

Prayer Devotions



September 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.

Turkmenistan (Central Asia): Dictatorial paranoia/ Main Religion: Islam

Laos (Asia): Communist & post-communist oppression / Main Religion: Buddhism

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

Daily Prayers for September... “No work is insignificant. All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thursday, September 1st: You have probably heard the expression “being driven to distraction.” The enemy knows that one of the stealthier ways to derail us is through distraction. On a recent Sunday morning I was driving north on 75th Ave. to attend service at the Peoria campus when a really good worship song came on the radio. I was joyfully singing along when I realized that I was over halfway to 67th Ave. on Thunderbird Road on the route to the Glendale campus. I had been running a little late to begin with, and this meant I was going to be even tardier! That is when the thought occurred to me that the enemy would use a good thing – even an anointed worship song – to steer me away from the direction I was supposed to be headed. Worship songs on the radio are a good thing; standing alongside fellow believers in worship and receiving an anointed word from God is so much better. Serving is definitely something that is on the Father’s heart for us, but when it becomes a matter of works or we find ourselves so overcommitted that we are unraveling, we need to push the pause button and ask the Holy Spirit to show us the road that the Father intended for us to be traveling and then to give us a direct route, trying to avoid any unnecessary detours. God does not want simply good for us – He wants the best for us. Anything that takes the place of where He wants our attention and talents directed is not only a distraction – it is an idol. It does not mean that those things are inherently bad or even that they are not really good; it just means that we must be mindful of always setting our sights on where He wants us to be headed and making sure that His destination and path are what is driving our decisions and direction. That way we can avoid being driven *to* or *by* distraction.

Proverb 4:25; Luke 10:38-42; 1 Peter 5:8

Friday, September 2nd: Living in the desert, we know how critical it is to stay hydrated and to never embark on any lengthy journeys either on foot or even in your car without an adequate supply of water. Failure to do so could be the difference between life and death. If you have ever gone on an extended and challenging hike, you know how easily you can become parched. I remember hiking with my daughter in a fairly isolated area, and we found ourselves rationing our water supply and were extremely relieved when we found a place to replenish our water bottles. We were thirsty! It makes me question how often I am that thirsty for spending time with the Lord. Considering the trying times we are experiencing not only in our country but globally, failing to stay satiated with the Living Water could leave us in a very dire condition. We must realize that drinking in His word and being refreshed in His Presence daily are crucial to our spiritual well-being. I want to be like David in the wilderness when he was so aware of his vulnerability and need that he cried out to the Lord, “You, God, are my God; earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.” Our landscape is getting more and more parched from a disregard for spiritual replenishment. But that should not be cause for us to throw up our hands in defeat. He has promised us that whoever truly believes in Him will never be thirsty. All we must do is keep going to Him to be refilled, and the water that He supplies will become in us a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Psalms 42:1, 143:6; John 4:14, 6:35

Saturday, September 3rd: Do you ever have a thought pop into your head and wonder where in the world it came from? I think we all do at times, but as to its origin, if it is shocking or disturbing in nature we can be pretty sure of the source. The thought itself should not alarm us because the enemy is quite crafty and will resort to all kinds of tricks to cause us shame, condemnation, or to tempt us into actions that feed our weaknesses and would throw us off God’s best path. It is what we do with those thoughts that really matters. Some thoughts will simply flash across our minds and have little if any impact, but if we find ourselves dwelling on them, we are giving them the power to shape how we view ourselves, our surroundings, and those around us. If we are not quick to take our thoughts captive, we could find them taking us captive. One of the best ways we can control how we deal with and differentiate our thoughts is to be intentional about what we put into our minds. We are urged to renew our minds regularly to transform our thinking and put it into alignment with God’s good and acceptable and perfect will. Numerous studies have been conducted on the power our thought life and our words have over the quality of our lives, one of the most recognized being The Power of Positive Thinking by Norman Vincent Peale who wrote, “The words we speak have a direct and definite effect upon our thoughts. Thoughts create words, for words are the vehicles of ideas. But words also affect thoughts and help to condition if not to create attitudes. In fact, what often passes for thinking starts with talk.” So, the solutions are to be cognizant of our thoughts, reject those which are not beneficial or are not aligned with God’s word, and replace them with whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy. The result will be a positive attitude adjustment leading to a happier, healthier, and more productive life. That sounds like a decent place to dwell.

Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:6; Philippians 4:6-9

Sunday, September 4th: FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) is a federal agency within the [U.S Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#). The FEMA administrator reports directly to the DHS Secretary and has a direct line of access to the U.S. President during periods of disaster response. In 2021, the U.S. experienced 20 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters, and the uptick in the number of disasters and their diversity in nature is troubling to say the least. And when you couple that with the rapid erosion of any semblance of morality or true reverence for God, it's obvious that something needs to change. As ambassadors of the Most High God we have a responsibility to be first responders to those who need rescue from desperate situations both physical and spiritual. We know that as Christ's return becomes more imminent, all these things we are witnessing will continue to increase exponentially and people are desperate for answers – for relief – for something that will give them hope. FEMA is not going to meet their needs, but we have a direct line to someone with more power and authority than the President, and His solutions are not only exceedingly abundantly beyond anything we could even think to ask – they are eternal. There is no evidence that the disasters are going to be letting up or that those who are perishing and are perpetuating the downward spiral into total decadence are going to suddenly develop consciences. It is going to take serious intervention, and God has appointed us as the ones who are to point them to the proper source of relief and restoration. We need to tell them who to call upon for them to believe and find the source of hope.

Romans 10:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Monday, September 5th: Today is Labor Day, and although it originated as a purely secular and politically motivated holiday, as Christians we can look at it as more than just another extended weekend. The idea of work and resting from it is one that God produced. The first five words in the Bible are “In the beginning God created...” and then in chapter two we read that by the seventh day He had completed the work He had done, and He rested. Consequently, when we work and then rest from our work, we are mimicking the very nature of God. Additionally, we were made to work. After God had created man He gave him an assignment – he was to cultivate and care for the Garden. Our mandate as well is to care for His garden, His creation, in every sense. There really is no distinction made between secular and sacred work; all work is to be done to the glory and honor of His name. Just like Paul says about the body, we are all created uniquely and each one has a role to play. If all were preachers, where would our food come from? Every job can have a purpose for the common good, even if our initial response would be that of Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh – “It's a rotten job, but somebody's got to do it!” And even if others may not see its value, when performed heartily and to His glory He bestows it with honor. Our place of work also gives us an opportunity to witness both in words and in our actions, and it does not have to be an office or a business – it is anywhere He has placed us. The world desperately needs to see the difference in lives that are dependent on the reality of Jesus and His redemptive work in and through us. So, we can take today to celebrate the contribution of all laborers, sacred and secular, remembering that we are all created for work, and it is not finished until He calls us home or He returns. Then we can rest.

Proverbs 6:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Colossians 3:23-24

Tuesday, September 6th: Only a few decades ago today would have been the first day of school! So much has changed, and it has been much more controversial and threatening to the well-being of our children than when they return to their classrooms. In those same two decades, proficiency in both reading and math has declined dramatically among high school graduates, and these are the ones who will become our leaders. Curricula has become politicized and manipulated to serve an agenda rather than to educate critical thinkers. Cheryl Sacks, who co-leads BridgeBuilders International with her husband Hal, has written a very timely book entitled *Reclaim a Generation* which is a trove of information about the issues being faced and prayer points to protect and equip not only our school kids but those responsible for their education as well. With that in mind, we will be dedicating one prayer/devotion each week addressing some of these and giving suggestions on ways to pray, allowing the Holy Spirit to expand and direct as only He can do. Today we want to focus on the declining literacy and the lack of excellence and attention to truth in what is being presented in classrooms. Lord, we desperately need a generation that is being prepared to lead with excellence, wisdom, and an adherence to the godly principles on which our nation was established. We pray for curricula that will align to those ideals and for students and educators alike to develop a hunger and passion for truth and wisdom rather than a mindless acceptance of indoctrination and ideology. Open their eyes and their minds to recognize the difference and give them the boldness to stand for truth. May they become life-long learners who are equipped with all they need to thrive and succeed and may this all be to Your honor and glory.

Proverbs 4:6-7, 18:15, 22:6

Wednesday, September 7th: When the responsibility of leadership into the Promised Land shifted from Moses to Joshua, God confirmed his role of authority over the children of Israel by parting the Jordan River much as He had parted the Red Sea for Moses. This time, however, the priests had to first “get their feet wet” while they were transporting the Ark of the Covenant before the waters parted and the path through the riverbed became dry land. This shift in method involved a growing level of participation and required trust on the part of the Israelites. Once they had passed through, the Lord commanded them to choose a leader from each tribe to pick up a stone from the middle of the dry riverbed and erect a memorial to serve as a remembrance. Thus, it would be a sign so when future generations would ask what the stones meant to them, they would retell the story of God’s intervention and deliverance. Interestingly, in Peter’s first letter to the scattered churches throughout Asia Minor he reminds them that even in the midst of persecution, they can stand strong, being filled with hope and joy because they are protected by God through the blood of Jesus, the living corner stone of their firm foundation. And because they have been joined together with Him, they have become living stones for the building up of His Church. Not a physical building, but a vibrant body of believers who are to proclaim the excellencies of the one who has delivered them. If we have been saved, we have a story of rescue from certain and eternal death that is meant to serve as a testimony to those who have never heard of His mighty power to save. We are to be His stones of remembrance – His living stones.

Joshua 4:4-7; 2 Peter 2:4-5, 9

Thursday, September 8th: NEW MERCIES: When is the day of rejoicing? It is today because My mercy and compassion are new every morning. There is nothing in your life that escapes My view. I am with you every moment. You are My child and the love I have for you is never ending. Yes, there are times when your flesh seems to rule and before you know it, sin has crept in and overtaken you. It does not mean that I give up on you. This is why I remind you over and over that My mercy is new every morning. My arms are wide open to you, and I will hear you when you ask Me for forgiveness of sin. Do not be a slave to the accuser of the brethren who wants to hold you hostage to condemnation and keep you in a prison of shame and guilt. You have been redeemed. The enemy can no longer hold you captive. When you ask in prayer for forgiveness, I will cleanse you in the blood of Jesus and wash away your sin. I will take away your shame. Rejoice! "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." (Lamentation 3:22)

Isaiah 41:10, 54:10; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 12:10; Galatians 3:13; 1 John 1:7; Zephaniah 3:18

Friday, September 9th: On May 20th, a Michigan State Police trooper was conducting a traffic stop for a reckless driver when he encountered fentanyl, a synthetic narcotic opioid. Just from this brief and incidental exposure he was overcome and fell to the ground. His partner recognized the signs of an overdose and immediately administered Narcan, saving the man's life. The trooper stated that he became disoriented and was trying desperately to breathe but felt unable to take a deep breath. It seems that our atmosphere is becoming more and more polluted not only in the physical but also in the spiritual sense. Unfortunately, we are all affected by this, and so many people are just unaware or are adapting to this depletion of healthy air. What they do not realize is the incapacitating effect this is having on them, and they are slowly dying as a result. Our antidote – our Narcan, if you will – is the life-giving breath of God. In the very beginning God formed man from the dust of the ground and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Then around 586 B.C. during the Babylonian captivity, the Lord gave Ezekiel a vision of a valley of dry bones into which He breathed life and raised up an army. This represented the house of Israel and the Lord said that they saw themselves as dead and without hope, but He was declaring that He would open their graves and bring them back to life. We are surrounded by people who are spiritually dead or are slowly dying both within the walls of our churches and outside. But God has given us His indwelling Spirit and He intends for us to rise up as His army and deliver the life-giving breath of His message to those who are suffocating and unable to draw breath for themselves. He is the antidote, and we need to remember that we carry it with us. "Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love the way You love, and do what You would do."

Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4; Ezekiel 37:5-6, 11-14

Saturday, September 10th: Hopefully, we would all like to see our faith in Jesus and our relationship with Him grow deeper and become more fruitful. For that to become a reality we first need to understand that it is a process and it is not going to happen overnight. Then we must consider what is necessary for something to grow and become hardier and more resilient. To paraphrase Psalm 1:1-3 – the person who does not follow the advice of the ungodly, hang out and go along with a sinful crowd, or sit down and relax with people who outright mock God, but instead they have a heart that really wants to be obedient to what the Lord wants them to do and they spend time reading and thinking about His teaching – this person is going to be like a tree that is firmly planted by streams of water and is well taken care of. This is the kind of tree that will have deep roots; its leaves will not wilt or shrivel up, and it will bear good fruit when it is the right time. The psalmist tells us that this kind of a person is going to prosper and come to maturity. We need to decide where we are going to plant ourselves. We can plant our feet so deep in His word that we will not be able to get pulled into the empty and harmful ideas of the world, and once we have planted ourselves, we need to keep ourselves hydrated and well fed. Living water and the bread of life. That is a recipe for satisfaction and success.

Jeremiah 17:8; Colossians 2:6-7; John 6:35

Sunday, September 11th: There are so many details in the Bible that we tend to skim over without giving them much thought. 1 Kings 2:11 reads that David reigned seven years in Hebron and 33 years in Jerusalem. On the surface that would seem to be simple information. Yet when I felt a slight tug in my spirit to dig a little deeper, I found a lot more significance in those details. To begin with, David was the shepherd king who was a man after God's own heart. We also have a shepherd King who tends His flock – us – with a tenderness and commitment to the heart of God, being the true Son of God and the embodiment of all it is to be our Good Shepherd. Next, we notice that David began his reign in Hebron, and he reigned there for seven years. The meaning of Hebron is unity, and the number seven means complete. Jesus came to earth to complete the redemptive purpose of His Father, to make us one with Him, and to equip us for works of service that the body may be built up until we all reach complete unity in faith so the world will know that the Father sent Him and loves us even as He loves Jesus. And finally, David ruled in Jerusalem for 33 years – the same number of years that Jesus spent on this earth. The meaning of the name Jerusalem is foundation of peace or secure habitation. This was Jesus' mission. He is our peace, our firm foundation upon whom we are all being fitted and built together to become the very dwelling place of God. David, whose name means beloved, is such a beautiful picture of Jesus. Shepherds know how to protect, care for and lead their sheep; a king is the ruler of a kingdom and is given authority over those in his realm. David was *good* in both roles; Jesus is *perfection*. When I think about how absolutely perfect and detailed His word is, I cannot help but stand in awe. Let us all humbly submit to our shepherd king. “Bow down and worship the LORD our Creator! The LORD is our God, and we are his people, the sheep he takes care of in his own pasture. Listen to God's voice today!” (Psalm 95:6-7 CEV)

John 17:22-26; Ephesians 2:20-22

Monday, September 12th: MELODY OF PRAISE: "O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day." (Psalm 95:1-2)

As you sing your song of praise, you are filled with such joy from the Lord. It is the joy of knowing Jesus. Your heart is filled with thanksgiving, for I the Lord hear the sweet melody of praise that comes out of your heart to Me. I am touched by your adoration. Your praise rises to me like a fragrant rose. Your praise is a song of love to Me. Your praise brings My presence. In My presence you can experience earthly joy like that of the heavenly realm. In the atmosphere of praise, burdens are lifted, hope is restored, and your soul is renewed. In My presence the plans of the enemy are defeated by the power of my Holy Spirit. Your praise is your weapon to shield "all the fiery darts of the enemy." (Ephesians 6:16) Your praise glorifies Jesus. Let Me hear your sweet melody of praise. "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord." (Psalm 150:6) Song of Solomon, Psalm 16:11

Tuesday, September 13th: I find it interesting that James, the brother of Jesus, tells us we should consider it joy when we encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations. To me, that sounds more like work! But then, in a sense that is exactly what it is because we are supposed to understand that the *trial* is going to bring about endurance, steadfastness, patience; and when these are fully developed, we will be perfectly and fully developed, lacking in nothing. What trial are you facing right now? Maybe it is some temptation that you are finding harder and harder to resist. Whatever it is, know that you are not facing it alone. Ask our loving and giving Father for wisdom and fortitude to see it through, and then fully expect Him to answer generously. He may give you deliverance, or He may give you an iron will to stay the course. Either way you will experience victory, and victory is always cause for joy. James had seen his brother Jesus face the ultimate trial with victory for all of us, so maybe we should accept that what he is telling us is not so implausible. Thank Him for your victory.

Jeremiah 1:2-5; Romans 8:28-29

Wednesday, September 14th: Most of us are familiar with the statement that it is okay to not be okay, but it is not okay to stay stuck and pretend you are okay. It is easy to see the application for those crippled by addictions and living a life that is spiraling out of control, but if we look intently into the mirror, we must face the reality that we are all not okay to some degree. If that were not true, we would have no need for a Savior. Even the apostle Paul, who was responsible for writing a substantial portion of the New Testament and was a primary catalyst to the spread of the gospel to Asia, Europe, and beyond, was aware of his intense need to keep pressing on to the upward call. Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees with all the right credentials, yet he openly confessed that all of that was rubbish because he knew the only righteousness, he could claim was not based on anything he had done except to believe in Jesus. What may be even more amazing than his self-awareness of that fact is that he openly and humbly owned it publicly. In a letter to his beloved friends in Philippi, the first church to help Paul in his work and the first in Greece to receive the gospel, his focus is not on the fact that he is writing from prison or even on the impressive list of his credentials. Rather he emphasizes the fact that those are not the things that define him. What really matters is knowing Christ and the righteousness that can only be found in Him. He had earlier written in his epistle to the church in Rome that no one is righteous because we all sin and have lapses, so no matter how small we may think these are, they would disqualify us without our justification in Jesus. Even Father Abraham had no room for boasting; the righteousness reckoned to him was based on believing God. Paul goes on to explain that we are still in our physical bodies and as such we are surrounded by temptations that will entice us at times to do things we regret, and he laments that even he can find himself a prisoner of the law of sin. The amazing good news is that the law of the Spirit has set us free, but to think that is an excuse to overlook our “little” lapses is to minimize the unspeakable value of grace. We all need it! The wages of sin – no matter how insignificant we may think it is – is still death. For those of us who have placed our trust in Jesus, this does not mean we will lose our salvation, but it could be the death of our destiny or dreams. How many of us would dismiss a diagnosis of cancer because it was only a small tumor? When we ignore sin in our lives it can become our master. Praise be to God that He has cleansed us from all unrighteousness, but it is essential that we recognize our own shortcomings, confess them, and openly and humbly agree with Him that they are indeed sin. Then we will walk in His light and will not be deceived into relying on our own merits – we literally go from rags to riches! Thank You, Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14; John 8:34-36; Romans 6:12-16, 23; 1 John 1:6-10

Thursday, September 15th: A friend of mine was describing the local movie theater in the town where he used to live. It was not a very nice place. It was smelly and the seats were dirty – to the point that you would probably go home with bedbugs! Eventually the theater was bought out and refurbished by a national chain, once again becoming a comfortable, safe, and healthy place to enjoy a movie.

One could easily be so distracted by the poor condition of the theater that they could not fully enjoy the movie. However, if the movie was a really good one, one that my friend looked forward to seeing, then it was easy to focus on what was showing on the screen and playing over the speakers rather than on the inadequate environment within the venue. Living the Christian life is often like that as well. As long as we are focused on Jesus, any unpleasantness thrown our way is often diminished or unnoticed altogether.

Jesus and his disciples experienced discomfort during their ministry. They had insults hurled at them often – even by those who claimed to be righteous. He chose to forgive and to move forward. In fact, when Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two to various towns and villages to share the Gospel with others, He instructed them to “shake the dust from their feet” and move on if they encountered anyone who did not welcome them.

Jesus never said that we would be spared from insult or injury. In fact, He told us to expect it and that we would be blessed by it! “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.”

We will have offenses thrown at us all the time because of our faith. We can choose to be offended or, like my friend who was focused on the movie, we can choose to focus on the One who took on all offense, insult, injury, persecution, and even death on our behalf. We can choose to forgive and to be Jesus for the sake of others.

Matthew 5:11; Luke 9:1-5

Friday, September 16th: The only thing worse than dying is being dead before you actually stop breathing and your heart no longer pumps blood through your veins. I am not talking about a physical comatose state but rather a spiritual one. This malady can infect anyone, young and old alike, and is commonly identified by symptoms of self-indulgence, a lack of interest in applying one's resources to any endeavors that are not directly related to entertaining non-spiritual pursuits, and the desire to coast along towards the finish line with as little effort and challenge as possible. It attacks those who feel they have put in their time and deserve to "retire" from active duty, and it can also affect anyone who thinks that all that is required of them is to say the right things and look good without actually having to sacrifice anything. The reality is that we were created for so much more than that. One of my favorite verses is Ephesians 2:10 which tells us that we were created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand *that we should walk in them!* And James tells us, "So also faith, if it does not have works (deeds and actions of obedience to back it up), by itself is destitute of power (inoperative, dead)." (AMP) One day every soul that has ever lived will have to face Almighty God to give an account, and personally I do not want to look back on all the opportunities I was given to reflect His glory and advance His kingdom but missed because I was not paying attention, they were too inconvenient or seemed too difficult or, even worse, "beneath" me. If He saw fit to create special opportunities for me, I would hope that I will be awake and aware enough not to miss out. I do not want to be like the church in Sardis that has a name for being alive but is dead. That church is told to remember what it has received and heard, to keep it, and to repent because if it does not wake up the Lord will come like a thief at a time when they are not expecting Him. We have received everything we need pertaining to life and godliness; let us never forget that lest He return, and we are found asleep with His precious gift tucked away under our comfy pillow of convenience. Let us wake up and make the most of the time that has been given us. Thank You, Jesus.

Ephesians 5:14-15; 2 Peter 2:13; Revelation 3:1-3

Saturday, September 17th: People have all kinds of reasons to either neglect or not fully embrace the practice of daily devotions. They may begin with a legitimate expectation of experiencing a spiritual high or breakthrough, and if that is not the reality, they chalk it up to – tried it...did not work for me! Having those mountain-top moments is a definite possibility, but there will also be times when you may not see any immediate benefits. That is okay. God just might have more in mind for you than a daily adrenaline rush. Most of us know better than to think that eating leafy greens and lean protein two days in a row is going to make us physically fit. It is a good start, but if we base everything on preconceived ideas and a need for immediate and consistently tangible outcomes, we will probably get discouraged. As one person put it, devotions are like exercise for our souls. We are intentionally shifting our attentions away from self-indulgence and aligning ourselves with God's purposes. When we do this on a regular basis, there will undoubtedly be times when we will have those holy moments our souls long for. It is also a good idea to mix it up. Just like a varied diet keeps you more interested in staying the course, and in exercise programs you work different muscle groups on different days, if you vary the way you approach your time with your Father, it will help you avoid letting it become routine and it may also help you grow in more areas of your spiritual life. You might want to read through the Bible in one year. That is great. Then maybe you could concentrate on one specific book or memorize some verses or longer passages that are particularly meaningful for you. Interspersed with that, devote some time to simply sitting quietly in His Presence or worshiping and thanking Him for His goodness. The idea is to come closer to the Alpha and Omega – the King of Kings – the Comforter who is always with you. The deeper the relationship, the more you will come to crave this time, and even if you miss it occasionally, it will not create a sense of guilt at not having fulfilled a duty – it will make you appreciate it even more when you meet together again.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25; Romans 12:2; Psalm 16:11

Sunday, September 18th: Observing all that is going on around us, not only locally and nationally but globally as well, it can be a bit daunting. There can be no doubt that we are in a battle and the enemy is very much alive and active and may even appear to be stronger than we are. It is true that he is gaining strength, but that is only because power has been handed over to him by a failure of the Church to stand firm and fight against his influence. And as the darkness increases, the threat becomes increasingly intimidating and taking a stand looks scary. That is when we need to remind ourselves that it is not *our* battle. In giving the laws of warfare, Moses reminds us, “When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you are, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord, your God...is with you.” (Deuteronomy 20:1) We may not be battling against horses and chariots, but it certainly appears at times that those against us are more numerous than we are. We can feel ill-equipped against the forces opposing us because they have titles of authority attached to their ranks. Remember that their weapons are earthly; ours are not, and the battle is spiritual! And with that in mind, the title of the One who is fighting on our behalf is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Almighty God, and He who is in us is greater – much greater – than he who is in the world. If we understand fully that not only has He given us an arsenal of weapons and tactical gear to protect us, He is also going into battle with us, and we have been assured that He is going to crush the head of our adversary. So rather than getting overwhelmed by the specter we see in front of us, let us fix our eyes on our conquering hero who is going before us, is always with us, and will be our rear guard.

Luke 10:19; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 John 4:4; Isaiah 52:12

Monday, September 19th: In Deuteronomy 28:2 we read about the blessings of God for those who diligently obey Him and are careful to observe His commandments. He tells us that not only will He set them on high, but all of the blessings which He goes on to list for them will *overtake* them. According to one commentary, *overtake them* is a beautiful expression meant to convey the idea that the blessings will come home to them and impress their hearts with the thought of God’s love and of His promises, even when it is least expected. I tend to think of something that overtakes as going beyond, surpassing, leaving something else behind. Think about that for a second. God wants to bless us in such a way that our hearts will be bursting with a realization of His immense love and promises. And this will not be because we have earned them through works, but it will be His expression of love to us when our love for Him causes us to trust Him enough to follow the path He has shown us. We choose to leave behind the dead works and destructive thoughts and habits that were putting us on the wrong road. And when we are not even expecting it, His blessings overtake us – they surpass anything we could even imagine. We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. We cannot even wrap our minds around all that would entail! “And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8) Thank You, Lord, for the abundance of blessing You have lavished on us according to the riches of Your grace. When we are walking with You, it will truly be a walk to remember and to cherish – beyond our expectation.

Deuteronomy 28:3-6; Proverbs 16:20; 2 Corinthians 9:8-10; Ephesians 1:3-6

Tuesday, September 20th: HABITATION: It is a new day and I am bringing you day by day into the destiny I planned for you, even before you were ever born. My eye is upon you. I have spoken to you in My word. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) When you were dead in sins, I loved you and I sent Jesus to pay the penalty for your sins. By grace you have been saved. I have brought you near to Me by breaking down the wall of partition that separated us. You are now "raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ." (Ephesians 2:5) It is by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that you have been brought near. You are being built as a habitation for the Spirit of God. You are now a "fellow citizen with the saints, and household of God." (Ephesians 2:19) I will walk with you and dwell in you by My Spirit. Rejoice, for you are a "new creation in Christ and old things have passed away." (2 Corinthians 5:17) You are now My dwelling place. Press into the secret place. Come and spend time in My presence and be refreshed.

Ephesians 2:8, 10, 14, 22; Psalm 32:8, 91:1; Revelation 21:3

Wednesday, September 21st: It is not what we put into our mouths that can pollute us but that which comes out of our mouths. In fact, in Matthew 15 Jesus uses the word defile which means to corrupt or ruin! With that in mind you would think we would be more mindful with the words we speak. But we also know that the tongue is one of the last things we learn to master. It is so easy to let a snide remark, a harsh retort, a juicy piece of gossip roll glibly off the tongue, and once said the damage is done. How many relationships or reputations have been damaged or destroyed by careless words? So, what can we do? The answer is to draw near to God and submit to Him. When we are listening to Him, we can rest assured that our words will reflect His nature and give grace to those who hear them. There are countless scriptures which advocate the benefits of guarding our speech – look for yourself and listen to what He may be saying to you. Lord, we ask that You would let no corrupt communication proceed from our mouths; instead, let our speech be seasoned with grace, that it may bless those who hear it.

Matthew 15:11; Ephesians 4:29; Proverbs 15:4

Thursday, September 22nd: A temple is defined in the dictionary as a building devoted to worship or as a dwelling place for a deity. The Bible defines the temple literally as a House of the Lord; it is a holy place set apart from the rest of the world. It is a safe place for people to come into the presence of God.

When God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai during the Exodus, He instructed him to construct a Tabernacle – a temporary dwelling place for God as the Israelites crossed the wilderness into Canaan. The Israelites continued to maintain the Tabernacle until Solomon constructed the Temple in Jerusalem. This was considered God's dwelling place.

The Old Testament records many regulations regarding the care and maintenance of the Temple. There were times when the temple required cleansing. Hezekiah was king of Judah during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. During this time, he enacted strict mandate for the sole worship of God and prohibited worship of other deities and included a cleansing of the Temple. The story of Hanukkah is centered around cleansing and restoring the Temple during a revolt against the Greeks. And the Gospels all record that after Jesus had entered Jerusalem to loud hosannas, He later entered the Temple and compared it to a den of thieves and robbers before driving out those who were buying and selling as if it were a marketplace.

But toward the beginning of His ministry – and before He cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus was having a conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well. She deduced that He was a prophet and stated that her ancestors worshipped on this mountain but that the Jews insisted they should worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. It was then that Jesus told her that the day was soon coming when people would worship in truth and in spirit – that is, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Paul asks the Corinthian church, "Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple, for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Through His death on the cross, we have been cleansed of our sins. And as Jesus promised, He sent the Holy Spirit to take up residence in the hearts of all believers. Our bodies, therefore, have been prepared to be a temple. You have been created and transformed to be a safe place for people to come into the presence of God.

2 Chronicles 29:3-5; Luke 19:45-46; John 4:6-24; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Friday, September 23rd: Eric Liddell was born to missionary parents in China in the year 1902. At the age of six he and an older brother were sent to England to a boarding school for children of missionaries, and from there he went on to the University of Edinburgh where he distinguished himself as both a devout Christian and a gifted athlete. He became well known for being the fastest runner in Scotland. This earned him a spot in the 1924 Olympics, but his sister Jennie disapproved of his pursuit of running and felt it cast a shadow on his goal of becoming a missionary. His response to her was, "I believe God made me for a purpose. But He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure." Do you realize that when God thinks about you it can cause Him to smile? Seriously, how amazing is that?! And the beautiful thing is that it is not only when we are intentionally running the race He has set before us, although that most assuredly gives Him pleasure. Those who have children know that just thinking about them can cause a smile to creep across their face, and this is how God feels about you and me. He loves us unconditionally, and when He thinks about us it can make Him smile. Think about how special it would feel to work for a multi-million-dollar organization, to be sitting in one of numerous cubicles on one of the lower levels, and to have the CEO walk through, greet you by name and ask about some detail in your life that only someone who really cares about you would know about! What we can experience is so much better. We are truly known by and, more than that, loved by God Himself. We are the apple of His eye. We are brothers and sisters in and of Jesus, and we are His beloved children. Any time you find yourself feeling "less than" or unloved or unappreciated, remember the One who sees you and knows you by name. Let that understanding and what it entails sink deep into your heart that you might "be filled up to all the fullness of God." That should make YOU smile!

Matthew 3:16-17; Ephesians 3:14-21

Saturday, September 24th: A friend was sharing with me a situation in which they had the opportunity to pray for someone, and the remark was made, “At that moment I forgot how to pray.” The enemy would like to convince us that unless we use just the right words or just the right tone of voice, our prayers will be ineffective. People may be more moved by an articulate prayer, but God is moved by a sincere heart. Or as Max Lucado puts it - “Don’t worry about having the right words; worry more about having the right heart. It is not eloquence He seeks, just honesty.” We need to stop stressing over how our prayers may sound to others and focus more on the fact that we are simply having an intimate conversation with our heavenly Father. Most of us would not find ourselves at a loss for words if we were talking to a close friend. And when we are having a conversation, a very important component for meaningful and productive dialogue is that it be two-way. Do not ever “hang up” without stopping to listen for a response. God is not some genie in a bottle waiting for us to rub the bottle and make our request. He is so much more personal and powerful than that! He is our Abba daddy waiting to have some quality time with one of His favorite children. He is not shocked or disappointed when we admit we have had a trying day and maybe even made some poor decisions in how we conducted ourselves. In fact, when we are really honest with Him and ask Him to help us, we have just submitted our fears and needs to the greatest power imaginable. According to English theologian and author Leonard Ravenhill, prayer is not just preparation for battle, but it is the battle. And if we really believe that the battle is His, then we will bring every concern to Him as well as share with Him the joys of overcoming because we have trusted and listened to Him. Key words there are: bring, share, trust and listen. In the words of F.B. Meyer, “The greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.”

Jeremiah 33:3; Matthew 6:5-6; Romans 8:26; Philippians 4:6-7

Sunday, September 25th: Most of us are familiar with the phrase, “Your assignment, should you choose to accept it...” from the *Mission Impossible* movies. Of course, our hero always accepts the mission because that is what he has been trained for, and even though the odds seem to be against him he somehow manages to do the impossible. He is given the choice to accept or pass on the assignment, but he sees it as his responsibility because it is what is expected of him from his superiors. We are also here on assignment, and we are given the choice to complete our mission or to pass and wait for something less challenging. The problem with that attitude is that there is an imminent threat that needs to be addressed when we receive our assignments, and if we refuse, the outcome could be disastrous. Not every task we are given will be perilous, but it will always require obedience to the call. We can never overlook or minimize an assignment because of its seemingly insignificant nature or reject it because of its assumed audacity. It could be as simple as committing to pray for a particular issue facing our family, church or country, but we cannot casually say we will follow through if we take the call lightly and fail to be faithful in persevering until we see the breakthrough that is being sought. Other assignments may look more like Noah being asked to build a boat in a desert place that had never experienced a cataclysmic flood, yet for the at least the next several decades he obediently constructed an ark according to the specifications of the Lord – Noah’s CEO. We are all here on assignment, and who knows whether we are in our particular situation for such a time as this. Lord, help us to choose to accept whatever assignment You have prepared for us and to complete it according to Your purpose and in Your infinite power.

Luke 11:28; Hebrews 11:7; Esther 4:14

Monday, September 26th: When his father Hezekiah died, Manasseh became king and not only rebuilt the high places but also built altars to foreign gods in the house of the Lord and did more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed. We are told that the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. Therefore, God allowed Manasseh to be taken captive by the king of Assyria. That got his attention and he humbled himself before God and cried out to Him, and the Lord answered. Then he knew the Lord was God and rectified his misdeeds *except* the high places were not removed, and it says the people still sacrificed in the high places, but “only to the Lord their God.” It is moving in the right direction, but how many worldly practices do we still accept because we have tried to sanitize them in the guise of trying to make them more Christian? Can things rooted in Eastern religions, the occult, or even simply things that are purely of the flesh can be adequately “cleaned up” enough to make them pleasing to God? We must be guarded and discerning in how we practice our faith, always seeking to align with what He says. Remember His response to Uzzah and the ox cart! (2 Samuel 6:1-7) Ask Him to quicken our minds to anything that would be contrary to His word and not to compromise in how we follow Him. Once He has revealed that to us, we need to repent, realign ourselves to follow His plan, and thank Him for His forgiveness, grace, and mercy.

Psalms 119:1-4; Colossians 2:8; 2 Timothy 2:5

Tuesday, September 27th: BE STRONG: I will always be with you to fight for you, so do not grow weary. Stay in the fight, for you will be victorious. Look up to Me your Creator, the God of heaven and earth. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power." (Ephesians 6:10) Do not worry about those who work to bring about their evil plans. I see the plans of evildoers taking place and I will be your strength. There is no evil that can stand before you. I am your rock and your strong deliverer. Call to Me in all humility. Let Me work out what the enemy plans for your harm. I will turn the plans of the enemy to nothing for My glory. "Though they plot evil against you and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed." (Psalm 21:11) "See, I have put a hedge of protection around you. I will keep you safe and I will fight for you ...Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." (Exodus 14:13) Just as in days of old, when I spoke to Joshua and commanded him to "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9) Those same words are for you, and I also say, as I said to Joshua, you go. "I will give you every place that you set your foot." (Joshua 1:3) Receive this word by faith. BE STRONG!

Isaiah 41:10; Psalm 46:6, 37:1, 91:10, 18:2; Job 1:10; Exodus 14:1

Wednesday, September 28th: There is much evidence that we are in the end times, and although that has been said of multiple generations, just because it is not new, we should not shrug it off with a cavalier attitude. The hard facts are that we are witnessing many of the signs that Jesus warned would be indications of the end, and every day we are closer than we were yesterday! Do not let delay diminish your determination to be constantly on guard and ready to fight the battle. One of the crucial battlegrounds is on the campuses of our schools all the way from kindergarten through graduate school. Time was when real indoctrination did not commence until students entered university; now it begins with the most vulnerable and impressionable – those in the lowest grades of elementary school – and more and more government and Department of Education overreach is diminishing the rights of parents in choosing what the core values should be for their own children. At such an innocent age there is no reason for five and six-year-olds to be introduced to the idea that they can choose their sexual orientation or any other controversial subject beyond their ability to understand. Would we teach them how to “safely” use narcotics? Of course, Not! Then there is the issue of genders who choose to identify as the opposite gender and are allowed to share dressing rooms and bathrooms with the opposite sex. Are these not situations that are above the capacity of knowledge to a child? We need to pray that all attempts to alter curricula or to use it as a tool to indoctrinate our youth in humanistic or godless ideologies would be stopped and that godly teachers, administrators and parents would stand up against such an overreach in the role of public education. It was never intended to be a platform for social or political indoctrination. “(Lord) Raise up watchmen and gatekeepers for truth and excellence in our schools who would guard over what is taught to our young people.” (Sacks, C. 2022, *Reclaim a Generation*)

Proverbs 8:10-12, 17-18; Colossians 2:8

Thursday, September 29th: We tend to look at the Israelites with a bit of disdain for all their complaining in the wilderness. In Numbers 21:5 they grumble that their “souls loathe this worthless bread” (the manna that literally dropped out of the sky to feed them)! Yet after visiting some third world countries and seeing their thankfulness for what little they have and then returning home to listen to complaints about such trivial things as having to drive (over paved roads) 5-10 miles to shop at Whole Foods or Trader Joe’s for some specialty item, I wonder what God thinks of our lack of gratitude! In the wilderness, he answered their complaints with a plague that wiped out over 14,000 people! Moses and Aaron interceded and stood between the living and the dead to halt the curse. So where are we? Are we intercessors who are praising and thanking Him for His unmerited, abundant favor; or are we whiners in need of a wake-up call? Lord, forgive us for taking for granted Your gracious provision. As You have blessed us, may we acknowledge Your ample supply and in thankfulness seek to share with others that they may come to know and depend on You. You are all sufficient.

Romans 1:21; Psalm 107:8; Hebrews 12:25-29

Friday, September 30th We are called to be an example to other Christians. Sometimes what we do – or do not do – can make a powerful impression on others, especially on new believers or on those who are critical of our faith. Just because we have a new freedom in Christ does not mean that we can go around and do whatever we want to do when it does not honor God.

We are being watched by others and that is why it is so critical to be the example. Paul knew this very well when he said, “...for I want to do what is right, but I do not do it. Instead, I do what I hate.” There are some things that we do in our lives that do not exactly reflect godly life – like watching that TV show with all the rough language or being unkind to someone who offends you. And while that may not actually affect whether we ourselves are going to heaven or not (for we are saved by our faith in Jesus), it may be a different story for the person who is looking upon you as an example.

Paul says that we should not be a stumbling block for others in their faith. That is why he – when eating with other Jews – would not eat food that was considered unclean according to Jewish law. Peter, on the other hand, did not understand this at first. As we read in Acts 10:24, Peter would not eat with Gentiles for his fear of violating Jewish dietary laws. However, the Holy Spirit revealed to him that so-called unclean foods were indeed clean since God himself created them. And by partaking in a meal with Gentiles, Peter was able to win more souls for the Kingdom.

The best way to display a godly life to others is to strive to live a godly life even when no one is watching (although God IS watching). I sometimes find myself not doing what I know is right but instead I do what I hate. But it is my spiritual maturity that convicts me, and the gift of self-control that helps me not to display these attributes that are unbecoming; I do not wish to be a stumbling block for someone else’s faith.

Just as a championship athlete practices long and hard to be better at their sport, it is important for us to practice long and hard to be the example for others, to show that the fruits of the Spirit are on display, and that God dwells within us through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 7:15-20; Romans 14:13-19; Acts 10:28-33, 44-46

