be – are you still in a Christmas state of mind? Perhaps a better question would be what state is your mind in. Geographically speaking, the state you are in can have a significant impact on many things. The spicy foods of New Mexico or Arizona can be quite a challenge to someone from the Midwest who is more accustomed to potatoes and pot roast. Driving in the Colorado Rockies in January could cause some serious panic for someone used to driving in Florida. And then there's the question of different laws and political climates from California to Texas. These same problems can arise when our mental state of mind has been altered. A state of mind is your mental condition based on what's controlling it at any given time, and our subsequent attitudes or perspectives determine how we are going to deal with life in general. You may be asking what any of this has to do with Christmas. In the second chapter of Philippians we find the answer. The whole reason Jesus came to this earth was to show us what it means to truly serve and honor God and then to provide a way for us to be able to do so. Paul urges us all to have the same attitude in ourselves as Jesus did when He was willing to relinquish all the perks that went with His position as Lord God and to take on the assignment of becoming human, and not just that but a bond-servant. This is the lens God wants us to see our lives through – the mindset that drives our decisions and determines our direction. And Paul says let *this* mind be in you. He's referring of course to the mind of Christ which has been afforded to us through the indwelling of Holy Spirit, and he stresses this because there are other spirits that could try to control our minds and redirect us into a different "state" that was never intended to be where we reside. They're like the "spirits" that are sold in the corner liquor store whose intent is to numb us, intoxicate us, and obliterate God-given inhibitions, causing us to do things that we would never consider if we were in the right state of mind. The last few years have been confusing, inconvenient, disappointing, even threatening; so what spirit have we turned to in order to deal with it all? We have to first remember that His ways are not our ways – they're so much higher and more effective. How many of us would have employed a shepherd boy (David) to kill a giant? Or sent someone (Jonah) to preach revival in a city that he utterly loathed? To come up with effective strategies like that we need the mind of One far superior to ourselves. Lord, help us to remember that we have been given the mind of Christ; today we choose to cooperate with you and ask Holy Spirit to keep us in the right state of mind.

Philippians 2:5, 4:6-8; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; 2 Corinthians 10:5

Wednesday, January 26th: Sometimes we have this skewed idea about what pastors do all week when it isn't Sunday. Sure, we know they write their messages and prepare lessons, and maybe they perform a wedding or funeral or counsel with someone, but beyond that? They carry on their shoulders the profound responsibility of shepherding a flock – and in our case, a very large flock – that actually belongs to a very powerful Master. The duties of a shepherd in Biblical times were onerous: ensure that the sheep were fed what would nourish them as needed – milk for lambs and pleasant pastures for the more mature, lead them on the correct paths, protect them from hostile forces, teach them to stay together and to listen for and respond to his voice, lovingly provide discipline when they strayed from the flock. Our pastors carry these same responsibilities, and they know that the sheep don't belong to *them*, and that the very lives of the sheep in their care depend on their fidelity to the directives of the One to whom the sheep belong. We need to appreciate, encourage, and pray for our shepherds. Father, we ask You to faithfully lead and empower those to whom you have entrusted us that they may fulfill their calling with joy and excellence.

1 Peter 5:1-4; Colossians 1:25-29

Thursday, January 27th: Everyone would like to have a powerful testimony. We can get chills listening to some of the stories of God's miraculous intervention and provision in peoples' lives, and it is a beautiful thing to see the beauty He gives for ashes. The only problem is, you usually will not have much of a testimony without testing, and most people are not lining up for that one. We have become so addicted to shortcuts and pain free solutions that we've lost sight of what it is to have a strong work ethic or to value delayed gratification. There are so many examples in the Bible as well as in more recent history of giants in faith. Who would not want to be remembered as a Paul? But before he ever became the primary author of the New Testament and a renowned and respected apostle he had to be stricken blind and spend three years in Arabia before he received the acceptance and blessing of the other apostles. Add to that the shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, and dangers he endured for the name of Jesus. Ongoing tests culminated in a powerful testimony. We want to shine forth like gold, but we need to remember that gold must go through a refining process. In Bible times it was broken and crushed, and then it was put in a crucible and exposed to extreme heat to remove all the impurities. Most of us will never have to go through the extreme testing of Paul or Joseph, but if we are truly desirous of belonging to Him; developing perseverance, proven character, and hope; and experiencing His love being poured out in our hearts, then we have to be willing to accept the trial that will lead to the triumph and the

testimony. We all have untapped potential for a powerful witness, but we are not going to tap into it by sitting on the sidelines. All it takes is a willing heart and a step of faith. He will take care of the rest.

John 16:33; Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-3, 12; 1 Peter 1:7

Friday, January 28th: Having your vehicle's wheels out of alignment can cause some serious problems. Causing your tires to wear down prematurely is just the start. It can also cause wear and tear on the suspension and steering components, and if the alignment is bad enough, you could wind up breaking things. Not only that, it causes reduced performance and traction, it can inhibit quick acceleration, and it can also increase the distance required to stop. There are similar consequences for us spiritually if parts of our lives are out of alignment with God's word. If even one area is misaligned it can have an adverse effect on the other parts as well in our overall effectiveness and endurance. For example, if Satan can keep us from giving our whole hearts to the Lord, he knows he has an entry point for all kinds of strongholds. There is a reason we are told to guard our hearts above all else; from it flows everything we do. For that reason, he will tempt us with all kinds of things to keep us from fully devoting ourselves to the Lord. Another area he may attack is our minds. If he can make us question God's goodness and authority, he can cause us to worry about things that we should be placing in the hands of the Father. He can also dupe us into believing we can do it all on our own apart from God's commandments. We may begin to pay more attention to "the experts" (who professing to be wise will one day be proven fools) more than we do to God's word. Yet another way is through our physical bodies. Satan knows that our bodies are the temple of the Lord, so he will find all sorts of ways to tempt us to misuse, abuse, or become obsessed with them in unhealthy or idolatrous ways that would not be pleasing to the Lord. You see how any one of these areas could derail us. When one of our "wheels" is off balance, we will most likely give it undue attention, or else we will be oblivious to the negative effect it is having on us as a whole person. One that should be wholly devoted to Him – in alignment with His truths. Sound too much for you to handle? Alone it is, but we need to ask Him to help us do an alignment check daily, address the weak areas and get them back into proper balance, then protect ourselves from further deterioration by putting on His armor.

Proverbs 4:23; Luke 10:27; Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 4:6-7

Saturday, January 29th: NFL conference championships will be played tomorrow to determine who will be going to the Super Bowl next month. For some of you that may be less than interesting, but to others it's the culmination of some nail-biting match-ups that have led up to this point and the tensions and expectations are high. And if your team is in the play-offs it's especially thrilling. You may have a "lucky" numbered jersey you wear and your posts or tweets may even carry your picture with the hash tag *That's My Team!* Of particular importance will be who's on the injured list and who's on the roster. Key players and good chemistry can make all the difference. You may be wondering what this has to do with faith and your personal walk with the Lord, but who we have as our teammates can be a deciding factor in whether we achieve victory or fall short. We need to surround ourselves with those who are like minded, who will encourage us to stay the course and who have the same goal in mind. We also need to understand that we all have an important role to play; each of us has an assignment, and when we are working alongside those with different but essential skills/gifts there is so much more to be achieved. More options, more teammates who have your back, and more protection from the opposition. And by all means, make sure your quarterback (i.e. pastor) follows the playbook. We all would prefer to be on the winning team, so to accomplish that goal we need to be mindful of whose team we want to be on. Wouldn't you rather be associated with Lions and Saints than Steelers and Raiders? (No endorsement of any teams intended – just a shameless play on names) Choose wisely as your crew those you believe will help you achieve the prize.

Proverbs 13:20, 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-15

Sunday, January 30th: **PRAY WITH THANKSGIVING:** When you are in My presence you are aware of the deepest sense of peace. This is a peace that is not found in the world. It is the peace that passes all understanding. When your heart is heavy, instead of carrying that burden, I invite you to come into My presence and you will find that burden becoming lighter as I carry that load for you. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to (Me) God." (Philippians 4:6) It is My delight to answer your prayer requests when you ask according to My will. "No good thing will (I) He withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Psalm 84:11b) When you walk beside Me, and live a life that pleases Me, you will find favor and blessings coming to you from My throne of grace. As you yield yourself to the Holy Spirit, He will guide you. I have many good things in store for you. Come into My presence through quietness, prayer and worship and share your heart with Me. "For I, the

Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.” (Isaiah 41:13) I invite you, come, and sit at My feet. Whisper your heart cry to Me. Let me comfort you with My love and know that I hear you when you pray.

Philippians 4:7; Matthew 11:28; 1 John 5:14, Psalm 5:2; John 16:13; Jeremiah 29:11, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 1 John 5:15

Monday, January 31st: The last verse of James 2 is somewhat sobering. It reads, “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” Oftentimes the idea of works is interpreted to mean serving in the children’s department, doing hours of volunteer work, or some other form of extracurricular activity that can be checked off a list. But this is not what James was referring to; the word he used was *ergon*, and it actually means everyday conduct measured by a standard of righteousness. It is the integrity of our daily lives, believing that God’s guidelines should be observed always, and that the reason for our behavior should not be based on being seen or recognized for “how good” we are or how much we do. It is all about obedience and reverence, trusting that He knows best. Acts of service will be the natural response to our core beliefs. That is what faith is. That is where we will find true life. Anything else is dead.

James. 2:14, 22-26; Genesis 15:6