

Prayer Devotions



June 2022

Luke 18:1

Pray Always and Never Give Up.

Prayer for Persecuted Church

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 in just the last year

- Over 360 million Christians live in places where they experience high levels of persecution and discrimination.
- 5,898 Christians were killed for their faith.
- 5,110 churches and other Christian buildings were attacked.
- 4,765 believers detained without trial, arrested, sentenced, or imprisoned.

These numbers are heart-breaking. And sadly, they do not tell the whole story.

Please pray:

- Whatever their circumstances, God will give persecuted Christians the right words. (Ephesians 6:19-20)
- That persecuted Christians will understand and find peace in the sufficiency of God's grace, even in their weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- That Christians facing hardship will draw from a source of power larger than themselves. (2 Corinthians 1:7-9)
- God be present in their hardship, protecting them according to His will.
- That their witness would inspire those who seek to harm them.

This Month's Countries, these are some of the most dangerous countries to follow Jesus:

Maldives (Asia): Islamic oppression / Main Religion: Islam

China (Asia): Communist & post-communist oppression / Various Religions

Qatar (Middle East): Islamic oppression / Main Religion: Islam

Daily Prayers for June: The problem of disbelieving in God is not that a man ends up believing nothing. Alas, it is much worse. He ends up believing anything.

G.K. Chesterton

Wednesday, June 1st: In Canada there are doctors who are actually prescribing spending time in nature as an approach to bring healing to those who suffer from anxiety. According to a study done at the University of Minnesota, “Exposure to nature not only makes you feel better emotionally, it contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones.” Imagine that – the Creator has provided His marvelous creation as a source of healing. When we spend time enjoying His creation we are spending time with Him; and when we recognize that, we can find the antidote to our depression, fear, and uncertainty. When you think about it, it makes perfect sense. Who hasn’t found themselves struck by the beauty of a brilliant sunrise or sunset? Who can stand on a pristine beach and not be mesmerized by the power of the pounding waves or the vastness of the ocean? Or consider the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains, Niagara Falls, or a meadow filled with fragrant wildflowers. As Paul writes in his letter to the church in Rome, “...since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made...” Not only can we have our breath taken away by the beauty of His creation, but fresh air and some physical exercise can improve both our mental and physical health. This is just one of the many reasons He is called Yahweh-Rapha, the Lord who heals. We need to be more intentional about literally taking time to smell the roses. He has given us such an amazing resource for combating the pressures of life, and best of all – it’s free! Take some time to enjoy His gift of nature and don’t ever lose your sense of wonder and appreciation.

Romans 1:20-21; Psalm 148

Thursday, June 2nd: When children are small and are learning communication skills, we will often tell them “Use your words.” That could be sound advice for those who identify themselves as Christ-followers. For too long many churches have been filled with people who are in agreement intellectually with a Christian worldview, but they’re not living it. There is more and more push back against those who practice and verbalizes true Christian values, and it can get uncomfortable and even carry a price tag for those who do so. We can’t allow the ungodly to control our behavior and beliefs with threats or derision. We may be labeled as quaint, archaic, small-minded, or even fanatical, but better to be considered a fan by the One who has the final say than to cave to the pressures of those destined for destruction. We need to stop denying the authority of the Scripture and begin more aggressively defending it. We need to stop conceding to “social justice” and stop cowering behind the banner of inclusiveness. Of course, it’s ok to not be ok, but staying there and pretending isn’t ok. It’s time to speak up. Lukewarm isn’t going to cut it, and neither is trying to just play it safe in the middle of the road. You know what happens to those in the middle of the road, don’t you? They become roadkill for the enemy’s camp. Our lives should humbly and lovingly demonstrate without a doubt where we stand, but we need to back that up with dialogue to explain the hope we have. It’s long overdue for those of us who profess Jesus to use our words.

Acts 4:29-30; Ephesians 3:8-12, 4:14-29

Friday, June 3rd: Pastor Robert Morris presents a very thought-provoking viewpoint on the idea of regarding no one according to the flesh. It's one that could have a transformative effect on so many of the tensions that are infecting society. It all begins with perspective. We're all probably familiar with the passage in Second Corinthians 5:17 about anyone in Christ being a new creation, but the pivotal foundation is found in the previous verse. Paul is telling them that from now on we are not to recognize anyone according to the flesh, and I love the way the Message puts it: "...we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at Him that way anymore." Jesus was in the flesh for a period of 33 years and only three of those were spent in His formal ministry. That said, after His resurrection, even those who had been with Him for that entire three-year span failed to recognize Him until He did something that revealed His spiritual identity. We need to focus more on what He *does* look like rather than what He *did*. In the same way, we need to see others for what they can be in the Spirit rather than what they are now in the flesh. And that applies to everyone, saved or not. It applies to ethnicity. The Samaritan woman at the well could not at first see past the fact that Jesus was a Jew, yet when He ignored that barrier and dealt with her, Spirit to spirit, she found true identity and life. It applies to gender – in Christ, there is neither male nor female because we are clothed in Christ. There are obvious differences physically, but there is no distinction in the honor that should be given. It applies to age. Paul told Timothy not to let anyone look down on his youth and not to sharply rebuke an older man. If a word of rebuke was needed it was to be delivered as an appeal showing respect as to a father or mother, yet with those younger, they were to be regarded as brothers and sisters. It applies to appearance. When Samuel was sent to anoint David as the next king, the Lord told him not to look at his appearance because He did not look at outward appearance but at the heart. If we could all learn to check ourselves when we interact with others to look past appearances and preconceived prejudices and instead see them through the spiritual eyes of our Father, imagine how many barriers would be broken down. Pray that we would no longer regard others according to the flesh but would rather see through the eyes of Christ.

1 Samuel 16:7; 2 Corinthians 5:16

Saturday, June 4th: In his 2009 book *Forgotten God*, Francis Chan presents an interesting exposition on an analogy many of us are familiar with – that of our new life in Christ being represented by a butterfly. He writes that he asked his wife one day if she ever wondered what caterpillars thought about. Quite predictably her answer was no. He went on to explain that caterpillars spend their lives crawling in the dirt and up and down plants. Then one day they take an extended nap and wake up with a slimmed down, beautiful body and wings! Do they question their ability to fly? The parallel is quite apropos in describing our own metamorphosis in becoming new creations. But there's a breakdown at this point because I don't remember seeing many butterflies crawling around in the dirt, yet isn't that what a lot of us find ourselves doing metaphorically speaking? When we receive Christ as our Lord and Savior we also are given the Holy Spirit, but we need to break out of the chrysalis stage in order to use our wings. The flesh is not going to want to release us easily. It's the struggle that forces fluid into the wings of the butterfly and enables it to fly. Imagine that fluid as being a release of the oil of the Spirit into our spirits, lifting us higher above our earthly limitations that we could ever have imagined. It's there; we just have to appropriate it and refuse to be trapped in our former identity. We should not just be walking evidence of His amazing Presence in us, we should be soaring. Why would we ever settle for crawling when He has enabled us to fly?

Romans 8:2-6, 11-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17

Sunday, June 5th: Have You Seen Jesus, My Lord?

One day Philip asked Jesus to show the Father to the disciples. Jesus replied to him, stating that if you have seen me then you have seen the Father. That was when Jesus walked the Earth, but what about now? Have you seen Jesus? Let alone the Father?

That question is easily answered in a contemporary hymn entitled, "Have You Seen Jesus, My Lord?" Composed in 1970, John Fischer was inspired by the view from his California home. The lyrics ask the listener if they have ever seen a sunset with sky-changing colors or if they have ever stood at the edge of the ocean and felt the awesome power of the waves pounding at their feet.

I recall a time when I was serving at a church camp on Mingus Mountain and marveling at the stars and the Milky Way blazing in the night sky. I asked the question, "How can anyone gaze upon this scene and not believe in God?" Indeed, Psalm 19:1 states that the heavens themselves proclaim the Glory of God and His Creation.

As recorded in Genesis and again in the first chapter of John, Jesus was present at the Creation. So, if you've seen a sunset, felt the ocean waves, or gazed upon the night sky as well as countless other wonders of nature, then you've seen Jesus. AND the Father.

Read: John 14:8-10, Isaiah 33:17, Psalm 19:1, Genesis 1:26, John 1:1-3

Monday, June 6th: Simon Peter....plunged into the sea (John 21:7)

This was Peter's reaction when he realized Jesus was calling to him from the shore. He had denied Jesus three times before men. Just before the denial Peter had said he was ready to die for Jesus, but Jesus knew he did not have the sacrificial form of love, agape, that Jesus Himself would demonstrate by choosing to do the Father's will. The godly love Jesus chose involved suffering and pain. But Peter was not ready to manifest that level of love as he would later. Instead, prior to the resurrection he had been overcome with emotion and wept bitterly at the thought of that response. Now, he couldn't wait for the boat to reach shore to be with Jesus.

But as Oswald Chambers once remarked, Peter's reaction was an act of will, not of desire. In the court of the High Priest Peter had not fully surrendered his will to God. The empty tomb, however, did its work and Peter would deny Jesus no more despite the pain his choice would result in. "In this world" we are told to expect trouble, but Jesus has overcome the world for us if we do not deny Him.

Father, I ask you to help me focus on Your love and the joy of being with You.

Tuesday, June 7th: When we read the stern warnings against setting up idols in the Old Testament, it's easy to discount because we have come a long way since then, and as Christians we don't set up stone and wood images and bow down to them. Or do we? This misconception can prove to be a very dangerous error on our part. First, we need to understand that ALL of Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness to make us adequate and equipped for every good work. Translation – it still applies. We need to give some serious thought to what the parallels are for us. Both the Hebrew word for idol (*pesel*) and the Greek word (*eidōlon*) is translated as image. It is the root of imagination, so an idol can be anything that consumes our thoughts and draws us away from the Presence of God. Our thoughts are merely a reflection of what is in our hearts, so when we set up idols in our hearts, we are also building stumbling blocks that could easily develop into walls or strongholds. Some of the things we allow to become strongholds are not bad in and of themselves. Our children, our spouses, making a good living, or even serving in the church have the potential to become idols when they occupy a disproportionate space in our hearts and are not rooted in a desire to honor God. When some of the elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to inquire of him a word from the Lord, the answer God gave Ezekiel was harsh. First, He asked if He should even be consulted by them at all since they had set right before their faces the stumbling blocks of their idols. He said to tell them that anyone who sets up idols in his heart and then comes looking for a word, the word they receive will be in view of the multitude of their idols in order to lay hold of their hearts. He is basically telling them to inquire directly, and He will answer them directly with the admonition to get rid of the idols and turn their faces away from all of their abominations. God's desire is restoration, but we need to come to Him in sincerity and humility acknowledging that He alone is the source of our well-being, and when we seek Him first, everything else will fall into its proper place. Lord, we ask You to show us anything that we have allowed to take Your place in our thoughts and in our hearts. Forgive us. Help us to recognize when we are trying to fit You into our lives in any place other than on the throne of our hearts.

Isaiah 59:1-2; Ezekiel 14:3-6; Act 4:29-30

Wednesday, June 8th: There's something to be said about having tenacity. This is a word that can be defined as stubbornness, drive, persistence, or resolve. People who are successful have it. They also have experienced setbacks, possibly ridicule, and maybe even failures in the pursuit of their ultimate success. I recently had coffee with a young man who has amazing gifts and potential but has also fallen victim to the pitfalls of the enemy's strategies to thwart his prospects. The beauty is that he now sees these setbacks and trials as fruitful because they have given him a perspective and a resolve, he might not have known had everything come easily. Sometimes God takes us through the fire to purify and prepare us for a greater purpose. The greater the purpose, the greater the need for preparation. Elisha's tenacity earned him a double anointing, but with it came something he hadn't anticipated. It undoubtedly felt different from what he expected. Not only was he without his beloved mentor, but he also now had some pretty large sandals to fill. Nevertheless, he took up his mantle and with his double anointing did twice as many miracles as Elijah. That is the payoff for persistence. There are no shortcuts. We marvel at the extraordinary skills of Olympic athletes, but their demonstration of prowess is the product of countless hours of practice and preparation. Many have been training since childhood. In the same manner, God will take you through whatever is needed to prepare you for your calling, but in order to succeed, you will have to demonstrate tenacity. It makes me think of lyrics from a Danny Gokey song that reminds us that all God's promises are just up ahead, but maybe we just have not seen them yet. Do not lose heart. Remember, as they say, if God brought you to it, He will see you through it. Be tenacious.

James 1:2-4, 12; Isaiah 41:10; Hebrews 12:1

Thursday, June 9th: When I have read the story of Ruth, I have tended to focus so intently on Ruth and how she faithfully and emphatically aligned herself with her mother-in-law Naomi that I missed some things about Naomi. Her name actually means pleasant, but when she returns to her own people, she tells them she wants to now be known as Mara, or bitter because she complains that the Lord has dealt very bitterly with her and has brought her home empty! Pause for just a moment there and put yourself in Ruth's sandals. She has literally left everything she has ever known to stay with and comfort Naomi with the very familiar, "Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus, may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." Not only that, but God has also positioned Naomi to be associated with the lineage of the Messiah. Empty? Bitter? Naomi is a classic example of seeing the glass as not even half full but empty. If only she could have had the same faith as her heathen daughter-in-law in the plans of her God. I'm not discounting in any way the tragedy that Naomi had experienced, but no matter what we encounter we need to keep our eyes focused on the author and perfecter of our faith. We can't see the ultimate outcome, but we need to trust the One who does. Whatever trial you may be facing now or will face in the future, remember that the story isn't finished, and Your loving Father has plans for you that are always for your good. Let Him fill your cup.

1 Peter 1:3-9; Hebrews 12:1-3

Friday, June 10th: GOD’S DESIGNER CLOTHING - I have clothed you in heaven’s finest garment. I have given you a robe of righteousness that you can wear. You are chosen and worthy to wear this robe, not because of any of your good deeds but because your sins have been forgiven by the shed blood of My Son, Jesus Christ. There is nothing you can do to earn that righteousness. The word says “We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind.” (Isaiah 64:6 NLT) You wear this robe by faith knowing you are now a new creation. You have favor with Me. The path before you will continue to shine brighter and brighter as you seek Me and follow Me. I will be a sun and a shield for you. I have chosen you. I loved you even while you were, yet a sinner and you had no thoughts of Me. I will not withhold any good thing from you. In My Kingdom, you go from glory to glory. You are being conformed to the image of Christ. When Jesus was nailed to the cross all your guilt was laid on Him. You are no longer condemned. He paid the penalty for your sin, and He has forgiven you. “For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

Isaiah 61:10, Psalm 84:11, Romans 5:8, Proverbs 4:18, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29, Colossians 2:14

Saturday, June 11th: I remember reading about a man who was asked if he would genuinely want to know God's will for his life no matter what it was that God wanted to do through him. The man's answer was brutally honest, and quite frankly is one that many of us might give if we were also totally honest. His answer was a flat-out no because he said that he would rather not know everything God wanted him to do. That way, in the end, he could honestly answer that he had no idea God had so many things that He expected or wanted this man to do. Deniability. Many of us are either afraid that we will ask, and He won't answer, or worse, He will tell us something we would rather not do. The idea of total surrender terrifies us because we know our own limitations and we're not entirely convinced that we really can do all things through Him who strengthens us. Additionally, there's a part of us that values comfort and conformity over conviction. What might people think if we took that leap of faith? It is so much safer to blend in and most of us have a predetermined picture in our minds of what our personal walk of faith should look like. But then, that is not really a walk of faith, is it. (No question mark – it's a rhetorical question!) We have the promise of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us for anything that may be required of us. If we truly believe that His plans are best and that He has equipped us for every good deed which He prepared beforehand for us to accomplish, then it would be a serious breach of faith to not ask and act. We live in earth suits and are all subject to doubts and fears at times, but do not ever let that stop you from pursuing the "impossible dreams" that He puts in your heart. As we have learned, far better to suffer some setbacks in chasing after something grand than to reach the end and discover with regret all those things we might have achieved had we not allowed our misgivings to keep us stuck in the mundane. Have faith in your incomparable power source. Don't forget about Holy Spirit – He has not forgotten you.

Luke 11:9-13; John 16:13; Ephesians 2:10

Sunday, June 12th: We all will at some point in our lives go through very difficult times when we may feel like everything is collapsing around us. There is an expression that is sometimes used to express what we feel – it is called hitting rock bottom. This expression comes from mining and refers to the layer of rock that is reached once the supply of minerals being taken from the mine has been used up. Although hitting rock bottom is intended to express a place of utter hopelessness, for Christ-followers it is exactly where He wants us to be. At first examination that may sound like a harsh and heartless statement, but if you really think about it, if we’ve “hit rock bottom” then it means we are finally standing on the solid rock, and there is no safer place we could possibly be. It is the point where we realize that we have exhausted every other source at our disposal and reached the point where we realize there is only one direction left and it is up. And because we know that Jesus our Savior, the rock on which we stand, has never left our side, we also know that He will raise us up to where we need to be. Psalm 18 tells us that He is our rock and fortress in whom we can take refuge, our shield, the horn of our salvation, and our stronghold. Horns symbolically represent strength and power, so to call Him the horn of our salvation assures us that He not only has the desire but also the power to save us. So, the next time the enemy tries to tell you that you have hit rock bottom, remind him that the power of that rock on which you are standing has overcome the world and you have never been safer or cared for. You are standing on a firm foundation against which the gates of Hell will not prevail, God still has a perfect plan for your life, and you’re right where you need to be.

Deuteronomy 31:8; Psalm 18:2; Matthew 16:18

Monday, June 13th: We all know the expression that hindsight is 20-20. It is easy to look back and see how things have fallen into place – the “everything happens for a reason” revelation we can embrace once we have seen how it fits into the grand scheme. But how much more profitable might it be for us if we could see, or to put more precisely if we would visualize the end from the beginning. It is the stuff that faith is made of. It is what Abraham had when he obediently made the trek up the mountain in the land of Moriah to which God had directed him and prepared to offer up his only son – the son through whom God had promised to bless the nations. God had laid out His plans for Abraham’s legacy. His directive was to leave his home and go to a land that God would show him. God then told him that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, would be enslaved for 400 years, and after that, they would inherit the land to which Abraham was being sent. The fulfillment of the promise would never be seen with Abraham’s eyes, but his spiritual eyes saw the end, and because he believed in God’s promise, he was willing to look beyond his own comfort and obey, even if meant releasing to God what he understood as being the means to fulfilling the promise. His reward was eternal. He is the father of our faith – not a bad legacy. We may never fully know exactly how the pieces will all fall into place, but if God had given us a dream – a directive – then we need to look beyond the physical realities and envision with our spiritual eyes an outcome that will glorify God and will further His kingdom. That’s something I would like to be a part of. Lord, help us to be willing to walk more by faith than by sight.

Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 11:1-2, 6, 8-10

Tuesday, June 14th: One of the reasons prisoners are assigned numbers when they are incarcerated is to dehumanize them and strip them of their identity. Psychologically this makes it easier for those in authority to control them. Within their own ranks, they can establish a sense of individuality, but to the prison guards, they are just a number. Their identities have been taken from them. This is the same tactic the enemy is using on so many, especially with our youth. He has convinced them to question how God has created them and their purpose in life as something other than how they were created, in the womb. This has stripped them of their God given, true identities. They have become his prisoners and he is constantly reinforcing the lies that if they listen to him, they will be happier. He has convinced them that if there really is a God, then He made a mistake when He assigned their gender and purpose. It is the systematic erosion of confidence in, or any acceptance of the truth and authority of the Bible and it is not only an attempt to rob God but a blatant act of defiance against His sovereignty. They are led to believe that “following the science” is the sophisticated approach to enlightenment until it comes to biology; then the lines become rather fuzzy. That is how deception works. Pray against this evil lie of the enemy and that those imprisoned by his false and empty promises of fulfillment will be set free to discover their God-ordained identities and destinies. His plans are always for our welfare to give a future and a hope.

Mark 10:6; 1 Corinthians 6:17-20; Jeremiah 29:11-13

Wednesday, June 15th: TRUE SATISFACTION - The world has such a strong pull-on souls to constantly seek out new thrills and new experiences; searching for satisfaction that is so fleeting. What the world offers as satisfying just keeps us thirsting for more. Jesus encountered a woman at the well who has had five husbands and was now with a man who was not her husband. She was coming to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14) True satisfaction is found in the one who has the living water. The woman who was at the well said to Jesus, “Give me this water so I will never thirst again.” (John 4:15) Jesus brings joy when we drink of His living water. Are you thirsty? Has the world left you empty and dry? The answer to quench your thirst comes from the living water. Jesus, the living water, with outstretched arms simply says to come to Him if you are weary and tired of searching. He is a friend who will never leave you or forsake you. He will be with you in good times and in times of trouble. Let Him fill your longing soul and bring peace to your heart. Jesus is “The way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6) Are you at the end of your illusive searching? Then, look to Me, the author of faith to fill that emptiness in your soul. Come to Me, and drink of the living water and you will never thirst again.

Matthew 11:28, Deuteronomy 31:8, Psalm 107:09

Thursday, June 16th: Do you ever find it interesting that God asks questions? After all, He is omniscient, so He obviously is not asking us to somehow enlighten Him. The first recorded question He asks is in the book of Genesis in the garden when He calls out to Adam, “Where are you?” That question and the two that follow were not to help God get a clearer picture of what had transpired. Instead, they were meant to bring Adam and Eve back into fellowship with Him and to reveal to them His sovereignty over all, and His love and mercy. Adam was hiding from God because he knew he had gone against God’s one rule, and he was ashamed. God’s command had been for their own good, yet their disobedience only meant they would forfeit the perfection of the garden and not the fullness of His love. He still asks that question of us when we are wandering from what we know is right. It is foolish for us to think we can hide from Him, and it is a lie for us to believe that our disobedience will cause Him to love us any less. One book later we encounter Moses, the reluctant deliverer of God’s people. God has laid out His entire plan for setting the Israelites free from the oppression of Egypt by the hand of Moses, and Moses doubts God’s choice of him and argues that they won’t believe him or listen to what he has to say. So, God asks him, “What is that in your hand?” All Moses has is his shepherd’s staff, but when God tells him to throw it to the ground, it becomes a serpent; and when He tells him to pick it back up it became a staff again. We often may feel inadequate to accomplish anything and we have nothing to offer. What He wants us to remember is that all He needs from us is a willingness to be used by Him; He will do the rest beyond anything we could even imagine. And then there is the question that Jesus asked Peter not once but three times. “Peter, do you love Me?” Jesus, of course, already knew that Peter loved Him, but Peter needed to think about it and say it aloud to confirm that even though he had really messed up he really did still love Jesus. This interaction also opened the door for Jesus to remind Peter that he still had an important assignment in the kingdom, but Peter needed to be reassured that the relationship was still intact. Just because we fall short doesn’t mean we no longer love Him, but the enemy would love to convince us otherwise. Because He loves us so fiercely, He is always standing at the door knocking, asking us to reaffirm our love for Him – not to convince Him but to remind ourselves.

Exodus 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 2:13

Friday, June 17th: His hands shall finish it. Zechariah 4:9 "I do not know if I agree with that" is a phrase I hear over and over. It represents a judgment based on that speaker's experience. Recently, I heard about some advice Pearl S. Buck gave a group of college students. This Nobel Prize-winning author told them that it was exciting to start a book and wonderful to finish, but the middle part - well that was a challenge. My children were adorable as babies (isn't every baby adorable?). But babies grow up into children who need discipline and can cause pain. A change may seem the answer to a situation. But whether it is a relationship or a job, the romance can wear off and disillusionment may begin to affect your thinking. You may even begin to think it's not worth it. If Pearl Buck had given in to those thoughts, *The Good Earth* would not have been written and she would not have won a Nobel Prize.

The Apostle Paul has given us pretty much the same advice by comparing his life to running a race. The thrill of the start soon became a series of beatings and imprisonments. But he persevered with little or no support at times. But he understood time, hard work, and personal sacrifice were the price of success. Paul's example points out that sometimes the price may be too high, or it may be that God wants you to change direction. Quitting is not always failing. Failing is not asking God for direction and help. You may not win a Nobel Prize; but staying focused on Him will lead to the greatest success of all: eternal life.

Father, I thank You for setting the tasks you have prepared for me and for the promise of helping me to finish them. Thank You for getting me over the hurdle of thinking that continuing with You wasn't worth the price.

Saturday, June 18th: The prophet Malachi informed us of what was going to take place in the latter days, and I want to quote the way it is expressed in *The Message*: “‘Look! I’m sending My Messenger on ahead to clear the way for Me. Suddenly, out of the blue, the Leader you have been looking for will enter His Temple – yes, the Messenger of the Covenant, the one you have been waiting for. Look! He is on His way!’ A Messenger from the mouth of God-of-the Angel Armies. But who will be able to stand up to that coming? Who can survive His appearance? He will be like white-hot fire from the smelter’s furnace. He will be like the strongest lye soap at the laundry. He will take His place as a refiner of silver, as a cleanser of dirty clothes.” He is coming to refine His church to prepare the way for His return. When gold is mixed with other metals or alloys it becomes hardened and more susceptible to corrosion. To remove the alloys, the gold is melted at extremely high temperatures and mixed with flux which breaks down and lowers the melting points of the other materials and causes them to rise to the top so they can be skimmed off. Sin is the alloy that we have increasingly allowed into our lives, and the result has been a hardening of our hearts and a greater vulnerability to the tarnishing and deterioration of our Christlikeness. So, what is the “flux” that will purge us? The answer can be found in 1 Peter 1:6-7. Paul tells Peter that for a little while, if necessary, he may be distressed by various trials *so that* the proof of his faith, being more precious than perishable gold, even though *tested by fire*, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus. (Emphasis added) He even tells Peter he should greatly rejoice because of the intended outcome of the testing. When we look at it that way – Covid, inflation, lawlessness, government overreach – they can all be interpreted as part of the testing or purging process. The greater the amount of contaminants, the greater the heat required to accomplish the refining. And James tells us to consider it all joy when we encounter these trials because if we persevere, there will be a perfect result and we will then be complete and not lacking. That is something to rejoice in. Let us be refined to the purest state in order to reflect Him.

Isaiah 1:25-26, 48:10-11; Malachi 3:1-3; James 1:2-4

Sunday, June 19th: Happy Father's Day to all the fathers. Take some time today to express gratitude to the men who have helped shape your life. Whether they are your biological father, a grandfather, a stepfather, or maybe someone who played a significant role in mentoring or caring for you – whatever part they played in pouring into your life, let them know that you appreciate them and acknowledge the sacrifices they made on your behalf. Maybe today is a difficult one for you because your father is no longer with you and the void you feel is almost crippling. Or maybe your memories of your father are not pleasant ones because of abuse or absence. Whatever your circumstance, know that you have never been alone, and you have a perfect and loving heavenly Father who will never leave you. Despite any possible shortcomings in your earthly father, you can still celebrate your eternal Father and experience His peace and strength in your brokenness. And if you were blessed with a father figure who makes your heart smile, be intentional about letting him know how thankful and appreciative you are for him and for all he did and is probably still doing to pour into your life. And don't forget to also thank God for being a perfect Father.

Exodus 20:12; Malachi 4:6; Romans 8:15; 1 John 3:1

Monday, June 20th: I Am The Resurrection...and Love. I had a friend who often shared the story of his fatal heart attack. It wasn't a story of pain and suffering. It wasn't even a story of his miraculous healing when his failing heart was revived. Rather, the story he shared was of the feeling he had while he was clinically dead. All he could feel was an overwhelming sense of love. Not long before this incident took place, Tom had accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. This incident served to affirm his faith and his hope in the eternal life that Jesus promises. 1 Corinthians 13, also known as the love chapter, reminds us of the power of faith, hope, and love - emphasizing that love is the greatest of them. And 1st John tells us that God Himself is love.

Tom's story is unique as very few people have gone through an experience such as this. Lazarus - whom Jesus raised from the dead - comes to mind. I often wondered how Lazarus reacted after Jesus brought him back to life. Did Lazarus resent being snatched away from Heaven? But as I reflect on Tom's testimony, I believe Lazarus may have been grateful to have the opportunity to share his experience. Most certainly he did not fear death for he knew firsthand what awaited him when that moment came again.

After his new lease on life, Tom loved to share his testimony of faith, hope, and love to everyone who would listen. Tom has since passed on to live in the Presence of God himself. No longer does he need faith and hope because he is experiencing the presence of Love itself - a love that was always there. A love that is always there. A love that will always be there.

Read: 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 4:16, John 11:25-26

Tuesday, June 21st:

I have a bookmark in my Bible that I intentionally read before I begin reading the Word. It isn't a pretty bookmark or even one that was purchased in a store; it's a reminder I wrote to myself on a scratch piece of paper. It simply reads: eyes to see, ears to hear, a mind to comprehend, a heart to receive, a will to obey. This needs to be my approach to His Word. In reality, this should characterize my degree of attentiveness in every conversation I have, but I especially want to be intentional in how I approach what the King of Kings and Lord of all creation has to say to me. I don't want to just skim over things because I don't see them as relevant. That doesn't mean I think I should memorize the entire genealogy of every patriarch, but I hope I will consider why God would choose to list them. What that speaks to me personally is the fact that there is an intrinsic value to every individual in His eyes, and even if nobody else ever remembers their names – He does. That encapsulates the first three reminders: see, hear, and seek to comprehend. The last two are far more personal and challenging. I need a heart that is tender and receptive to both correction and affirmation. In His hesed love – His relentless, constantly-pursuing, lavish, extravagant, unrestrained, furious love – He will redirect me when I'm headed in the wrong direction and He will also remind me that I really am fearfully and wonderfully made and I am precious in His sight no matter what outside influences may try to tell me. And finally, perhaps the most difficult is the will to obey. I can dutifully nod my head in agreement with directives on how to walk in obedience, but it takes more than intellectual assent. Unless I choose to follow the path, He's telling me to take, I'll never accomplish what He desires for me, and His plan is always the best. Complete fidelity to His word is not always easy or fashionable, but the ultimate outcome will never disappoint. Perhaps Robert Frost did not intend this particular interpretation to the final line of his famous poem "The Road Not Taken," but it applies: "...Two roads diverged in a wood, and I - I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." My challenge is that we would pray for enlightenment and an open mind and will before we ever even open our Bibles. You may discover that it makes all the difference.

Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:18, 105; 2 Timothy 3:16

Wednesday, June 22nd: THE MEETING PLACE - I created you in My image. I have chosen you to live in fellowship with Me. If you want to live close to Me you will have to seek Me with all of your heart. You will have to choose the narrow path that leads to life. My desire is that you would have life and have it more abundantly. Keep seeking Me and I will speak to you, lead you and guide you like a gentle shepherd who tends to his sheep. If you stay in My word and hide My word in your heart, you will gain wisdom and knowledge. I delight to reveal Myself to you in My word. My word has mysteries hidden from the world but in plain sight for My children. Let Me show you spiritual treasure that will delight your soul and open your eyes to the mysteries of My Kingdom. My word “is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow: it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) My word will guide you so that you will not stumble. Let My word dwell in you richly. My word has the power to transform your thinking and break off the old worldly thoughts and attitudes. I want to meet you in My word. Spend time in My word and your soul will find a deep treasure. I will open My word to you that you may glean from it. Ask for revelation as you spend time in the word. Let Me open your spiritual eyes and ears. Come to the meeting place and draw near to Me and I will draw near to you.

Genesis 1:27, Matthew 7:13, John 10:10, Jeremiah 29:13, Proverbs 2:6, Mark 4:1, Psalm 119:105, Colossians 3:16, Romans 12:2 Ephesians 1:17, James 4:8

Thursday, June 23rd: According to a piece on the Newsy channel, there is a “new” trend to help relieve tension and reportedly promote healing for everything from rashes and migraines to infertility. It is called moon bathing, and in practice, it is very similar to sunbathing. You simply lie on a blanket or a chaise lounge under the moon to soak up some moonbeams as opposed to rays. The idea however is to “drink in the cooling lunar energy” and meditate. It is actually based on an ancient practice of moon worship from the early cultural rituals of India, China, Egypt, and Arabia, as well as Celtic and pre-pagan people. There is such a commercial aspect to this that you can even buy special moon-gazing goggles to wear while you bask in the moonlight and sip on marketed lunar libations! People really are that desperate, but it is only because they do not yet see how dangerous and misleading this can be. They are looking up for their answers, but the enemy has duped them into believing their help can be found in creation rather than **The Creator**. They are nearsighted. This should not come as a surprise. The Bible is clear that He has made Himself unmistakably seen through creation, but in their flesh, they have refused to acknowledge or honor Him as God, and professing to be wise, they have become foolish! What begins as a seemingly harmless exercise is the doorway to deception and destruction. We need to be keenly aware of the lies that can lead us or others away from the Son and into darkness. Our call is to lovingly reflect the true light to others so they will see the true source and seek Him only.

Deuteronomy 4:19; Romans 1:20-21

Friday, June 24rd: Our niece is a chaplain with Healthcare Chaplains Ministry Association and she shared the following story with us about a recent encounter she had with one of those to whom she had been ministering:

“I might go to hell.” I had just finished reading Revelation 19-21 to a hospice patient and I was surprised by his words. “What makes you say that?” I asked him.

“Well, I imagine everybody thinks they’re going to heaven, but the truth is that some people are going to go to hell. I don’t imagine we all get to heaven. We are all going to die. I will have to wait and see.”

“Well, you know,” I told him, “there is a way to have assurance you will be with God in heaven.”

“I don’t know; I’ve tried to be a good person but I’m not going to judge myself. Only God can judge me.” I looked back over the chapters I had just read and my eyes fell on chapter 21:8. “As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for the murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” I reread this list and told him honestly: “You know, I see myself in this list.”

The man seemed surprised. I continued, “What person has not been a liar? What person has not been sexually immoral and an idolater? What person has not been a coward? If anyone is being honest, they will see that they themselves deserve to be written on this list.” At this point, the rest of the patients sitting nearby were also listening intently. “Because you and I are on this list is the whole reason Jesus came to die.” As I explained the “Good News” of Jesus to this man he began to nod in agreement with everything I told him.

“Jesus came 2,000 years ago and really suffered and was crucified for our sins?”

“That’s right, and you know what? Jesus describes two different types of people. There is the Pharisee who is prideful and believes he has been good his whole life and says, ‘Thank you Father that I’m not like other men, who sin.’ But the other man is the Tax Collector who won’t even lift up his eyes to heaven. He humbly says to God ‘Be merciful to me, a sinner.’ Jesus says that the Tax Collector goes home right with God, not the Pharisee.”

The patient continued listening, his eyes locked on mine. “You know what I think? I think since you admit you see yourself on this list, you have hope far more than the man who says he has been a “good person” his whole life. Only here can you see why Jesus came to die and only then can you place your hope in Jesus’ goodness and sacrifice for your entrance into heaven.”

Now he spoke up. “Yes, that’s right. We are thankful for Jesus; I don’t know what any of us would ever do without Him. I know He came and was crucified and died on the cross for all our sins.”

“Yes, you’re absolutely right. And praise God that He came and took our punishment!” I prayed with this patient and as I left, I knew this man probably had no idea how refreshed I was by him. All-day long I talk to people who think they’ve been “good people” their whole life. RARELY do I ever meet a person who believes he might be going to hell and will assess himself honestly to that end. I rejoiced to hear him see his need for Jesus so practically and it TRULY reminded me afresh that I must always have the humble attitude of the Tax Collector who said: “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Saturday, June 25th: YOUR STRONGHOLD - Come before Me with a joyful song. Give Me those heavy burdens and let Me lift you high above the cares of this world. I am your strong tower. Run to Me and I will be a shield for you. Look to Me, your Creator, to satisfy your every need and fill the longing in your soul. I am the one who can move mountains. “I am that I am.” (Exodus 3:14) I am the giver of every good and perfect gift. I will do more than you can even ask or think. My ways are far above your ways. Let Me answer your prayer in My timing. All the days of your life are held in My hand. I will be with you always. I will never leave you or forsake you. I am bringing you into that good land. I am strength to the weak. I am a refuge in the storm. I am shade from the heat. No matter what is happening in the world around you, I am your strong foundation. Do not fear even if the earth is shaken and the mountains fall into the sea. I am the stronghold of your life. You have the gift of peace that surpasses understanding. Jesus said “I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.” (John 14:27 – NLT) Build your life upon the strong foundation of Jesus Christ. In the Psalms, David proclaimed “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2)

Psalm 100:2, 55:22, 3:3, 107:9,46:3, 27:1; Proverbs 18:10; Mark 11:23; James 1:17; Ephesians 3:20; Isaiah 55:8, 40:29, 25:4; Job 12:10; Matthew 28:20; Deuteronomy 31:6, 8:7; Philippians 4:7

Sunday, June 26th: We live in the desert, so we know how dry, desolate, and dangerous it can be to be stranded there. It is easy when we find ourselves in what seems to be a spiritual desert to assume that we have done something wrong or that we are being disciplined. That certainly is a possibility, but it is also just possible that it could be a fruitful time of preparation for the next season that God has in mind for you. It could also be a divine appointment to take what seems to be a low point for you to lead someone else into their highest point. Paul was probably a little bummed out when he was ready to embark on his second missionary journey after a highly successful first one, only to have an ugly falling out with his partner on the first endeavor. Add to that a desire to go to Asia only to have the Holy Spirit forbid them twice from going there. And then a vision appeared to him – a man from Macedonia was pleading for him to come and help them. This was definitely not part of his planned itinerary, but he acquiesced and set sail for Philippi. They arrived safely and, on the Sabbath, went out to the river since there was no synagogue and spoke to a group of women who had assembled there for prayer. As it happened, there was a certain woman there from Thyatira (in Asia Minor) who was wealthy and influential, and her heart was opened to the Lord. Not only was she forever changed, but she also invited Paul and his party to stay at her home and on the way to and from her house a slave girl with a spirit of divination was continually calling out to them, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation!” It greatly annoyed Paul and he finally commanded the spirit to leave her. In his fleshly frustration, he set her free. Because she had been bringing a good income to her employers, this caused a stir, and Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. Instead of bemoaning their situation, they began praying and praising God. An earthquake ensued, every prison door was opened, and the jailer in a panic was about to commit suicide until Paul assured him that everyone was still there. The jailer fell to his knees and asked what he must do to be saved! Paul was in a place he had not even wanted to go to. For him, it probably seemed like a desert place, and yet for Lydia, a slave girl, and a jailer, it was salvation. Since Lydia was from Asia, she would be taking her newfound faith back with her to the place Paul had originally wanted to go. In addition, the church founded in Philippi was the first Christian church in Europe and was a catalyst for the spread of the gospel across the continent. Not on Paul’s radar but definitely on God’s. So, if you feel that where God has you right now is like a desert and doesn’t seem to make any sense, just remember that He always has a bigger picture in mind, and as long as you continue to humbly obey, you just might discover a greater purpose than you ever could have imagined. **Proverbs 3:5-6, 19:21; Isaiah 55:8-9**

Monday, June 27th: With everything going on around us it can be very tempting to become cynical and spend inordinate amounts of time and energy complaining about everything that is wrong. We need to be aware of the evil that must be combated but being a grumbler and a complainer only adds to the problem. That is placing our focus on the problem rather than the solution, and in doing so we are missing the things that God is doing in the midst of it all. We are unquestionably seeing an increase in the darkness, but we cannot allow the darkness in its many forms to take center stage in our thoughts. Rather than expounding on everything that is wrong – “gender confusion,” skyrocketing inflation, government overreach, unenforced borders, or even gossip about any salacious bit of news whether it is national or closer to home – why not develop an awareness of the good that God is accomplishing all around us and sharing that with an attitude of thanksgiving and trust in His goodness and promises. The only thing that can dispel darkness is light and we are called to be the light of the world, but we won’t be driving out much darkness if we are not allowing that light to shine more brightly than anything else we are projecting. He didn’t fill us with His light for our own personal benefit. In fact, we are to exude so much light that it will give light to all who are in the house and then fill the world! So, get your praise on and turn on the lights.

Matthew 5:14-16

Tuesday, June 28th: I will send my messenger. Malachi 3:1

Jesus once said about John the Baptist, “This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I will send My messenger.’” The Greek word for “messenger” is *angelos*. The word for angel in Hebrew is *malak*. In the book of Haggai we read, then spoke Haggai the Lord's *malak*. Neither John nor Haggai fits how we would picture an angel. Yet, they were God's emissaries announcing a message from God. Hence, they are *angeloi* <angels>.

When Jesus gave his followers the Great Commission, He gave them and us a message or the *evangelium*. Notice the word “angel” is part *evangelium*. Do you think that's an accident? It isn't if you have been born again to the service of God. So today contemplate bringing the good news to those you meet and be God's messenger, His *angelos*, to those around you.

Lord thank You for reminding me You need messengers willing to carry Your message about the reward of being with You to others.

Wednesday, June 29th: Too often we tend to think of praying for the peace of Jerusalem as an afterthought or maybe a tag to other more pressing concerns. There are assuredly times when we have a dire situation that demands immediate and fervent prayer, but that does not negate the need for us to understand how important to God it is that we remember to always pray for Jerusalem. It has been a temptation for many Christians to feel somehow superior to the Jewish people because they have not yet recognized Jesus as their Messiah and we look at the persecution they have suffered as evidence of God's judgment. First, we need to remember that they are His chosen people and there is a difference between discipline and judgment. How many times when they were either drifting away or were in blatant rebellion did, He allow them to go into exile in order to purify them so that they might return to the land He had promised them? We would do well to learn from that as we see the Biblical foundation of our own country crumbling. When Jeremiah prophesied to Israel the Babylonian captivity, He also related to them God's many promises for them at the end of the 70 years. Most of us are familiar with the verse that promises a future and a hope, but in chapter 31 he gives some specific promises of what God says He **will** do: He will be the God of *all* the families of Israel, and will again build them, gather them from the remote parts of the earth, make them walk by streams of water, turn their mourning to joy, comfort them, fill the soul of the priests with abundance, He will have mercy, watch over them, make a new covenant with them and forgive their iniquity. These are not empty promises; He is a covenant-keeping God, and this does not sound like a people He no longer calls His own possession. If He regards them that highly, so should we. In His grace and mercy, He has grafted us into them, not the other way around. Furthermore, David instructs to pray for the peace of Jerusalem saying, "...may they prosper who love you...may peace be within you. For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good." And if the advice of King David isn't enough, God Himself made a covenant with Abraham, telling him that He would bless those who blessed him, and He would curse those who cursed him. This is the enduring promise of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). We pray for the peace of Jerusalem because that is what God desires, and His desire is always for our best.

Genesis 12:3; Psalm 122:6-9; Jeremiah 31:1-31

Thursday, June 30th: We have all heard the saying there is strength in numbers. That all depends on what you are counting and what the purpose happens to be. In Judges 7 the Lord had appointed Gideon to deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. This seemed rather unlikely to Gideon because he argued that his family was the least in Manasseh and he was the youngest in his family. After God confirmed to him that he was indeed the one to lead this assault, He then told Gideon that the army of 22,000 was too many and proceeded to whittle the number down to a paltry 300! To God, the “who” was more important than the “how many.” He wanted it to be obvious that the victory belonged to Him, and He was the one who directed Gideon in the selection of the army that would be successful. It’s worth noting that God’s criterion for determining who qualified was probably not the standard process used by most military leaders. Gideon still had some misgivings, so God assured him by allowing him to overhear the prophetic dream of one of the Midianites. His first response was to bow in worship; his next was to muster the troops. May we always remember that what is most important is not how many people fill the sanctuary but how many are filled with His Spirit and willing to obey. Ask God to make us as the 300 – people filled with, chosen, and led wholly by His Spirit.

2 Chronicles 16:9; Judges 7:1-9