

Prayer Devotions



August 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 are some of the most dangerous countries to follow Jesus.

Algeria (Africa): Islamic oppression / Main Religion: Islam

Mauritania (Africa): Islamic oppression / Main Religion: Islam

Mali (Africa): Islamic oppression / Main Religion: Islam

Daily Prayers for August... "Remember who you are. Don't compromise for anyone, for any reason. You are a child of the Almighty God. Live that truth." Lysa Terkeurst

Monday, August 1st: If you did not send in an early ballot for the primaries, tomorrow is voting day. The share of registered voters in the United States who say they are Christian has declined by about 15% since 2008 while the number of religiously unaffiliated voters has nearly doubled, Pew Research Center data suggests. According to the data, approximately 63% of Americans identify as Christians, or roughly a little over 200 million people. That said, identifying as a Christian does not ensure that the beliefs held are based on a Biblical worldview, and it also does not mean that those registered will vote. There are several reasons for this: apathy, loss of confidence in the process, or the notion that Christians should not entangle themselves in politics. And in all honesty, our security will not be won or lost by a political party or any particular candidate. However, it is our responsibility as followers of Christ to care about our country and the God-given freedoms with which we have been blessed, but which we have also seen being compromised or forfeited at an alarming rate. With that in mind, we should care about who is shaping the direction of our country and what their core values are to want to have a say in who gets elected. We have no room to complain about the government if we do not participate in choosing those who will reflect Godly values, and if we hope to continue to enjoy His blessings, we need to be vocal in upholding those ideals and principles that reflect His nature. There will never be a perfect candidate or government, but we do have a perfect King who encourages us to respect those in authority, so let us exercise our right to vote for candidates who respect God and His precepts.

Proverbs 29:2; Deuteronomy 1:13

Tuesday, August 2nd: Our school campuses from kindergarten through graduate school have become battlegrounds in both the physical and the spiritual realm and there is a direct correlation between the two feeding off one another. The more we remove God from our schools and reject His principles underscoring the curriculum, the more we witness violence and blatant heresy on the campuses and in the classrooms. It is a downward spiral, and we cannot afford to sit back and watch it happen. Whether you are a parent or not, these are our children – they are our next generation of leaders and we all need to take some responsibility in monitoring and being proactive and vocal about what they are being taught. Schools were established to teach, not to indoctrinate students. Pray for Christian administrators, teachers, and students to not grow weary, to be strengthened to stand boldly for truth, and for wisdom and opportunities to combat the lies and deceptions that are being promoted. Pray for the physical protection of the campuses and pray that the faith community would be more actively welcomed and involved both physically and in regularly praying for schools in their immediate communities and across the nation. Pray that those in positions of authority would not bow to the pressures of outside influence to rewrite our history and undermine the principles and values upon which our country was established. May we be a nation that truly is under God and indivisible. **Proverbs 22:6**

Wednesday, August 3rd: I am a list maker; I like to have an idea of my schedule for the day, and whenever I shop or pack for a trip or have several things that need to be accomplished in a given period of time - I make a list so I can check things off and be done with them. That is all well and good when the things I need to manage are not of a spiritual nature. However, when it comes to our faith journey, we need to remember it is all about a relationship rather than a rigorous set of rules and regulations that can be checked off a list. That kind of “religion” sounds a lot more like legalism. When our lives are Christ-centered we understand that our schedules are in His hands. This does not mean we quit our jobs and sit around meditating 24/7, but it does mean that we take Him with us all the time. We have been given the mind of Christ, and that means our resources for achieving the very best outcome in every setting and situation are exponentially upgraded when we submit to His spirit rather than our own limited, fleshly faculties and resources. It is a matter of law versus grace; all of the requirements of the Law have already been fulfilled, releasing us to freely walk in the power of the Spirit and giving us life and peace. “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Romans 7:6, 8:3-6; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16; Ephesians 3:20-21

Thursday, August 4th: All of us, believers and non-believers alike, go through difficult times. We can be blissfully cruising along when out of the blue we get slammed with something that has the potential to shake us to the core and maybe even make us begin to question the depth of our faith. Do not be alarmed if this happens; even the disciples of Jesus had to be reminded that maybe they were not taking God seriously enough when they prayed. They had prayed for a young man who was demon-possessed, but their prayers were ineffective. With authority, Jesus rebuked the demon, and the boy was cured at once. The disciples then asked Jesus why they had not been able to do so, and Jesus told them it was because of the littleness of their faith. I think it may have had something to do as well with how they were approaching the situation - in whose authority had they been commanding the demon to leave? Do not misunderstand - praying in the name of Jesus does not mean that we will always get the results that we are asking for. What it does mean is that we are confidently putting it in His hands, believing that He hears, He cares, and He will act in His timing and according to His perfect plan. Our mustard seed faith releases His limitless power. We will still experience trials and tribulations - Jesus has flat out warned us that this is a reality - but the peace that we can experience in the midst of the storm is that He has it well in hand and He has already defeated the enemy's hold. Difficulties are a reality, and He hasn't given us a magic wand to wave that will turn a pumpkin into a Porsche. What He has given us is access to Him, allowing us to watch Him turn what may appear to be shattered and broken pieces of dreams and create a beautiful mosaic that is His *poema* - His workmanship or masterpiece that we never could have produced on our own. As one person put it, He will draw stars around our scars. All it takes is faith the size of a mustard seed to level a mountain as long as we're willing to really take it seriously. If we put it in His hands, it will be handled in His authority and to His glory.

Matthew 17:19-20; John 16:33; Ephesians 2:10

Friday, August 5th: Are you one of those people that doesn't like to wait? And what if you are waiting on the Lord? I must admit that sometimes I don't like to wait either.

As usual, God's very creation has an example for us: the sloth. Clocking in at a maximum speed of 0.16 miles per hour, these slow-moving mammals that are native to Central and South America are best known for hanging upside down on tree branches with their long limbs and their hooked claws. They can't even walk! These docile creatures just hang around with seemingly no care in the world. While some people think sloths are cute, these creatures have also inspired a word in the dictionary with a rather uncomplimentary definition: "reluctance to work or make an effort; laziness."

Yet, as they hang around, thinking about their next move, consider this: it takes great strength to hang their body like that. In fact, sloths have three times the strength of humans. A sloth can easily pull its entire body weight with just one arm.

Just as when a sloth is hanging on a branch, waiting on the Lord takes strength as well. There are times when we ourselves are just hanging around waiting for something to happen or waiting for that word from God. Sometimes our self-control is not enough, and our impatience gets the best of us. We act impulsively on our own rather than wait for God's guidance. And oftentimes when we act on our own, we are not acting in accordance with God's Will, and things do not go as well as we hoped or expected.

So where do we get the strength to just hang around and wait? Psalm 46 reminds us that God is our refuge – and our strength. Surely the God that can break the bow, snap the spear, burn the shields, and cause wars to end is strong enough to fight for you! As you wait on the Lord, trust in Him to answer your prayer in the manner that He knows is best for you. Be still and know that He is God! **Psalm 46**

Saturday, August 6th: What a friend we have in Jesus, the old hymn declares to us. There is no better friend that we could ask for, and we know that His love is unconditional, but did you know that His friendship is not? In fact, when Jesus was giving His disciples the analogy of abiding in Him as branches abide in the vine and as a result bear fruit, He told them, “You are My friends *if* you do what I command you.” Even of Father Abraham, we are told by James that he was called a friend of God because he believed God and it was reckoned unto him as righteousness. (Isaiah 41:8) We have all probably had a “friend” at some time who was more than willing to hang out with us and enjoy any benefits of the relationship, but when it came to the question of making any kind of sacrifice on our behalf, they were MIA. These are not real friends. The same holds true in our relationship with Jesus; if we want a relationship with Him in which He regards us as truly His friend, then we need to be willing to do the things He asks of us. The next words He had for His disciples after giving them the condition for His friendship were, “I am no longer calling you servants because servants do not understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I have named you friends because I have let you in on everything I have heard from the Father.” (MSG) In order to be in on the Father’s plans, we need to accept Him as Lord and treat Him as such. Otherwise, we’ll just keep insisting on being in charge ourselves, and we’ll be forfeiting the benefits of His friendship, i.e., being blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm! I would say it makes far more sense to allow the One who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and the essence of unconditional love to take charge of my life. There is no better friend. And He makes us a better friend to others.

John 15:13-15; Ephesians 1:3-6

Sunday, August 7th: In keeping with the idea of Jesus being our friend, in addition to obeying Him, we have a responsibility to show Him the respect that is due Him. Even though we may have a close friendship with a judge, we would still be expected to address him or her as “your honor” when greeting them in a public setting because we are setting an example of how we would expect others to treat him or her. We may not always agree with their decisions, but we will defend their “honor” and their right to rule because they have earned it and know more in their area of expertise than we do. How much more does the Creator and sustainer of all life who willingly gave Himself for our pardon deserve to be respected and listened to? Many Christians treat Jesus far too casually, only valuing friendship with Him when it is comfortable or advantageous but distancing themselves when they are asked to publicly acknowledge Him, make a sacrifice, or do something that may not line up with their personal agendas. We have a choice to make. Let us be honest; when we find ourselves in a difficult or even life-threatening situation, wouldn’t we want to know that the only one who has all the power and resources to deliver and save us also happens to be our close friend? He is not going to recognize us as His friend if the extent of our commitment is hitting the “like” button and adding a heart or smiley face when He says or does something good. The relationship has to be deeper. It should be one that has been formed from time spent together and truly seeking to know one another. He already knows everything there is to know about us and He still wants to be our friend. That in itself is pretty amazing. That is the kind of friendship we should pursue, and the benefit for us is the more we hang out with Him and get to know Him more intimately, the more we will become like Him. He is the friend who will never leave you or forsake you. We all need that kind of friend and so do those around us. Let us introduce them to our best Friend.

Philippians 3:7-11; James 2:23

Monday, August 8th: I recently had to spend an extended period of time out of town, and it was encouraging when I returned to have not only my friends tell me they had missed me, but one of the cashiers at Sprouts asked where I had been. That gave me the opportunity to share some God moments and talk about His faithfulness and power and how what could have been a time when my faith was shaken instead became a testimony to His goodness. It made me think about how important it is to be intentional in relating to those outside our church community. My relationship with this person was not the result of a single conversation while checking out. Instead, it has grown through repeated interactions that began as polite pleasantries that led to a sharing of honest feelings and interests. I try to make it a point to always go through her line, even when it is longer than the other lines because it has become personal. I look forward to seeing her when I shop there, and if she sees that I am waiting in a longer line and she is not currently at a register, she will open a line. The truth is I miss her when she has the day off. Everybody likes to feel valued, and that relationship of mutual appreciation opens the door for deeper conversations – ones that could have an eternal impact. My motivation was not to proselytize but simply to be pleasant. However, this gave me a platform to share my faith with someone whose ears and heart was already open, and only God knows where this could lead. It is also gratifying for me personally to realize that He has given me this opportunity, and I want to be aware of other times when He would like me to be intentional in how I interact with others. We are His hands and feet. We want to carry that out in a way that will have such a powerful and positive impact on others that they would miss us if we were gone tomorrow. Not for our sakes, but for His.

Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 Peter 2:9

Tuesday, August 9th: WALK WITH ME: My mercy is unending. It is new every morning. I look at you with My loving compassion. You are unique in all the world. It is true; there is no one else like you. I am God and I created heaven and the earth. My creation is alive with My beauty everywhere you look. I created man in My image. You are a reflection of my love. I gave you the freedom to choose the path of life. On that day, when you surrendered yourself to Me, you were born again. All of heaven rejoiced the day when you made Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior. You made the choice to walk with Me when you surrendered your heart in total abandonment. I am the shepherd of your soul. I am watching over you and I have given My angels charge over you. There is a hedge of protection around you. I hear you when you call to Me. It is My desire to answer you and help you. Your spiritual eyes and ears have been opened to receive from the Holy Spirit the wisdom that the world cannot receive. You have been given the keys to My spiritual kingdom. When you seek My face, you will find that I will draw near to you. In My presence, you will find renewed hope and strength. Draw near to Me and find the joy of your soul. You are My special creation. I want to walk alongside you each and every day. Come and spend time with Me. In My presence is fullness of joy.

Lamentations 3:22; Genesis 1:1, 27; Luke 15:10; 1Peter 2:25; Genesis 28:15; Psalm 91:11, Job 1:10, 16:11; Jeremiah 29:12; John 14:17; Matthew 16:19; James 4:8

Wednesday, August 10th: Then, the disciples asked: "Are you going there, again?" John 11:8

Jesus had just announced that he was returning to Judea because people thought Lazarus had passed away. The disciples knew the religious authorities meant bodily harm to Jesus; therefore, they asked their question in such a way that the tone of their voices conveyed their incredulity. Clearly, they did not understand the direction Jesus had just announced and thought their lack of understanding was sufficient to believe Jesus was mistaken in what He was about to do. Of course, they spoke from a real desire to prevent Him from taking a costly course of action.

Nevertheless, their words plainly show they are evaluating God from their own experience. God's direction was clear and direct. Jesus was acting in accord with the Father to give a sign for others "to believe" (v.42) the Father had sent Him. Too often I am like the disciples, either debating what step I should take or waiting until God changes His direction to match my understanding. Lord, I want to be faithful; help me not to listen to voices of compromise.

Thursday, August 11th: As we see the erosion of the values upon which this country was founded increasing at an exponential rate, we need to take a hard look at the root cause. It cannot be blamed on a political party or the government in general. The blame ultimately falls on the shoulders of God's people. If we truly believe that He is sovereign, He cares about us and listens to our prayers, and that our prayers have the potential to cause Him to change His mind; if we believe all of that, then we would see a church on its knees on a very regular basis, crying out to Him for mercy and repenting of anything that would be in opposition to His nature. People sometimes misunderstand His sovereignty. They think it means He orchestrates everything that occurs and therefore it would be pointless to try to change anything. He is our supreme authority, but He has given us free will. We have been given stewardship of His creation, and one day we will have to give an account as to how well we cared for it, including how we treated His greatest creation – people. Every person on earth will ultimately be held accountable, and we can have a positive or a negative effect on where they will spend eternity. Secondly, although it is true that God Himself says, “For I, the Lord, do not change...” (Malachi 3:6), this is in reference to His character rather than His mind. In fact, there are some notable instances in which prayer caused God to relent in a decision to destroy people. When Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments, the impatient Israelites were busy crafting their own god in the form of a golden calf and God told Moses to let Him alone that His anger might burn against them, and He might destroy them. Moses intervened on their behalf, and we read that the Lord changed His mind. In another example, Jonah initially did all he could to avoid preaching repentance to the hated city of Nineveh because he knew that God was gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and *one who relents concerning calamity*. When we are praying in His name and according to His will, we are causing a shift in the spiritual realm. The extent of the enemy's dominion is only as much as we yield to him; when Jesus gave Himself on the cross, He defeated the enemy, and he knows his power is limited by the fervent prayers of the righteous. Now more than any time in our generation is the time for us to be crying out to Him for mercy and for His supernatural intervention to turn the tide and usher in a kingdom mindset. We His people need to humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways. He then promises to hear from heaven, forgive our sins, and heal our land. IF we really believe Him, we will take Him at His word. It is time to pray.

1 Timothy 2:1-4; 2 Chronicles 7:13-15

Friday, August 12th: Similar to Pastor Dan's analogy of taking the long walk around as it applies to golf in order to get a different perspective, I recently heard another take on that idea. This one involved looking at the label on a bottle of water. If the label is facing away from me, I can only see some small print with indiscernible information, but the person looking from the other side can clearly see the name of the manufacturer and possibly how many ounces the bottle contains. They have a clearer picture of what's in the bottle because of their perspective. This can be applied to the issue of racism in our country. We will never be able to fully resolve the tension until we see it through a different lens and identify our own limited and imperfect perceptions. Without getting into the purely evil aspect of racism, which is expressed in hatred based solely on ethnicity, we need to understand that it all has to do with seeing differences. This in itself does not have to be a bad thing. It is when we attach labels or preconceived ideas to the differences that the problems arise. We are all created in God's image, so there is no superior or inferior race. An interesting fact that relates to pigmentation (what determines our skin color) traces all the way back to Noah and what he named his offspring. His sons were: Ham, meaning hot or black; Japheth, meaning to extend but also possibly meaning fair as in fair-skinned; and Shem, which simply means *name*, and through him came Abraham, the house of Israel, and Jesus. It is believed that his skin was most likely brown like his parents, and it is from Noah that all the earth was inhabited. Incidentally, brown is the most predominant skin color. God is all-inclusive, and this is borne out in many scriptures. We were not created to all be alike; we were created for diversity but not division. Regardless of our skin color, we all have the same color blood; those belonging to Him have the blood of Christ running through our veins. However, to combat groundless prejudice we need to see race from a personal perspective rather than a historical one. Be open to seeing through different eyes. Listen carefully to personal stories. Get to know others from the inside out rather than the other way around. And ask our Father to reveal to us any areas of faulty understanding in our own thinking that would hinder us from truly representing His family.

John 3:16, 13:34-35; Matthew 28:19; Revelation 5:9

Saturday, August 13th: When I wear my LifeBridge t-shirt that reads “This church has left the building,” I often receive comments from total strangers. They either give a “thumbs up” for the idea or ask what it means. It speaks to our value of becoming more like Jesus for the sake of others. It opens the door for a conversation. The church is so much more than a building and meeting together on a weekend to be fed and to fellowship. Think of that more as a charging station, but don’t ever think that once a week is going to equip us for the other six days. We have been given an assignment; becoming suggests action – moving, morphing, and maturing. Sitting in the sanctuary and being fed but doing nothing else could be compared to sitting in the recliner eating chips and salsa. You might “grow” but you will not get stronger or more mature. A number of years ago Amy Grant had a song entitled “Fat Baby” about those who can quote Scripture but are content with just getting by with the bare minimum of commitment. Fat babies are cute, but they do not make very good ambassadors. We need to learn to also feed ourselves more than just milk. In order for us to be the church, we should understand what it is. The Greek words are *ekklésia* which is from two words that mean called out from, and *kyriakos*, or "belonging to the Lord" (*kyrios*). We belong to Him, and we have been “called out from” in order to go back out to proclaim His name. In other words, we need to physically leave the building if we are really going to be the church. When we are faithfully getting filled with His Spirit and then taking that with us into our spheres of influence we will make a difference, people will be blessed, and God will be honored.

Mark 16:15; Romans 10:14; 1 Peter 3:15

Sunday, August 14th: There are some rather interesting quotes on listening. Two that I particularly like are anonymous. “God gave us mouths that close and ears that do not; that must tell us something.” And in the same vein, “Did you ever wonder why God gave us two ears but only one mouth?” The takeaway here is that He is far wiser than we, and He knows that more wisdom is gained by what we hear from others than by what we expound from our own storehouse of information. When we speak, we are only repeating what we already know, but when we listen – really listen – we have the opportunity to gain new insights and perspectives that we may have never considered. Besides, when we actively listen to what others have to say, we are showing them courtesy and respect. We are letting them know that we value their input, and everyone likes to feel validated. None of us has all the answers, and when we respectfully listen to others, we are showing ourselves to be humble, teachable, and vulnerable – just the sort of vessel that God can use. Lord, let us always show preference to one another in honor and be eager to hear, learn, and grow in understanding and wisdom according to Your Word.

Romans 12:10; Proverbs 12:15; James 1:19

Monday, August 15th: BE REFRESHED: I will nourish your soul with springs of living water. I am a beacon of hope for your soul. Be still and seek My presence. Let me fill the deep longing in your soul. My peace I give to you. My peace is a gift you can experience when you seek after Me. Instead of looking at all the tasks before you, look to Me first. I will guide you and make a way for you to accomplish all that is before you. Lean on Me. I will help carry your heavy burdens. I can make a way for you even when things seem impossible. If you feel weary and exhausted, that is a sign, it is time for you to seek My presence and be refreshed. It is time for you to let My grace carry your heavy load. Stay close to Me in prayer. Seek My presence daily. Come and dine with Me. Let My words fill your longing soul. I have prepared a banquet for you. Come and be filled and you will find refreshing. "Delight yourself (in Me) the Lord, and (I) He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4) Let go of the world's fading glitter and seek after Me. "When you look for Me, you will find Me. Yes, when you seek Me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13) New American Bible

John 7:38; Psalm 46:10, 107:9, 14:27, 32:8; Jeremiah 29:13

Tuesday, August 16th: According to Merriam-Webster, "The word *hypocrite* ultimately came into English from the Greek word *hypokrites*, which means an 'actor' or 'a stage player...an interpreter from underneath.' That bizarre compound makes more sense when you know that the actors in ancient Greek theater wore large masks to mark which character they were playing." The difference between ancient Greece and today is you knew the actors were wearing masks. A recent example of blatant hypocrisy was the response of the media to the gruesome discovery of an infant corpse in an alley in the Arcadia district of Phoenix. They were rightly horrified and outraged at this senseless act because they emphasized that there are non-condemning resources available to offer assistance to women in desperate situations and there is no need to resort to simply disposing of this infant. Yet many of these reporters are also the ones who are speaking out about the undue burden being placed on those seeking abortions without highlighting the many resources also available for counseling and support. At what point did the value of the life that was lost change? God's perspective on truth does not change, and neither must ours. This is a much more obvious example of hypocrisy, but there are many subtle ways that we can be hypocritical as well. How many times do we call other drivers on the road idiots because they are driving too fast/too slow/failing to use their turn signal, and then we justify our attitude because *they* are the ones in the wrong! In the next breath, we may even tell our children how we must turn the other cheek and let no unwholesome word proceed from our mouths. It is hard to walk in integrity and adherence to holiness, but we have the advantage of the Holy Spirit to come alongside and guide us. Those who do not have had their minds blinded by the god of this world. To them the truth is veiled, and they are perishing! Rather than condemn, we need to check for splinters from any logs in our own eyes. "Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church." (Ephesians 4:15 NLT) Father, give us such a clear understanding of Your truth that we will readily see duplicity in what we hear, and show us anyplace we are wearing masks to hide what we really believe. Thank You that Your Word is truth, it is infallible, and it has the power to save and to set us free. **Proverbs 11:3; Mark 7:6; Titus 1:16**

Wednesday, August 17th: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet. Psalm 119:105

My family gave me an old clunker to drive to school that I named "The Golden Chariot." The car almost made it into a picture dictionary next to the word "stall." The car stalls at stop lights. The car stalls on left turns. The car stalls going uphill or downhill. When I described this to my brother, he said sounds like fuel deprivation.

It was also a good description of my spiritual life at the time. There had been weeks when I was not praying or reading my Bible or even enjoying fellowship with other Christians. Those were the weeks I had let a friend down or I would agree to one too many projects. Eventually, I realized I was having a fuel deficiency of my own. I had not gotten the spiritual fuel needed to handle the sharp turns on the road of life.

That old car taught me the importance of the right fuel, of checking the gauge every day and including a quiet time with God and His Word. When I do, I have plenty of fuel, and it is free.

Thursday, August 18th: When someone first gets saved there is such a feeling of freedom and eager expectation as to what comes next. A spiritual parallel can be drawn between this experience and the Exodus. To be sure, those who have been set free are free indeed from the bondage of Egypt/sin. The reality is that the journey will not always be easy and being *saved* does not mean being *removed* from the influence and temptation to return to our former state when things are not as rosy as expected. We can have a Red Sea experience and three days later grumble because we do not see provision for a need. There will always be tests to see if we really trust Him to lead us in a way that will prosper us and not harm us. Few people look forward to tests, but they give us a better picture of what we have learned and what we need to work on. As long as we look at the test as a barometer to help us better understand where we are and give us perspective and direction, we really can consider it as joy because we know that it is preparing us for greater things. The tests in first grade were easier and we got more tangible rewards for doing well, but there were also so many things we could not do or were not allowed to do, and who wants to still be there when they are twenty? For the Israelites, they were more desirous of the cucumbers and melons and garlic and onions and leeks they had while in bondage than they were of letting their physical appetites be satisfied with heavenly bread that they did not have to do anything to receive while they pushed forward towards the promise of their very own land. It all has to do with perspective and final outcomes. What are we willing to give up and what are we willing to invest in? Choose you this day.

Joshua 24:15; Galatians 6:7-8

Friday, August 19th: I once had a pastor who told us whenever we came across the word “therefore” in the Bible, we should ask ourselves what it was there for. It is a straightforward word in any language. In Greek grammar, it is a conjunction which means its purpose is to join two things together. English grammar uses it as an adverb meaning consequently or for this reason. Both of these usages apply in Biblical text. Most of us are familiar with Romans 12 which is a beautiful passage in which Paul is instructing the church in Rome as to how they should conduct themselves. This portion of his letter encapsulates for us the essence of a life that would reflect Christ. Even if we stop there, it gives us a lot to chew on. But we need to go back to the very first word of this passage - therefore. What was Paul’s primary objective? Of course, he wanted them (as God wants us) to have a deep and genuine faith in the grace and mercy of the Father reflected in the Son, but they had apparently begun to develop a somewhat arrogant attitude towards the Jews because they had not recognized their Messiah. These Roman Gentiles evidently saw their salvation as a badge of honor more than a gift to be shared. In fact, Paul reminds them in the previous chapter that it was by their (the covenant people of God) transgression that salvation had come to the Gentiles *to make them jealous!* Our obedience and humble submission to His purposes are the means through which multitudes of those who, in their lack of understanding or their own disobedience and rebellion, has not yet experienced the depth of the riches of His mercy. Our salvation is a gift that was purchased with the blood of Christ - the Jewish Messiah who came to all the world that all might be saved through Him. If God did not spare His own people when they stumbled and so made a way for us to receive His grace and mercy, how much more will their acceptance result in a profound display of His glory. We must constantly be aware of both His kindness and severity - His kindness if we continue in His kindness, but His severity and cutting off if we become arrogant and forget that we have been grafted into the vine. And that is what we are “here for” - to overcome evil with good by being a reflection of Him. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:12, 18; Romans 12

Saturday, August 20th: Have you ever known someone who seems to be able to weather anything that comes their way and who is praised for being so stoic? Nothing seems to faze them. There are certain denominations that promote the idea of not allowing emotions to cloud decisions, and I even heard from a pulpit once that the children’s song doesn’t proclaim, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for my feelings tell me so.” Granted, we cannot let our feelings dictate what we believe, but it would be just as wrong to totally discount them. After all, why would God give us emotions if He did not expect them to be expressed? Why would He tell us we could be angry but just not sin? We even read that God gets angry and that Jesus angrily overturned the tables of the moneychangers. We read that at the death of His friend Lazarus, Jesus wept. Are not we made in His image? In Romans 13:15 we are told, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Acknowledging and expressing emotion is actually reflecting the nature of God. All emotions are good when expressed within His boundaries: righteous anger, godly sorrow, and loving one another. It is when they exceed His limits that they become childish and destructive. Anger becomes a temper tantrum or rage, love becomes lust, grief becomes despair, and a healthy fear becomes anxiety. We need to learn to acknowledge our feelings, actually give some thought to why we are feeling the way we do, and then ask God to help us learn to respond in ways that will reflect His character. You cannot empathize with the feelings of others if you ignore your own. True spiritual maturity comes with learning to rightly and fully employ and enjoy the vast range of emotions He has placed within us. The closer we get to Him, the more we will take on a family resemblance.

Psalm 61:1-2; Proverbs 3:5-6; Galatians 5:22-23

Sunday, August 21st: Someday all of us will die. It even says so in verse sixteen of Psalm 139 which states: “Every day of my life was recorded in your book before one of them had taken place.” Simply put, our days are numbered. Yet this does not mean the end; God provided for us a way out. And there is nothing to fear!

A little boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring day. Suddenly out of nowhere, a bumblebee flew into the car through the open window. Since the little boy was deathly allergic to bee stings, he was terrified. But the father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. But as soon as he released it, the young boy panicked as the bee buzzed by him. The father saw his son’s panic-stricken face. Once again, the father stretched out his hand, but this time he pointed out the stinger of the bee now lodged in his skin, growing red and swollen and painful. He then said to his son, “Do you see this? You do not need to be afraid anymore. I have taken the sting for you.” Indeed, Christ has taken for us the sting of death. For the believer, death is harmless – much like a bee without a stinger. The cross, the grave, the resurrection – all these were necessary in order for Jesus to break death’s power over us and remove its sting. Because of Christ, death is not something to be feared. He has already given us victory over sin and death!

1 Corinthians 15:54-57; John 11:25-26; John 3:16; Psalm 139:16

Monday, August 22nd: If you have ever taken a road trip with children, you know that despite your efforts to ensure their needs are being met and they are being sufficiently entertained, you will eventually hear the inevitable, “Are we there yet?” And it is not just children who become impatient. On a trip to Long Beach one summer (towing a 24’ sailboat), our truck kept overheating and we had to turn off the air. I was continually reassured that we could turn the air back on “as soon as we got over the next hill.” The problem was there was always another hill! I wonder if God felt the same frustration when He was leading the children of Israel to the Promised Land. They had seen Him perform miracles, and their needs were being met in supernatural ways, yet they continued to grumble and complain. They were impatient and wanted to have every need met and every promise realized immediately. Don’t we do the same thing when we feel like He is not acting fast enough, or our “wants” are not being met, even if our basic needs are? I like Max Lucado’s quote, “God never said the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile.” We don’t need to pretend that everything is hunky-dory when we have legitimate needs, but we do need to keep our eyes on the destination, knowing that in His time He promises to make *all things* beautiful. And we are not there...yet.

Ecclesiastes 3:11; James 1:2-4; Philippians 4:13-14

Tuesday, August 23rd: NEW SEASON: Rejoice, you no longer need to carry the shame of the past. You are free from the bondages and chains of darkness. Jesus has set you free. You are a new creation. You have been given a new heart. Jesus went to the cross and paid the penalty for your past sins. He took your shame. "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1 NLT) You are cleansed and washed in the blood that Jesus shed on Calvary. Jesus has become your righteousness. "For it is by grace that you have been saved..." (Ephesians 2:8). When you asked Me to forgive you, I removed your sins "as far as the east is from the west..."(Psalm 103:12) By grace, throw off any shackles that would bind you. You are a new creation. I am a God who can take the things of your past and use them as a testament of My grace. I love you and I have given you a new heart. You have a new passion for the truth. I am bringing you into a new season. I have opened your spiritual eyes to see My kingdom. Jesus is the author and finisher of your faith. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Galatians 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21; Ezekiel 36:26; Romans 6:23; Isaiah 53:4; 1John1:7; Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 12:2

Wednesday, August 24th: Possibly one of our most primary instincts is pain avoidance. We know that pain is unavoidable, but we will do just about anything to keep from experiencing it or at least to minimize it, and too often the methods we resort to are not what God intended when He allowed us to go through our painful experiences. Our very first response to any pain or difficulty should be to turn to Him not only for comfort but also for guidance on how to manage it, how to navigate through it, and how to discern how He wants to use it in our lives or the lives of others on the other side of the trial. It could be that He is refining us to remove something that is hindering us from growing, but it also might be that He trusts us enough to allow us to experience something that in the future will benefit many others in facing their own trials. When we are truly following Him, we can rest assured that according to His promise, He is the one who is going before us, He will be with us as we walk through any storm, and He will never leave us or forsake us. Jesus Himself gave us an example of enduring pain for the sake of others, and Paul reminds us that just as Christ's sufferings are ours in abundance, so also is our comfort abundant in Him. And James tells us to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials because we know that testing produces endurance, and the perfect result of endurance is that we will be lacking in nothing. It is the ongoing process of becoming more like Jesus for the sake of others, and even though it may not seem like honor or joy at the time, think of what it means to have Him consider us worthy to be refined in order to reflect Him and be a vessel that will carry His message of hope and comfort to the world. Lord, give us yielded hearts that are willing to share in Your suffering so that we may also reflect Your glory.

Deuteronomy 31:8; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, 3:18

Thursday, August 25th: In case you have not noticed, this is an election year. Anyone who watches TV or has a phone that receives text messages is aware of this by now! We listen to the rhetoric and hopefully educate ourselves on the issues and the platforms of those running for office, but in all reality, although elections definitely have consequences, no candidate or party is going to solve our problems. The reason for this is that the root problem is not with the government but rather with the heart condition of those casting their ballots. Elections are something like a standardized test that reflects the heart of the nation. Most people vote for the candidate they believe will best work to reinstate what they consider "the good life." They would rather have a better life in the physical sense than a godly one in the spiritual sense. It is a heart problem that has to do with where we are putting our trust. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, our faith (trust) does not (cannot) rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God. More than any time in recent history we should be on our knees regularly, interceding for our country and its leaders that they would listen to His voice and submit to Him. Then we should ask God to cleanse our hearts so that we might be a voice at the polls and in our communities that will honor Him and help reestablish the principles upon which our country was founded.

2 Chronicles 7:14; Proverbs 29:2; 1 Corinthians 2:5

Friday, August 26th: Have you ever considered how counterproductive it is to worry about something? My husband used to say that worrying must work because 90% of what he worried about never happened! But the truth is, worrying can have a paralyzing effect on us. It begins to dominate our thoughts to the point that we become ineffective in our responsibilities, and we fail to appreciate anything good. And to be honest, worry is just another word for unbelief. Paul exhorted the church at Philippi to “be anxious for *nothing!*” Instead, they were to give thanks for everything and then make their requests known to God. He told them that this would lead to incomprehensible peace. The word for anxious is *merimnao* and it refers to worry. It’s the same word used in the parable of the sower when Jesus warned that the *merimnao* of the world could choke the good seed of the Word and keep it from taking root and producing fruit. Sometimes those difficult times are the very things that grow us up and enrich our relationship with our Father, Savior, and Comforter. Henry Ward Beecher once said, "The little troubles and worries of life may be as stumbling blocks in our way, or we may make them stepping-stones to a nobler character and to Heaven. Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things." Choose to allow Him to shape you; cast your cares on Him.

Philippians 4:6-7; Psalm 55:22

Saturday, August 27th: There is a rare medical disorder called prosopagnosia, also known as “face blindness.” This makes it difficult for those afflicted to recognize faces, including familiar ones. There are even a few of those afflicted who will walk up to a mirror, look at themselves, walk away, and have already forgotten what they look like. In James's letter, he speaks of the condition of spiritual blindness. He stated that if we listen to God's words but do not do what He says, then we are like those who see ourselves in the mirror and forget what we look like as soon as we walk away. We are called to love our neighbor, and in doing so we are warned against being double-minded. To love our neighbor means to love ANY neighbor. Paul admonished wealthy believers in the Corinthian church who failed to share in the Lord’s Supper, leaving the poor believers to go hungry. Peter had to be reminded in a vision from the Holy Spirit that nothing created by God was unclean – including those foods forbidden by Jewish law; otherwise, he may not have heeded the call to break bread and share the Gospel with the Gentile Cornelius and his household. We might not look alike, dress alike, enjoy the same music, drive the same kind of car, or vote the same way. Yet we are called to love our neighbor regardless. As we gaze upon our spiritual mirrors, let the image we see shimmer with the brightness of Christ!

James 1:22-25; 1 Corinthians 11:20-22; Acts 10: 9-36

Sunday, August 28th: Having grown up in the Midwest, I have experienced a phenomenon called whiteout. It is when there are blizzard conditions so extreme that it becomes impossible to see where you are, and you can easily become so disoriented that you could freeze to death within feet of your own door. Farmers would often tie ropes between the house and barn in order to navigate when they had to care for the farm animals, and they could not wait until the storm hit to secure the rope. It was literally a lifeline not only for the farmer but for the livestock – the ones who depended on him – as well. In the Valley, the closest thing we have would be the haboobs or sandstorms that can obliterate visibility. We do not always know when they are going to hit or the severity, but we know that they are always a possibility. Our spiritual lives are much the same. We know there will be times when it seems we get blasted with something that throws us off course or makes us feel like we do not know what direction we should be going. Other times it could be that we have just gotten our lives so cluttered that it is like being in a huge, junk-filled warehouse and we cannot find the exit. Either way, we need a lifeline – something that will show us the way home. Peter Scazero in His book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* speaks of two ancient practices that could prove to be our ropes leading us home to our Father when we encounter our whiteouts. They are the Daily Office and Sabbath. The Daily Office is quite simply being intentional about setting aside several fixed times throughout the day of stopping and being present with God. The beauty is that it can be flexible to your own rhythms. You determine the number of times and what they will look like. It could be sitting quietly, reading from or praying the Scriptures, worshipping, or taking in the beauty of His creation. It is not the structure or the length of time that matters – it is the regular remembrance of Him. It can be broken down into four elements: stopping, centering, silence, and Scripture – the Psalms are always a good place to start. The second practice is Sabbath, which in Hebrew means to cease or to stop working. In our culture, it seems quite foreign to think of ceasing work for a 24-hour period, but God gave us both an example and a command to do so. It may sound radical (and it is) and counterproductive, but as one theologian put it, “To fail to see the value of simply being with God and ‘doing nothing’ is to miss the heart of Christianity.” By observing a Sabbath (the day can be what fits your personal schedule) we are affirming that God really is our center – our lifeline. He will always lead us safely home, but we need to be in His Presence to let Him show us the way.

Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Daniel 6:10; Acts 6:1; Psalm 46:10

Monday, August 29th: I really enjoy growing things: flowers, plants, fruits, and vegetables. Sometimes I will purchase a plant that is already developed, but what I especially like to do is to take a cutting from a plant I would like to grow or start from seeds - either purchased or harvested from a flower, fruit, or vegetable. Regardless of their beginning state, they all need to be cultivated. I cannot expect to just dig a hole, plop them in, and expect them to flourish. I need to prepare the ground ahead of time and then I need to tend to the plants regularly, ensuring they have adequate light, water, and nutrients as well as protection from harsh weather and insects or diseases. I need to cultivate and nurture them. The same is true of faith. It is not a one-time endeavor - repeat a prayer of salvation, make a confession of faith, and expect smooth sailing with healthy growth to automatically happen. King David penned a beautiful Psalm that gives us an idea of what to expect and what is required of us, as well as what we can count on as the fruits of our trust in following the Lord's guidance in how to produce an outcome that we will find delightful. Among other things, he tells us to trust in the Lord, to do good, dwell in the land, and cultivate faithfulness. Another way to express dwelling in the land might be to put down roots where He has planted us and to cultivate or nurture our faith as part of the ongoing process of working towards a pleasing and fruitful outcome. And to be clear, the dwelling may not specifically mean physical location; it could be a situation, a physical condition, a challenging relationship, or a profession...as long as we are trusting Him, doing our best to follow His manual for producing optimal growth, and spending time in His presence to protect us from the damaging effects of harsh conditions and natural predators, our faith will be cultivated. Finally, do not fret. It is a process. Remember that seeds rest in the prepared soil a while before you see any evidence of growth. From the time of planting until the time of harvest, delight yourself in the Lord - He will bring forth the desired results.

Psalm 37:3-11; Luke 8:14-15; 2 Peter 3:14-18

Tuesday, August 30th: **WONDERFUL AND PRECIOUS:** You are fearfully and wonderfully made. I knit you together in your mother's womb. I saw you in the depth of the secret place. I saw your body as it was being formed. I have ordained all of your days. I wrote them all in My book before any of them came to be. You are precious to Me. My thoughts toward you can't even be counted. "See I have engraved you on the palms of My hand... (Isaiah 49:16) ..."I love you with an everlasting love and therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you." (Jeremiah 31:3) I will always be with you, and I will be there to fight your battles by My Spirit. I will give my angels charge over you to keep you in all of your ways. I am a God of justice, and I will avenge your enemies. Look to Me the perfecter of your faith. I am bringing you into a new season of the demonstration of My love for you. Look to Me to guide you as you obey My voice. Surrender your heart to Me so I can work out all the details and fill in those missing links. Follow Me and I will guide you in the way you should go. Give heed to My word. Hide My word in your heart so you will not sin against Me. (Psalm 119:11) Take delight in Me (The Lord) and I (He) will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4 A bold promise. Ponder those words and see where I will take you.

Psalm 139:14-16, 91:11, 32:8; Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Isaiah 61:8

Wednesday, August 31st: I am totally blown away by the magnitude of God's mercy. He demonstrates not only His willingness but His *desire* to show kindness and compassion toward us when we do not deserve it – to bring us relief and restoration rather than retribution. In fact, we are told that He delights in showing mercy! That is something to give thanks for. It is His kindness (mercy) that leads men to repentance. Rather than shaking an angry finger at those who understand their offense and undeserved forgiveness, He draws them in with compassion. Mercy triumphs over judgment. And that is exactly what He expects us to do in kind. We have so freely received; we cannot become hardened or arrogant in our unmerited favor and neglect or refuse to extend the same kindness to those around us. Once we have drawn near and received mercy, we are to walk humbly and graciously in that forgiven state so that others might also be drawn near. Failure to do so displeases our Father, and He will hold us accountable. Even if the offender deserves justice (and they often do), so do we! Pray that we would instead choose to be merciful, even as He has been to us. Thank You, Lord, for Your unmerited, unfathomable mercy and grace.

Romans 2:3-4; James 2:13