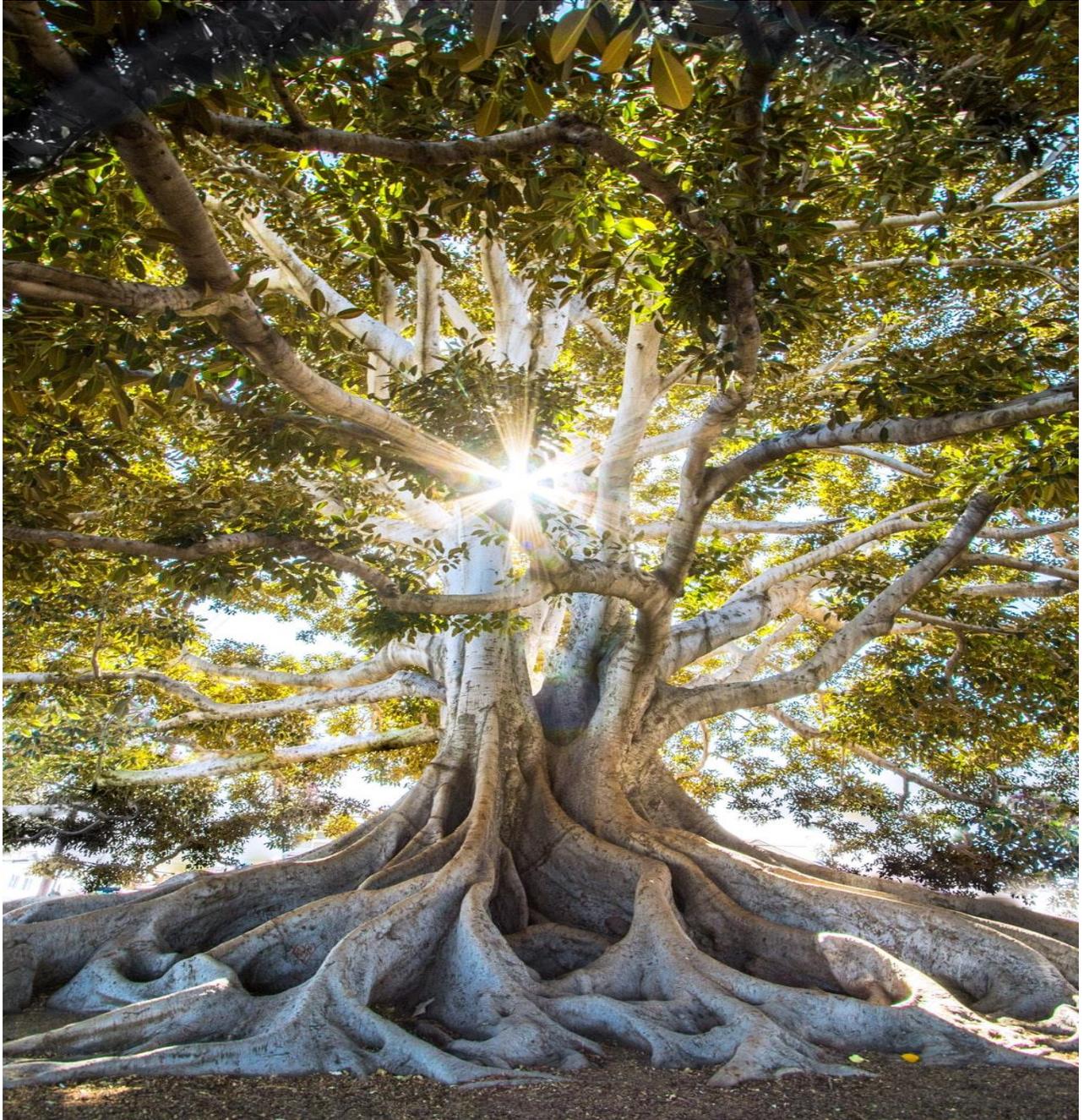


Prayer Devotions



May 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:

Sudan

Iraq

Syria

Daily Prayers for May “Worship is giving God the best that He has given you. Be careful what you do with the best you have. Whenever you get a blessing from God, give it back to Him as a love gift. Take time to meditate before God and offer the blessing back to Him in a deliberate act of worship.” Oswald Chambers

Sunday, May 1st: I was recently reading in Song of Solomon about the little foxes that come to devour the fruit and destroy the vineyards *while they are in blossom*. You see, foxes are smart enough to know that the best time to raid the vineyard is when there's fruit being produced. And they do not just eat the fruit; they also dig under the arbor to separate the branches from the vine. This is what the enemy would like to do to us when we are fruitful – find ways to detach us from our Vine and rob us of our fruit. He will send his little foxes – distraction, disappointment, distress, discontent – anything that might deter us from producing the sweet fruit we were intended to according to our Master's plan. That is what we were created for. And one of the best ways to keep foxes at bay is to have a big dog. We have a big dog! If we stay close to Him and depend on Him, we can be assured of being productive. Holy Spirit, guard us from the little foxes.
John 15:4-5; Ephesians 2:10

Monday, May 2nd: I love mornings. There is just something about starting out fresh each day. I am fortunate most of the time to start each day sitting on my porch with a cup of coffee and listening to the birds as the sun slowly makes its way up for its daily journey across the sky. Often, I get to watch other activities as the neighborhood wakes up, such as people walking their dogs, cats making their morning rounds, and saying hello to neighbors as they start their day.

It is these peaceful moments that help me to prepare my mind and my heart for my daily time with God. It is at this time - before I do *anything* else - that I read a devotion and some Scripture, pray, and meditate. I have made it a habit to carve out this time in my schedule each day. It is this routine that helps me start my day on a positive note - even if the day turns out anything but routine.

Setting a regular rhythm that includes rest is vital to our physical, mental, and spiritual selves. Jesus often took time out to be alone with His Father. God Himself took a day of rest after creating the Earth - and commands us to do the same each week. And not only does God command us to keep a Sabbath - the Bible even states that we are blessed by doing so.

After incorporating a Sabbath day in my routine, I have found better balance in my life. I also consider my daily devotional routine as a "mini-Sabbath."

Life is crazy - there is no doubt about that. And in all the noise of the craziness, it is nearly impossible to hear God speaking. Are you taking time for your soul to rest? If not, try adding a routine of Sabbath to the rhythm of your life - even if you can only manage to squeeze in a mini-Sabbath each day. You may be surprised what happens!

Read: Exodus 20:8-11, Isaiah 56:2, Mark 1:35, Matthew 6:6

Tuesday, May 3rd: When the Apostle John recorded the Lord's messages to the seven churches, the very first was to the church at Ephesus, and although He affirmed the many things that they were doing well, He had this complaint against them - they had lost their first love. Author John Bevere gives an insightful picture of what Jesus is really saying to all of us as a reminder of what is truly important. We've all both heard and probably said to others that it is not religion - it's a relationship. But how often is this "the right thing to say" but not truly a reflection of how we live? Bevere explains that when he was engaged to his wife, he was so head over heels in love with her that he thought about her all the time and would go out of his way to spend time with her or do things that he knew would bless her, no matter the cost. It was a joy for him, and he did not do these things to *prove* he loved her; he did them *because* he loved her. However, after several years of marriage he became distracted by other things that demanded his attention and it now became more of a requirement than a joy to do these same things. In short, he was taking her for granted. He was losing his first love and it was having a serious negative effect on his relationship with his wife. The same is true when we lapse into just going through the motions of honoring our relationship with God without treating it as our first love - our top priority. We may be doing all the "right" things but for the wrong reasons. It is not our acts of service that prove we love Him; it is our love for Him that prompts our acts of service. If that is not the motivator, then we have fallen into a works mentality, and it will not warm His heart and deepen our relationship with Him any more than a generic Valentine with a rubber-stamped signature would enhance your relationship with your spouse or sweetheart. We need to be intentional in spending quality time with Him, seeking and longing to really discover His heart and connect with Him. The rest will be the natural outflow instead of the assumed pathway and proof.

Revelation 2:4-5; John 14:21

Wednesday, May 4th: SHOUT THE VICTORY: "Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! For the Lord, most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth." (Psalm 47:1-20) I am your mighty deliverer. Shout out to Me with the high praises of victory. I am the Lord, I change not..." (Malachi 3:6) Trust in Me, I will be there in the darkest of times to bring light. So, shout with the voice of victory. Your shout will bring joy to your soul in times of trouble. I say to you the earth is Mine and nothing escapes from Me. Praise is your weapon to defeat the enemy....so shout out to Me. Your shout of praise is a deafening sound to the enemy. If the enemy tries to come in, your shout will lift up a standard against him. I will send My angels to take charge over you and give to you a hedge of protection. My angels are flames of fire that obey My word. I am on your side, and I will fight for you. Your praise brings the victory to the situation you are facing. Clap your hands and shout with the voice of triumph. It might seem foolish, but remember I choose foolish things to confound the wise. Your shout can bring the walls down and bring your victory. SHOUT HALLELUJAH!

Psalm 24:1, 2 Chronicles 20:22, Isaiah 59:19, Psalm 91:11, Hebrews 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2

Thursday, May 5th: It all boils down to the simplicity of accepting by faith His wisdom and authority in all things. When we know that we know He is the source of everything and that He transcends our limited knowing and understanding, we are open to receiving revelation knowledge as opposed to learned facts. Admitting that we do not know or understand everything allows Him to fill our minds with ideas that are far beyond our own abilities. By definition, knowledge is facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education, the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. However, revelation is defined as the communication of divine truth; something that is revealed or made known by God, an enlightening or astonishing disclosure. Any training that centers on man will result in mere knowledge; any training that centers on God and receiving from Him will result in His knowledge which is beyond our searching out. It is the revelation of the heart of God which was made available to us through Jesus and is always with us in the Presence of our Paraclete, our advocate and helper who will teach us all things. But it all hinges on whether or not we base our dependence on the Alpha and Omega - He who was in the beginning. **1 Corinthians 2:6-13; 2 Peter 1:3; Isaiah 55:8-9; Proverbs 3:5-7**

Friday, May 6th: There is a challenging verse in Jeremiah 8:8-9 that states the wise will be put to shame, dismayed, and trapped. At first glance this seems contrary to what we believe about who the Bible typically refers to as wise, but when we read the remainder of these verses, we realize that they are only wise in their own eyes. Our own limited wisdom is so inferior to the wisdom we can have when we defer to God, but self-acclaimed wise ones are those who reject the word of the Lord. The Bible tells us that as the end draws near there will be an increase in wickedness, and we have certainly been witness to this, particularly in all the divisiveness and the blatant disregard for Godly authority as opposed to self-promoting authority (such as the invasion of Ukraine.) These are the more obvious evidences of wickedness. The more subtle examples are in those who gain positions of authority yet have rejected the basic standards of morality found in the Bible and replaced them with laws that accommodate ungodly lifestyles and undermine God's best for humanity. And unfortunately, even some Christians have been deceived into thinking that we just need to accept this new way of thinking. But before we cast aspersions, remember that none of us are immune to deception, and if we think that we are too wise to fall for any of the disinformation, we have already been deceived. To know the difference, we must be firmly rooted in God's word, and with the growing deception of our day it is imperative that we prepare ourselves because Jesus **is** coming back, and we do not want to be dismayed, trapped, or put to shame. Lord, we want to stand firm in Your wisdom, truth, and righteousness. We ask Holy Spirit to nudge us every day to be in Your word that we would not be deceived. **Romans 1:18-22; 1 Timothy 4:1**

Saturday, May 7th: Not everything we call worship is actually worship. In fact, 25% of the world's population died at one time because of a misinterpretation of how to truly worship God. Cain and Abel both brought sacrifices to the Lord, but He was only pleased with Abel's sacrifice and rather than learn from his mistake, Cain instead became jealous and furious at the Lord and murdered his brother. We are not told exactly what the problem was, but we know that the Lord was not pleased with Cain's sacrifice and because the Lord is not capricious, we can also be sure that both brothers knew in their hearts what would have qualified as true worship that honored and pleased Him. The church today has the Bible as a resource to help understand what worship really is. It is more than singing praises, and it's even more than bowing in reverence although both can definitely be a part of it. True worship goes beyond any form of external expression - it is only known by God because He sees our hearts and that is where our worship is born. It is from a place of knowing fully who He is, who we are not, and who we have become because of His mercy, grace, and love. He's God; we are not. Worship comes from a place of deep adoration, gratitude, and reverence for the One we know we cannot live without and who holds the Universe in His hands. Come, let us truly worship and bow down, kneeling in our hearts before the Lord, our God, our Maker. **1 Corinthians 10:31; Hebrews 12:28-29; John 4:24.**

Sunday, May 8th: Sometimes the role of a mother can be diminished from homemaker to housekeeper. There is a big difference, and the impact of creating a safe and nurturing home cannot be discounted. Proverbs 31 inevitably comes to mind when we think of virtuous mothers and the impact they can have, but it is interesting to note that many scholars believe that the mother being lauded is Bathsheba and that King Lemuel, meaning belonging to God, may be a name assigned to Solomon to remind him of his obligation to God and the need to dedicate himself to justice and the glorification of God above all else. If that is the case, what a profound impact this imperfect yet redeemed mother had in building the kingdom of God. Her wisdom and example inspired the wisest man on earth to become a great king. And then there's Lois and Eunice, the grandmother and mother of Timothy whom Paul credits with placing in Timothy a sincere and powerful faith. And when we are hurting, it is the gentle comfort of a mother that speaks to our wounded hearts. God even likens the comfort He affords to that of a mother. No mother is ever perfect, but they cannot and should not be expected to be. "Mothers write on the hearts of their children what the rough hand of the world cannot erase." Praise God for godly mothers who play the powerful role of creating godly homes and pray for all mothers to know Him and to honor Him as they shape the lives that will shape the future. **Isaiah 66:13; 2 Timothy 1:5-7; Proverbs 31**

Monday, May 9th: There are so many powerfully gifted representatives of Jesus for us to listen to and learn from, but we need to avoid the trap of wishing we could be them or to somehow achieve their particular position or measure and style of influence. That not only makes them an idol, but it also hinders us from being used by God according to His perfect design for us. There are just as many verses to encourage us that He has a special plan for each one of us. He tells us: we are fearfully and wonderfully made - Psalm 139; we are His masterpiece and were created for good works which He prepared ahead of time for us - Ephesians 2:10; He has chosen, appointed, and equipped us - John 15:16. I used to want to be Barbara Streisand. I was so envious of her beautiful singing voice, and I love to sing, but I did not come equipped with those kinds of pipes and that was not God's design for me. If I had wasted all of my time trying to be Barbara Streisand, who would I have been me? I will never be well known and adored by the world, but I have a much greater and more important audience in the Creator and Lord of the entire universe, and the only one I need be concerned about impressing is Him. And the beautiful part is He has already equipped me to succeed and thrive in a plan that was tailored just for me! The same is true for you. The only thing we need to do is to ask Him to help us understand who He made us to be and how that will apply to building His Kingdom. The only way we will ever bear good fruit is if we release ourselves from coveting someone else's fruit and instead develop those gifts that God has given us. He only gives good gifts, and His plans are always for our good.

Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 139:13-16; John 15:16

Tuesday, May 10th: A Time of Refreshing: This world is not your home. I will refresh you in My presence if you will come before Me. Surrender your desires to the peace that I offer you in the secret place. In this place you can be shut in with Me and feel the very atmosphere of the heavenly realm. You can trust Me and rest securely in My embrace. I am drawing you by the spirit away from the cares of the world. As you spend time in My presence, I will renew you with greater strength to face every challenge and adversity. If you will listen to Me and follow My instruction, I will be an enemy to your enemies. When you come into the secret place you are preparing the way of the Lord. It is here that My anointing flows and showers you with refreshing. I am a shield around you. I will lift you up above all the storm clouds. Come into My presence with singing and I will inhabit your praise. Your praise is like sweet incense to Me filling the atmosphere. When you are in My presence you know that we are one. Here in My presence, strongholds are being torn down. In your busy world, make time to be refreshed. It will change the battle from defeat to victory and shape your destiny. Remember, you are in the world but not of it. Come, spend time with Me and let Me refresh you.

Acts 3:20, Psalms 91:1, Isaiah 40:31, Exodus 23:22, Psalm 3:3, Psalm 22:3, John 14:20, John 17:16

Wednesday, May 11th: One of the skills we all could probably spend more time developing is that of listening with true interest and compassion. You see, we have a choice as to how we are going to listen to someone when they begin to share something with us, and this is especially important if what they are sharing is something that may cause them to feel vulnerable. If we act disinterested or shocked it could cause them to feel shame, insignificance, rejection or may even close them down to ever trusting anyone with their innermost feelings again. Maybe even from trusting God. But if you listen with compassion and show a genuine interest in them as well as a concern for what they are experiencing, it could encourage them to open up and give you an opportunity to minister in a way that would communicate to them God's mercy, grace, love, forgiveness, and compassion. It could even be a God appointed time because what they are going through is similar to something you have gone through as well, and you will be able to share with them how He helped you overcome. Always avoid the temptation, however, to turn the attention to you. Give them hope and leave it at that. And if you cannot empathize, simply offer to pray for them. That may be all they need, but it also may be exactly what they need. Just be willing to let Him use you to be His emissary, reflecting His own willingness to actively listen and care.

Colossians 4:2, 3:12-14; Galatians 6:2

Thursday, May 12th: For anyone who has any doubt, there IS a God! Not only that, but He is the Creator and sustainer of all things and we can know Him personally. And as if that is not enough, He has also given us access to His authority: authority over sin, sickness, and Satan and his schemes. This does not mean that we will be exempt from ever being tempted by sin, from experiencing sickness or from being harassed by Satan, but it does mean that we do not have to be mastered by them. In fact, we can overwhelmingly conquer in all these things through Him who loves us, because there is nothing that can separate us from His love. There is, however, a caveat to wielding this power and authority and it has to do with first humbling ourselves and submitting to Him. This was beautifully demonstrated by the centurion in Capernaum who publicly humbled himself before Jesus even though he was himself a man of great authority in the public and political arena. Yet he realized that this Jewish rabbi possessed an authority greater than his own and was willing to risk his reputation in order to free one of his servants from paralysis and a tormenting spirit. Jesus responded to this Gentile's request by healing the servant and then marveling at the man's great faith - a faith greater than He has witnessed in those who should have recognized and responded to His authority. How amazing would that be if we could astound Jesus with the level of our faith! As Pastor Allen Jackson explains, it is all about following Him when we do not understand or think we have all the answers. It is being willing to look foolish or suffer persecution for His name because we believe that ultimately, we will have the victory. Because He is who He says He is - **the great I Am.**

Romans 8:35-39

Friday, May 13th: It's time to grow up! Paul urges Timothy to flee youthful lusts and to instead pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. This sounds like good advice, and especially when you have reached an age that, shall we say, would be considered more mature. But the truth is that we all cling to things that we may not consider on the surface to be "youthful lusts." The most obvious thing that comes to mind is sensuality, and although this is most likely one of the things that Paul was cautioning Timothy to flee from, there are other more subtle desires that tend to be more prevalent among youth, but we are expected to outgrow as we mature in the Lord. These would include pride, rashness (or lack of self-control), self-serving ambition, envy, and the like. All of a sudden we realize that we know a lot of people who are exhibiting these "youthful" lusts but do not chronologically qualify as youths! Hopefully one of them is not the face gazing back at you in the mirror. All of us will struggle from time to time with the temptation to fall into some of these lusts, but we do not have to be governed by them. Even the great Apostle Paul wrote about his own inner conflict with the flesh. In chapter seven of his letter to the church in Rome he wrote, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." Paul knew full well the schemes of the enemy and his clever, underhanded strategies to derail those who desired to serve God. The line of counterattack is to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. The meaning of the word Paul used for pursue meant to seek after eagerly and earnestly. As we run toward God with an earnest desire to grow up and mature in His ways, He will continually support us through our Advocate whom Jesus sent when He returned to the Father. Nobody really wants to be or see a 40-year-old soiling themselves and sucking on a pacifier. It is time to run – away from what deters us and toward what develops us.

2 Timothy 2:22; Romans 7:15, 24-25; Ephesians 4:14-24

Saturday, May 14th: Just over twenty years ago worship leader and songwriter Matt Redman wrote a book entitled *The Unquenchable Worshipper*. According to Merriam-Webster, unquenchable means not capable of being satisfied, quelled, or discouraged. This is the kind of worshipper I want to be. I think this is the kind that God yearns for us all to be. Our worship of Him should well up in us with such unbridled passion that nothing could stop us; there would be no point at which we would sit back and think to ourselves that we had satisfied the extent to which He should be worshipped. No amount of disappointment would cause us to think that He no longer was worthy. Francis Chan once said, “What makes worship amazing is the object of our worship. Isn’t it a comfort to worship a God we cannot exaggerate?” You see, the more time we spend in His Presence, the more we come to realize that He is infinitely greater than we could ever imagine, and that should stir up in us a desire to know Him even better. Because His love is unquenchable, so should our worship be. As the Song of Solomon is ending, we read the words, “Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.” This reflects the extent of God’s immeasurable love for us, and our response should be that of an unrestrained expression of our love and gratitude. He alone is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power; for He created all things, and because of His will they exist and were created. The heavens never cease to declare His glory, and neither should we. Lord, we humbly bow before You and recognize Your glory, splendor, and majesty. May we never lose sight of Who it is we worship, and may our worship be unquenchable.

Psalm 150; Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 4:8-11

Sunday, May 15th: We all have dreams. I am talking about those things that maybe God has put on our hearts, and they are typically things that would have a positive outcome, but the question then is what do we do with them? The answer to that question will be determined by how badly we want it. Michael Phelps has won more gold medals and more total medals than any other Olympian athlete, winning 28 medals in all – 23 of them gold! So how did he get so good? For a five year stretch he was in the pool every day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. He had decided at the age of eight that he wanted to compete in the Olympics, and despite the understandable misgivings and even ridicule he received, despite the birthdays and other special days that also incorporated training and therefore missing out on some things, despite all of that he was committed to doing what was necessary to achieve his dream. When you look at the story of Elisha, you can also see how much he wanted his dream. When Elijah threw his mantle over Elisha's shoulders, Elisha stood to inherit a lucrative family business. But he knew enough about the prophet and that what had been done meant that he had been chosen to be Elijah's successor that he dropped what he was doing and ran after the prophet to serve as his apprentice. The Bible is not really clear as to how long Elisha served in this lesser role, but it could have been between six and ten years. What we do know is that when Elijah was finally ready to pass the torch, three times he told Elisha to remain behind while he went on an errand for God and three times Elisha refused to leave his master's side. When it was time to be taken, Elijah asked what it was that Elisha would want him to do. Elisha's response was to receive a double portion of Elijah's anointing. He had a big dream, and he was willing to put in the time, sacrifice anything that needed to be left behind, and he refused to be deterred from pursuing the dream. What is your God dream? How badly do you want it? Pursuing a God-sized dream will mean a willingness to put in the time and face some obstacles, but the prospect of positive results is exponentially enhanced when you determine to go the distance – when you are all in. If the completion of your dream is bigger than your own resources and it is dedicated to Him and His purposes, He will help you to bring it to fruition. Dream big, stay the course, and give Him the glory.

Ephesians 2:10; Jeremiah 29:10-13

Monday, May 16th: In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he gives a pretty accurate description of what we are witnessing today: those who love only themselves and their money, are boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and are ungrateful. They consider nothing sacred, are unloving, slander others and have no self-control, are cruel and hate what is good. They betray their friends, are puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. This all quite aptly reflects our current culture. But what really caught my attention was what followed - they will hold to a form of godliness but will reject the power that could actually make them godly. We read the first four verses and apply them to the heathens - those who are outside the church. But verse five hits us right between the eyes - it is directed at those who are talking the talk, putting up a good front, but are what Jesus would call whitewashed tombs. It is one thing to show up at church every weekend and occupy a seat; it is quite another to listen intently in order to hear from God's word and respond to how He wants you to live a life that is honoring to Him and will reflect and further His Kingdom. To put it another way, you need to walk the walk. As one pastor used to put it, your actions speak so loudly that it's difficult to hear what you are saying. Lord, help us to take seriously what You tell us and to conduct our lives in a way that causes others to believe Your word is true and profitable for living a life that is worth pursuing. **2 Timothy 3:1-5; Matthew 23:27-28**

Tuesday, May 17th: Any time you are in a conversation with someone, it is always gratifying if you feel comfortable with the subject matter and can speak with confidence. I think all of us like to feel that we are knowledgeable in at least something. However too much knowledge can also be a hindrance because we can fall into the trap of thinking it is all our own doing. Of course, we need to study and learn, but we also need to understand that it's only by the grace of God that we even have that ability. We are being bombarded daily with information that is based on a secular worldview interpretation of "the facts." When we fail to factor in what God has to say about something we set ourselves up for deception, doubt, and disaster. This does not mean that we are to discount true science, but we need to keep in mind that science is something concrete that can be demonstrated and consistently replicated. The other thing we must remember is that new discoveries can alter what we previously understood and, in some cases, may even totally discount what we thought was true. How reassuring it is to know that God's Word never changes. The other problem with those who espouse their superior knowledge to anyone who will listen is they tend to repel better than they attract. Even if we have a preponderance of learning in a given subject, we should always season our words with grace and examine our own hearts and motives to ensure that we are sharing for the purpose of helping someone better understand rather than using it as an opportunity to showcase our own superior intelligence. It all comes back to remembering who we are speaking for; we are the disciples (learners) and He is the Master. We would all do well to listen to His advice and encouragement. First, He only spoke what the Father was telling Him. Second, He promised to send His Spirit to guide us into all wisdom. We are just the conduit; He is the source, and He spoke with humility and gentleness. **James 3:13-18; 1 Peter 3:15; Proverbs 26:12**

Wednesday, May 18th: SHOUT WITH VICTORY: “Honor the LORD for the glory due His name. Worship the LORD in the splendor of His holiness.” (Psalm 29:2) There is so much joy in the presence of the Lord. You are majestic in all of Your ways. It is so amazing that You loved us when we were still sinners. “We love Him because He first loved us.” (1John 4:19) We love You, LORD. Jesus, You are lifted high above and have been given a name that is above every name and it is written: “As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will acknowledge God.” (Romans 14:11) Therefore, do not be anxious about evil men. The Lord rules all the nations with a sovereign hand. He sees the beginning from the end. As the scripture says: “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Galatians 6:9) The LORD will stand against the enemy when he comes in like a flood. Vengeance belongs to the LORD. Just keep trusting that all things are working for good. Look to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. If you have doubt, then it is time to trust. If you have doubt and unbelief, it is time to pray. If you feel discouraged, it is time to shout with victory. The walls of fear, doubt, unbelief, and discouragement will fall by faith when you shout with “the voice of victory, Hallelujah!! By faith, in obedience to God, the Israelites marched around the walls of Jericho every day for seven days and as commanded they all shouted as they finished their seventh time around those walls, and supernaturally the walls fell down at the sound of the shout. Release your faith and shout with victory! The walls are coming down.

Psalm 16:11, 8:9, 47:8; Philippians 2:9; Proverbs 24:19; Isaiah 26:10, 59:19; Romans 12:19, 8:28; Hebrews 12:2

Thursday, May 19th: Hopefully as Christians we all read our Bibles on a regular basis, but we have a choice as to how we approach what we are reading and then what we do with it when we close the book. Are we reading it as a history book? A theological reference book? A theoretical blueprint of the dos and don'ts for being a Christian? Or are we treating it as a relevant and very personal manuscript from a Father who loves us deeply and wants to see us not only succeed but to carry on the family business. This is a very serious question, and we need to take a hard and honest assessment of how we really view the Bible. It's one thing to read it and learn from it and quite another to live it. Jesus warned that in the latter days there would be many self-professed believers who would be deceived because they were allowing themselves to become too entrenched in the wisdom and influence of the world. As evil multiplies, we must be more watchful and aware of what we are listening to, just as we must ensure that our intake of His truth outweighs the barrage of worldly wisdom. To be sure, not everything we hear from secular sources is evil or incorrect, but we need to be familiar enough with what the Bible says to evaluate what we hear judiciously. Not knowing something is wrong will not protect us spiritually from the ill effects of it any more than believing that a Costco bran muffin is "healthy roughage" will keep the 500 calories and 32 grams of fat from making us gain weight. Jesus would not have repeatedly warned us to not be deceived if it was not such a threat. We have to accept that ALL Scripture is God-breathed and that its purpose is for us to be completely equipped. Instead of quibbling over which version is the best, find the one that you will read and ask Him to reveal Himself to you through it. The more you get to know Him and recognize His voice, the better equipped you will be to distinguish fact from fiction and truth from deception. He loves you, His word is true, and His desire for you is to be armed to stand firm against anything that would come against you. Read it; believe it; do it.

Matthew 24:24; Psalm 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 4:3-4

Friday, May 20th: When I graduated from high school, we had class mottos. The preceding class had chosen "Face the sun and the shadows will fall behind." Our class' choice was "Be brave, be bold, and venture to be wise." Both were intended to motivate and inspire us to face our future with courage and an attitude of expectancy for great possibilities and achievements. It is that time of year when many of our young people will be graduating from high school or college and preparing to enter a new phase in their lives. Others may be applying for graduate school to further refine their skills and knowledge for a specialized degree. Pray that they would be aptly prepared for it, and then consider what the next level of preparedness God has in mind for you. This can be an intimidating challenge, and we might be tempted to settle for where we are, but I think God always wants us to be growing and grooming ourselves for greater purposes no matter what stage of life we are in. We would do well to choose a motto for ourselves to keep us motivated to keep moving forward. If we remind ourselves to always be heading in the direction of the Son, we may have to walk through the valley of shadows, but they will only be behind us and will never overtake us. And then we must bravely and boldly venture to seek His wisdom with an expectant eagerness to discover where our newfound sharpening of skills and understanding of His preparation will lead us. **Proverbs 18:15; 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Saturday, May 21st: I grew up in a church that practiced infant baptism, so when I became an adult attending a church that taught a more complete understanding of baptism as being an informed, intentional decision on the part of the one being baptized, you might say I took the plunge. Initially my parents were a bit insulted, but as I explained the reasoning behind my decision, they began to better understand my choice and it gave them a more comprehensive picture of what baptism truly is. It is so much more than a religious exercise or a membership requirement. It is a public declaration of death to self and receiving new life in Christ. It is a picture of deliverance, just as water destroyed all of civilization except for Noah and his family – eight people out of the entire population, and just as the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea, leaving behind the bondage of Egypt and slavery to Pharaoh. These are shadows of the symbolism of what baptism represents for us. Even Jesus was baptized even though He definitely did not need to repent or be washed from any sin, but He told John that it was fitting to fulfill all righteousness. And as He came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended, and the Father proclaimed Jesus as His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased. This intentional step of receiving in faith His atonement for our sin and His place as Lord over our lives opens the door for our baptism of the fire of the Holy Spirit indwelling us and empowering us to walk in the righteousness of Christ. If you have never taken that step, seriously pray for His leading. And for those who are being baptized, rejoice with them, and pray that they would understand the enormous significance of this step of faith. Out of death and into life – praise God!

Matthew 3:15-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22

Sunday, May 22nd: The most common word for worship in the Old Testament is *shachah* and means to bow down or prostrate oneself to demonstrate honor and reverence to one with superior power, denoting the worthiness of the one receiving the honor. An added meaning in the New Testament is in the Greek word *proskuneō* which is from *pros* for from the side of and *kuneō* meaning to kiss as a show of reverence. Both suggest a recognition of worthiness, but there is an added element of intimacy in the encounter. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai there was tangible evidence that he had been in the presence of one supremely worthy of honor and reverence. It had been a holy encounter of such magnitude that his face was actually shining – the afterglow of God’s Shekinah glory. The word Shekinah does not actually even appear in the Bible, but it was an expression the Jewish rabbis coined from a Hebrew word that literally means “He caused to dwell.” It signified a divine visitation of the presence or dwelling of the Lord on the earth. What that should tell us is that when we have truly worshipped God, when we have come into His Presence in an attitude of reverence and acknowledgement of His worthiness of receiving all honor, we will be changed and there should be evidence. The change for Moses was so profound that the people could not even look at his face. He had to wear a veil over his face except when he entered the Lord’s Presence. Then he became what Matt Redman refers to as an unveiled worshipper. The good news for us is that Jesus has removed the curtain that separated us from the Presence, and we are told that we all, with unveiled faces, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory! When we behold Him, we become like Him. The God of the universes desires to have an intimate encounter with us, and the result will be that we will be allowed to experience and reflect His glory. Worship is so much more than a song. Our lives, our total being, should be an expression and evidence of His incomparable worth. We can never allow a veil of apathy, routine, or lack of deep reverence to keep us from the unbelievable privilege of an encounter with almighty God Himself. Approach Him with a humble heart, submitted in reverence, and with the expectance of an intimate rendezvous with the King of Kings. The weight of His glory may bring you to your knees, but whatever the impact, expect to be forever changed from glory to glory.

Exodus 34:29-34; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Revelation 19:4

Monday, May 23rd: I was eagerly anticipating finally being able to use my frequent flyer miles, naively believing what I had been told – that with the number of miles in my account I would be able to fly roundtrip anywhere in the contiguous United States for free! The truth was that I could only fly one way from Arizona to West Texas with the accumulated miles, and not all dates were even accessible with those miles. Isn't it comforting to know that God does not require a benchmark number of good deeds before we can approach His throne, and there are never any blackout dates? That is because we have Jesus who went before us to obtain for us free access to the Father's throne of grace and mercy. Prior to His atoning sacrifice, the only way to be released from the penalty of our own guilt was to bring an animal without any imperfections to the priest who would kill it and offer the blood as a substitute for our guilt. God is perfectly holy and cannot be approached by anything tainted with sin. But praise be to Him who made a way for us. If we are only willing to accept that on our own there is no possible way, we could ever approach God, but instead we choose to accept the free gift of forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus and honor Him as Lord and Savior, we have an unlimited pass that will never expire. We don't have to accumulate merit points through our own efforts; as long as we trust and believe that He has paid our account in full, it is a done deal. Nobody can cancel our account. What an amazing promise. What an amazing gift. What an amazing Savior we have!

Hebrews 4:14-16; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9

Tuesday, May 24rd: Not too many years ago there was a popular restaurant chain called Bobby McGee's. What was particularly unique about it was the servers were dressed as fictional characters: Mickey Mouse, Alice in Wonderland, Superman, and the like. When they served the patrons, they were captivating, exuberant, and they made the dining experience, well, they made it an experience. Of course, they had nothing to do with the preparation of the meal; they were merely the ones who delivered it to the hungry guests. Obviously the "real" Superman was not an employee of the establishment, but the server did his best to be a representative to the guests so they would get a feel for who was being represented. I think maybe God would like us to be Bobby McGee servants. We should be spending enough time with Jesus that we can represent Him as accurately as possible to those we are called to serve, and they get a sense of having seen a glimpse of Him. We also need to know what is on the menu, and we need to remember that our job is to deliver the spiritual food – the bread of life and the meat of the word – as He has prepared it for them. We may be the only Jesus they ever see, so we should serve with joy and enthusiasm, reflecting a servant who is determined to see them fed and satisfied. And we must remember our role; we only bring what He has prepared for those who have come with a hunger. May all the glory go to Him.

1 Peter 4:10-11; 2 Corinthians 4:5-7

Wednesday, May 25th: AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST: “Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the Lord rises and appears over you.” Isaiah 60:2 NLT

As the world seems to grow darker, My glory will shine brighter and brighter. I am appointing you to be My ambassador. You know the truth because I have opened your spiritual eyes and ears. I have given you a discerning spirit. You are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and you have been given kingdom authority. You no longer belong to the world, but you are Mine and your life is hidden in Me. The world may be dark but My light in you overcomes the darkness. You are drawing others to the light. Your faith is rising, and you are being prepared for great victories as you press on in the Spirit. Keep seeking after Me and pressing in and I will increase your anointing. Let My love and compassion flow through you as you reach out to others. Keep pressing in and let Me lead you. My favor is upon you. I have given you every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Fear not, I will go before you and lead the way. You can stand tall in the Spirit. David had only a slingshot and five smooth stones to go against a giant - Goliath. I can do the same for you. I am a mighty man of war, and I am the captain of the host. You are a sweet-smelling fragrance of Christ wherever you go. You are an ambassador for Christ, and you will touch others for My glory.

2 Corinthians 5:20, 2:15; Ephesians 2:6, 1:3; Colossians 3:3; Deuteronomy 31:8; 1 Samuel 17:40; Exodus 15:3; Joshua 5:14

Thursday, May 26th: Trying to make appointments or resolve issues with certain entities (doctor’s office, cable company, credit card, etc.) can be so frustrating. After multiple attempts and layers of recorded messages you hear the inevitable, “Please hold for the next available...” We do not like to wait, and our culture is pretty much geared to a “have it now” mentality. Yet the Bible tells us over and over to wait patiently for Him, and then He hears us; He blesses those who wait for Him, He renews our strength, and He promises great reward. When you think about it, it is worth it to wait until a loaf of homemade bread rises and is fully baked. If you eat raw dough, you will probably get sick, and if you take the bread out of the oven too soon, it may look nice on the outside, but the insides will be unappetizing and flavorless. When we fail to wait on the Lord, we can expect similar results. So, the next time you hear Him whispering for you to wait - to not be anxious but instead to patiently persevere - trust that He has only the best intentions for the outcome. I want my life to be savory and beneficial to those around me; Lord Jesus, teach me the art of waiting expectantly for You to work in and through me for Your glory.

Isaiah 40:31; Psalm 40:1-3

Friday, May 27th: Jesus gives us a vivid picture of what forgiveness looks like, and He expects us to extend that mercy to others. Paul reminds us of this in his second letter to the Corinthians. An incestuous person had been excommunicated and had evidently repented and now was in dire need of reconciliation. Paul urges the church to extend forgiveness so that no advantage would be taken of them by Satan, as they were not *ignorant of his schemes*. Several things are worth noting here. First, Satan's schemes involve causing excessive guilt and grief as well as nurturing self-righteous attitudes that fail to forgive. Second, we are cautioned to not be ignorant of his schemes. The word for ignorant is *agnoeō*, from *gnō* which means to come to know and *gnōs* meaning knowledge. Gnosticism was a second-century religious movement claiming that salvation could be gained through a special form of secret knowledge. It was quite rightly condemned as heresy. We know that placing the "a" in front of the word means not or opposite. I find it interesting that this is the root for the word agnostic or literally *not knowledge*. When we succumb to the enemy's schemes by refusing to extend forgiveness for any reason, we are being ignorant, just like agnostics who deny that the existence of God is provable. That is from the father of lies! If I cannot bring myself to forgive, then I am questioning the very One who has forgiven me so much and am instead being duped by a liar. Now that is just ignorant! Lord, help us trust You and walk in forgiveness that we may reflect You to an often doubting and uninformed world. **2 Corinthians 2:9-11; Ephesians 4:31-32**

Saturday, May 28th: In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul is addressing some concerns about their drifting away from the things that he had taught them. They were reverting to a reliance on works aka legalism rather than grace. Given Paul's illustrious background, he knew how dangerous and destructive such a mindset was. It cheapens grace and promotes pride. When we follow that example, we become law keepers rather than God seekers, and as such we forfeit walking in the power of the Spirit because we are relying on our own efforts instead of submitting to His sovereignty. It is such an easy trap to fall into because we know that there should always be evidence of our faith, but we also need to understand that works are not going to get us any closer to Jesus – getting closer to Jesus will result in greater works. And good works are not the goal of being a Christian; they are a byproduct whose purpose should be to reflect Jesus, demonstrate His love and hope for all of humanity, and further His kingdom. Being a good rule follower is not going to inspire people to want to know Jesus. Neither will giving them a list of things to either do or not do; check the boxes and life will be good. Even Paul lamented that it was impossible to always keep the whole law, so when we stumble and sin we are condemned through our falling short and we become slaves to sin. This is not what being a Christ follower is all about. He came to set us free from the Law by fulfilling its requirements in order that we might walk according to the Spirit rather than the flesh. When we can fully grasp that, sheer gratitude for His grace and mercy should be enough for us to want to return to Him that same love and demonstrate it in serving one another. Loved people love people just like hurting people hurt people. When we are basking in His freedom and love it gives us the liberty to resist the temptations of our former nature and instead become walking reflections of His grace – His freely given gift. Praise God!

Ephesians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 15:10

Sunday, May 29th: **The Father hath not left me alone (John 8:29)** There is a TV program titled *Alone*. Individuals go into the wilderness and must survive on their own. The setting is generally in the North and sub-zero temperatures are common. Also, there may be extended periods of darkness, especially if clouds block out the light of the sun, moon, and stars. The reality these contestants face involves the absence of heat and the absence of light. Heat and Light are the realities these people need. The ancients used this fact to communicate that heat and light were true realities, that is realities without which there would be darkness (no light) and cold. (no heat)

Many people face the coldness that comes from feeling betrayed in their relationships. They have heard too many lies like, "There are no absolutes." It is not a new phenomenon. Psychologist Howard Gardner has pointed out that the feeling indicates the culture no longer provides a definition for right and wrong, i.e., evil. When we listen to the news today, drive-by shootings, corrupt politicians, and nations sending troops to attack other nations all remind us of the Scriptural definition of evil as an absence, the absence of goodness, or The Good (God). You may ask, "So what?"

Well, like heat and light, God is a true absolute, a true reality. The ancient philosopher Plato knew this. God had Paul teach the Athenian philosophers the true name of the Good was Jesus. Thus, Christians are taught to look beyond the appearances or forms of evil and focus on their relationship with Jesus who by his death and resurrection made our eternal relationship to the Father possible.

Father, I ask you to help me see the darkness of problems and the coldness of feeling alone by reminding me that in You I am never alone.

Monday, May 30th: HIDING PLACE: My child, run to Me in times of trouble. I will keep you safe and comfort you under My wings. Let Me be your hiding place. Seek after Me and bask in My Presence where you will find peace even during the storm. I will "surround you with songs of deliverance". (Psalm 32:7b) I am for you, not against you. What I did for you yesterday, I will do today. You can look back at the seemingly impossible situations you faced and see how I brought you victory. Build your faith in that. I never change, so you can trust Me to meet your needs. I know that your heart is fragile. I remind you that I love you and care for you. Fear not for the waters will not overtake you. I will go with you through the fiery trials. I am your strong tower. When you call, I will answer. You are My child, and I will provide for you. You can have confidence that I will fight for you and bring you out of the trial victoriously. Place your trust in Me. I can do the impossible. There is nothing too difficult for Me. Bring Me everything that causes you fear, anxiety, and trade it for My peace and joy. Look up to the heavens! You can have My joy no matter what battle you are facing. I will go before you. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10 ESV) Do not try to fight in your own strength. Keep your eyes on Me and you will come through the storm in peace.

Psalms 32:7; Malachi 3:6; Isaiah 43:2; Proverbs 18:10; Jeremiah 33:3, 32:17; 2 Chronicles 20:15; Matthew 19:26, 14:30

Tuesday, May 31st: It occurred to me that the less our children are really taught history in a way that makes it come alive for them, the less they are inclined to believe it ever really happened. If events can be reduced to simply stories in a book, they lose having any impact on how current life is evaluated and conducted. As disturbing as this is from the standpoint of the establishment of our country on a Biblical world view, even more disturbing is how that can impact one's acceptance of Jesus as our Savior and His Father as chief architect of all of creation. That must be a personally held belief which has been both taught and caught. Our young people need to hear from those who are influences in their lives that what we read in the Bible is more than just stories, and then they need to see the evidence of what they learn from these accounts and these heroes of faith being lived out in the lives of modern-day prophets and evangelists and martyrs. They are not going to get this from public education, and most of the secular wisdom they are taught must be balanced against what God says. Right now, the scales are tipped heavily against Truth, and a Biblical worldview is often dismissed at best, but more often it is mocked and even labeled as intolerant, hateful, dangerous, divisive, and uneducated. We have an assignment to fight for the next generation as well as for ourselves and His Kingdom. The best ways for us to do that is to first be on our knees repeatedly asking for His guidance and protection and then to be willing to stand up for His Truth, lovingly but firmly teaching it and defending it without fear or reservation. We need to know who the modern heroes of the faith are, and we need to let others know as well. We are in a battle, but our assurance is that He is on our side as long as we are on His, and He has promised that no weapon formed against us will prosper. Lord, we ask for wisdom and boldness to be Your faithful witnesses and to stand firm, passing on to the next generation a solid foundation on which they might build.

Proverbs 22:6; John 8:31-32; Ephesians 6:10-18