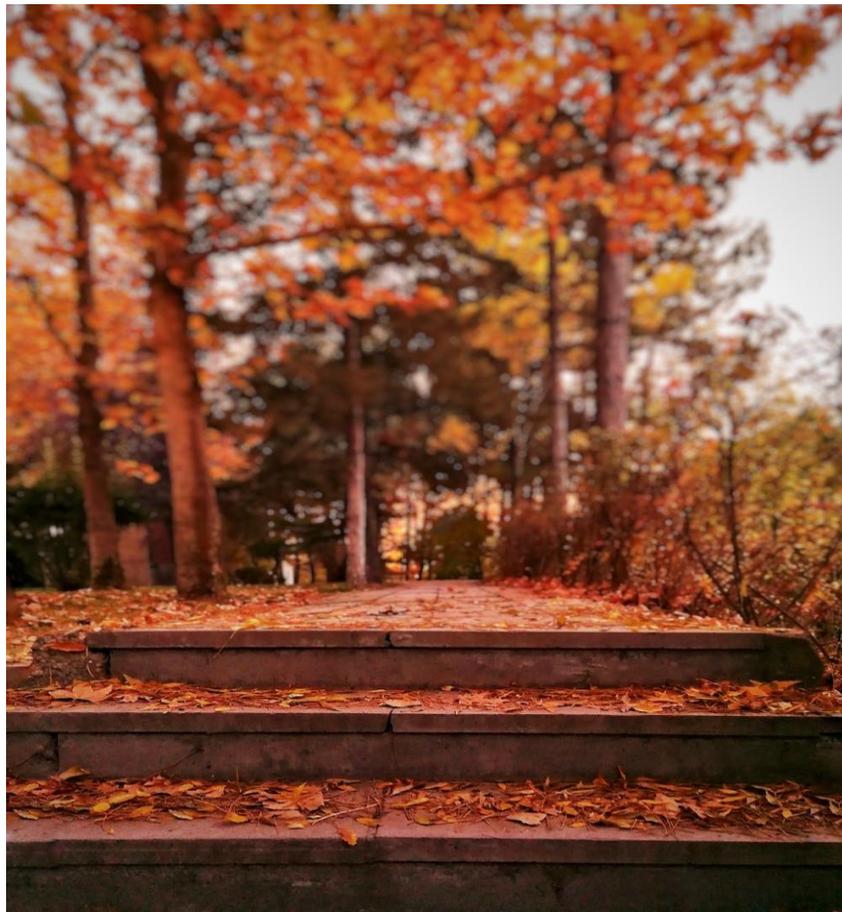


Prayer Devotions



November 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.

Central African Republic (Africa): Islamic oppression/ Main Religion: Christianity

Burkina Faso (Africa): Islamic oppression / Main Religion: Islam

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

Daily prayers for November... “In happy moments, praise God. In difficult moments, seek God. In quiet moments, worship God. In painful moments, trust God. Every moment, thank God.” – Rick Warren

Tuesday, November 1st: Gene Edwards wrote a book entitled *A Tale of three Kings* which examines two types of leadership modeled in the first three kings of Israel: Saul, David and Absalom. Neither Saul nor David sought to become king, but both were chosen and anointed by God. Saul was given a mantle of God’s power and authority with no training period. He was simply thrust into the position and initially handled it well, but when he felt that another was being regarded more highly than himself, he forgot that it was God who had given him his crown and his covering. He allowed his jealousy to fuel insecurity and it cost him a kingdom. Outer power does not change what is within the heart but rather eventually reveals it. David’s ascent to the throne was not so rapid nor was his mantle so easily discernable. That’s because David’s anointing was on the inside and had to be developed and tried through troubles and testing. It was more of an inheritance than a gift, and it was planted as a seed within David’s spirit where it could grow and mature until it filled the entire inner person. When King Saul faced opposition he threw spears and became mad – literally mad. When David was attacked, he dodged the spears and continued to honor the king as God’s anointed. Even when Saul was seeking David’s life and David was handed the opportunity to seize the throne that he now knew was destined to be his, he chose instead not to raise his hand against the Lord’s anointed. It’s all about humbly submitting to God’s leading and timing, fully assured that what He has promised He will also provide. When Absalom, after the order of Saul, tried to usurp the crown, David again left the outcome in the hands of God. He was convinced that whoever was truly the Lord’s anointed would be revealed. He was a man after God’s own heart. So which are we? How do we respond when our character or position is questioned or challenged? In all of us there is some of Saul, just as there was in Absalom. The difference was that Absalom was never God’s choice, never His anointed, and his time in command was quite brief. God is looking for broken vessels who are willing to wait until He has formed them into one who will carry the true nature of His heart. Lord, reveal any semblance of a Saul or an Absalom in us and help us to purge it from our hearts.

Psalm 51:1-2, 6-7, 10-11, 17

Wednesday, November 2nd: Most of us, when we think of the book of Nehemiah, think of restoration and how the walls surrounding Jerusalem were rebuilt in the face of opposition and discouragement. That is all certainly true, but it could also be studied as a treatise on prayer. At the time of the writing, the Israelites were no longer exiles but were still under Persian rule. The temple had been rebuilt, but the city was still in disrepair, and when word of this reached Nehemiah he was extremely distressed and mourned for days. During this time he was fasting and praying day and night, begging forgiveness for the sins of his people and imploring God to remember His promises to Moses and to grant Nehemiah favor before King Artaxerxes. When he was finally in the presence of the king several months later, he still could not contain his grief and it was noticed by the king. It says that this made Nehemiah very afraid because it has been suggested that to display sadness in the king's presence could prove to be disastrous. What was Nehemiah's response? He uttered a quick (probably silent) prayer to the God of heaven and then presented his request. He had spent much time in prayer leading up to this moment, he had fasted to better hear what the Lord would say, and when the opportunity presented itself – he once again sought God's direction and favor. The king granted Nehemiah's request. Then, when there was intense opposition and the people began to lose heart – Nehemiah prayed. Every step of the way, he prayed. That should be our approach to life. Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to pray without ceasing and to bring every need and care to Him. I like the way The Message expresses Philippians 4:6-7. "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life." Let prayer always be our first response to whatever concerns us.

Psalm 145:18; 1 John 5:14-15

Thursday, November 3rd: All of us experience the wounding of rejection at some time in our lives – no one is immune, and for some it may seem chronic. It can come in various forms: feeling excluded, unwanted, not valued, unappreciated, less than, invisible. And it is always the result of sin, either the offending person's sin or possibly our own. It could be that those who reject us are doing so because of their own prejudice, but we have to consider that it could also be the result of our own behavior. Either way, how we handle it will make us either bitter or better. Why not take some proactive steps to seek a positive outcome? One of the first things we can do is remind ourselves what God says about us. We are: loved, redeemed, His masterpiece, fearfully and wonderfully made, righteous, accepted, victorious, perfect and complete – lacking in nothing! With that in mind, we also need to consider what has wounded us and then prayerfully and humbly consider if there is any justification. Have we done anything hurtful, thoughtless, or offensive? If so, we need to repent, admit and accept our weakness, and ask forgiveness and for God's grace to help us to change. If not, we still need to forgive, but then we can remind ourselves of what God has said and walk it off. The biblical interpretation of that would be to turn the other cheek. If what has offended us is neither true nor warranted, then it's just someone else's opinion. Whose opinion matters more? Whose will you choose to believe? God's or a human with their own flaws and weaknesses? Just remember that even some of His greatest servants were attacked and at times rebuked, often by those who should have been supporting them, so you're in good company. The slaves from Egypt who were being led out of captivity and even his own brother and sister rebelled against Moses. The elders told Samuel he was too old to advise and lead them anymore and they wanted a king instead, which is actually rejecting God as well! And Jesus was betrayed by one of His disciples and deserted by the others. We need to keep our eyes fixed on Him and remember that He is in us and has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Following Him may not always be easy, but it will always be fulfilling and freeing.

Isaiah 53:3-5; Psalm 91; Ephesians 1:18-23

Friday, November 4th: Envy, self-centeredness, discontent – all of these ultimately lead to an unfulfilled life. Trying to fill “self” with self can never be satisfied. The first example we have occurred very early in the history of the earth when Satan was not satisfied to be one of the highest ranking angels in heaven. Instead, he and one third of the angels, whom he had corrupted with his prideful arrogance, waged war in an attempt to usurp God’s supremacy. The result was their expulsion from heaven. When he realized his initial defeat, he turned his sights on God’s creation and His chosen people. A prime example of this would be Haman, second only to King Ahasuerus of Persia at the time of Esther. He had authority over all the princes who were with him, and all the king’s servants were to bow down and pay homage to him, but Mordecai would do neither because he was a Jew. This enraged Haman, and in his own words, “Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” His glory was short-lived, and the gallows he erected to hang Mordecai became his own means of death. Better to die to self than to flat out die! To be discontented is to be saying in essence that God is not good enough, big enough, powerful enough, or even interested enough to satisfy us. When we fully understand who our Father is and believe what He says, we know that no matter what else is happening around us, He is still for us and knows what is best for us. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly! When we learn contentment and cultivate an attitude of gratitude, we open ourselves to the peace that only He can give. It’s a peace that is beyond our understanding, and we are promised that it will guard our hearts. And that will be fulfilling.

Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Hebrew 13:5

Saturday, November 5th: There are certain portions of Scripture that are more familiar and easily recognized than others: the Lord's Prayer, 1 Corinthians 13 – the famous love chapter. But possibly the most recognized and memorized chapter in the entire Bible is Psalm 23, and I think the reason for this is the comfort, confidence and encouragement that we find in those six verses. Hopefully we will never allow that familiarity to lead to almost an indifference to it. Not that we don't still revere and love it, but we can tend to breeze through it without truly leaning in and soaking up the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of God and the representation of our Good Shepherd found therein. Our need to lay hold of His provision and promises are especially important in times of uncertainty and heightened unrest, and that would certainly describe where we are as a nation. Think about it. He promises that no matter what, we will not be left wanting. There may be scarcity in the world, but He says we'll have green pastures, still water, and He will restore our souls. And even though we may find ourselves walking through really dark times we don't need to be afraid because He'll be right there beside us. He's not up in the clouds somewhere simply observing or even just cheering us on. He's right there with us, leading the way and protecting us from the enemy. When He tells us that His rod and staff are a comfort, He's telling us that a good shepherd uses his staff to pull the sheep to safety and he uses the rod to ward off and destroy predators. And as if that isn't enough, He invites us to sit down and dine with Him right in the midst of the battle. It's like He's letting the enemy know that He has us covered and no threat will be allowed to rob us of His peace and provision. He is always with us. This is the knowledge that prompted David the shepherd to proclaim surely goodness and mercy would follow him all the days of his life. This is our promise too!

Psalm 23

Sunday, November 6th: In the United States we can feel that we're being persecuted when someone un-friends us because of our Christian beliefs. Or maybe it's being ridiculed by family members for being so narrow-minded as to speak out against some of the evidences of moral decay that have become somehow accepted as normal. We need to broaden our understanding of real persecution. Today is the National Day of Prayer for the persecuted church, and this is an abbreviated story of one Nigerian woman. She and her husband lived in a small village with their two children. One of their most cherished possessions was the Bible they had received as a wedding gift. They read from it together daily and Rebecca also read it to the children of their village, helping them to memorize Scripture. One evening on the way home with her daughter she saw smoke rising from their village. Boko Haram militants had killed her husband and son and burned their home. One of the few things she was able to salvage from the rubble was their partially charred Bible. Rather than become bitter, she remembered Isaiah 40:38 – "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our Lord stands forever." And she praised God for His faithfulness. She reminded herself that God is her husband, He will provide and protect, and He will be a Father to her daughter. This is the power of our God in the midst of real persecution, and this is the power of His written word in the hands of those who have little else to cling to. Pray for the persecuted church and pray that they would have access to Bibles. Then thank Him for the blessings we take for granted and intercede on behalf of those who are standing strong in their faith in the face of such atrocities. May He always be their refuge and a tower of strength against their enemies. And may we also remember that He is always ours.

Habakkuk 2:14; Psalm 61:1-4, 68:5; Isaiah 54:5

Monday, November 7th: Tomorrow is Election Day, and if you're a registered voter and have not yet cast a ballot – this is a time for the voice of God's church to be heard loud and clear. In September Dutch Sheets on his program "Give Him 15" gave a clear case for why Christians need to involve themselves, not in politics, but in government. There is a difference, and God is not political, but He is not only interested in government – He is the creator of it! In Isaiah 33:22 we read that He is our judge, our lawgiver, and our king. Is that not representative of the three branches of our government? Our leaders are to reflect His authority and pattern for leadership and governing, and we have the distinct privilege of having a voice in choosing who those leaders will be. Rather than allowing ourselves to be manipulated by rhetoric or derogatory and misleading political ads, we need to become informed about the voting records of candidates and find out as much as we can about what they truly stand for. The Center for Arizona Policy has online resources to make that easy. And don't believe every interpretation you hear about bills or proposed legislation – so much misinformation is circulating about what certain legislation and rulings do and do not say. We are in a spiritual battle and much of it is being waged with deception, but that's nothing new. When appeals are made to vote for personal agendas or to have all of our desires satisfied with disregard for what God has told us, we need to be wary of the source as well as the message. When Satan told Adam and Eve that they would not die for eating from a tree that looked desirable, the word for desirable is *chamad* which can also be translated as meaning selfish desire or ungoverned. They were tricked into doubting God's desire to protect them and give them what was best, and instead believed a lie that fed their fleshly temptation to be equal to God. We want to be our own boss. If we believe the lie that our vote doesn't matter or that Christians should "stay out of government", all we're doing is giving the enemy a greater advantage, or as Dutch Sheets puts it – we're feeding the beast. Key issues in this race involve parental rights, the lives of the unborn, rampant inflation, and the security of our borders to name a few. If these aren't spiritual battles, what are they? This is a battle we can fight at the ballot box. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Tuesday, November 8th: Despite the outcome of today's election results, we need to use it as a call to prayer. If we feel that darkness has increased, we need to be on our knees repenting on behalf of our country and, quite frankly, those who would claim to be followers of Christ yet either voted for the world's system or didn't vote at all, and then seek clear guidance for what to do next and plead for God's intervention. If there has been even a modicum of success in a turn towards more godly values, we should be praising Him and asking what next? To simply celebrate victory would be like going on a diet to lose forty pounds, to religiously monitor calories for a week, lose two pounds, and decide to eat some cake and ice cream to rejoice over the success. The battle isn't over, and any ground gained will be actively contested and challenged. We have to muster the forces and not only stand our ground but follow our Commander in Chief's battle plan and strategically position ourselves to carry it out. Our country, and the entire world for that matter, is in an epic spiritual battle, and in the days of world wars, being a soldier was not an option. Able bodies were drafted, trained, and sent into combat. We belong to the Kingdom of God, and as such we are His army. He's calling us into active duty, and He has supplied us with all the gear we need to defend His kingdom. Pray that His church will rise up and respond to His call with a sense of heavenly patriotism and resolve. As an older worship song declares, "In heavenly armor we'll enter the land, no weapon that's fashioned against us will stand; when the power of darkness comes in like a flood, He'll raise up a standard, the power of His blood; when your enemy presses in hard, do not fear; take courage, my friend, your redemption is near...the battle belongs to the Lord!" No weapon formed against us can prosper, but it's our responsibility to take up our weapons and wield them.

Isaiah 54:17; Ephesians 6:11-18; Revelation 7:12

Wednesday, November 9th: The word correction can sometimes carry a negative connotation. We relate correction to discipline or being called out because we've been wrong in some area. After all, our prisons are referred to as correctional institutions. But if that is the only way we view correction, we may find ourselves being held prisoner when in reality the "correction" could better be described as redirection. And that's not a bad thing. In fact, it should be viewed as something very positive that is intended for our ultimate good and well-being. If we're headed on a long journey (like life?) and our internal navigational system has us off by even a few degrees, it can make a huge difference in where we end up. Being off by just one degree would put you off course by 92.2 feet in one mile. If you were traveling from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., you'd end up on the other side of Baltimore, 42.6 miles away. One degree! Now the idea of being redirected is beginning to sound more positive than negative because it would seem foolish to stubbornly insist that we know where we're going and the best way to get there if someone who knew the route well was trying to redirect us to ensure we actually arrived safely at our intended destination. Every single one of us needs occasional redirection, and even if it seems to suggest a more difficult path, if we'll only trust the input of one who not only knows the road but actually created it for us, we'll find it to be the safest and surest path to take. Jesus has sent to us His Holy Spirit to be our traveling companion, and we can fully trust not only His navigational advice but also His protection for us as we yield to His guidance. The actual words He whispered to me recently when the whole idea of correction was at the forefront of my thoughts were: correct, direct, protect. Lord, teach us to always be keenly aware of the voice telling us – this is the way, walk in it. Help us to accept Your redirection with gratitude and to humbly submit to it.

Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 30:21; John 10:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Thursday, November 10th: SOLID GROUND: I am your glory and I lift up your head. I am a shield for you. I have set you upon a rock and I have given you solid ground to stand upon. Jesus has endured the punishment of sin for you so that you can walk in His ways. You have been brought out of bondage by Jesus. "Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace." (Romans 6:14) Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35) Look to Me as your provider. I will "lead you in paths of righteousness." Follow where I lead. There will be green pastures and there will be some rocky roads, but I will always be with you. Let Me tenderly caress your fragile heart with My love. My love for you is ever lasting and I am drawing you close to Me. You are precious to Me, "See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands; your walls are ever before Me." (Isaiah 49:16) I have the keys to your inheritance, and it is My delight to shower you with blessings. Open your heart to Me in full and I will commune with you and keep you on solid ground.

Psalm 3:3, Psalm 40:2, Psalm 23:3, Jeremiah 31:3, Isaiah 43:4

Friday, November 11th: It was the eleventh hour of the eleventh day in the eleventh month in 1918. The world was celebrating the signing of a treaty ending what was to be "the war to end all wars" - World War I. A Congressional Act was approved May 13, 1938, which made November 11 in each year a legal holiday: "a day to be dedicated to the cause of world peace and to be thereafter celebrated and known as Armistice Day." However, by this time there was so much unrest in much of the world that Americans realized World War I would not be the last war. In 1945 a veteran from World War II suggested that the day be expanded to honor all those who had given their lives in wars beyond World War I, and in 1954 the name was officially changed to Veterans Day.

I was part of the generation of draft dodgers who had a disdain for war and rallied against our participation in wars on foreign soil. The result was a declining value in honoring those who did serve. We couldn't understand why anyone would voluntarily join the military. We were quite vocal in our disapproval, and in retrospect I can see how abhorrent and insensitive our attitudes toward veterans were. We were so self-absorbed that we forgot how God viewed them. *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) We are part of a greater community with brothers and sisters in every part of the world, and God honors those who fight for the just causes of the downtrodden. We are so blessed with many freedoms that those in other countries can't even imagine. Among them are being able to gather together openly to worship and having access to as many different translations of the Bible as we choose. Those freedoms have come at a cost – freedom is not free. We can enjoy them because the men and women in our armed forces have been willing to defend them, knowing the cost. It isn't enough to just thank them, although that and showing honor and recognition today is a good place to start. To truly honor their legacy, make it such by passing on to future generations how precious our freedoms are and give them an understanding of what it cost. And to those who are veterans, "I thank my God every time I remember you."*

Psalm 82:3-4, 116:15; Romans 13:7

Saturday, November 12th: We know that God causes all things to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. That said, there are times when none of it feels good, but I heard an interesting take on those trying times. When the darkness seems to overwhelm us and we feel like we've been buried six feet under, maybe – just maybe we've instead been planted, and God is just giving us a time for the seed of His purpose in us to germinate. His reassurance for us is that no matter how dark and hopeless it may feel, He is still right there with us and He promises that He isn't going anywhere. A classic contemporary example of this would be Nick Vujicic. Nick was born in Australia in 1982 with no arms or legs and spent his early years questioning why a loving God would allow such a thing. You see, Nick's parents are pastors, so He was more than causally aware of the idea of God. But at the age of 15 he was reading the story in John 9 about the man born blind "so that the works of God might be revealed in him." This gave Nick an entirely new perspective on his condition, and he not only gave his life to Christ but he determined to demonstrate the extent of God's love by showing others the power of accepting God's plan and how He can turn any adversity into a marvelous opportunity to experience the fullness of God and bring Him glory. It doesn't mean we will avoid pain, but it does mean that there's nothing we can't rise above and turn the tables on the enemy's program. Satan would love to have us wallow in our misery and curse God. But when we keep our eyes on Jesus and fully lean on Him, He has promised to turn our mourning into dancing. As Paul wrote, we can actually learn to celebrate our weaknesses because when we're weak, we can sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in us. (TPT) Wait on Him and He will not only give you new strength, He'll teach you to soar with the eagles.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9; Isaiah 40:28-31; Ephesians 3:16-19

Sunday, November 13th: I used to play bridge, and in that game there is bidding to determine which suit is going to be the trump suit or the highest one. If it was established that spades was the trump suit, a person could play an ace of any other suit and the two of spades would take the hand. That means you could have a really strong hand in diamonds, but it would be useless against the weakest of cards as long as they were trump cards. Satan is good at holding trump cards. They are our areas of vulnerability, the things we would rather not have others know about, and just when we are gaining momentum in our faith journey he will play one of his trump cards. All he has to do is remind us of our secrets and threaten to reveal them or simply shame us into believing that we aren't qualified or don't deserve to call ourselves true children of the King. We can even tip our hand to him to let us know our vulnerabilities by what we say aloud. When we confess to someone that if our spouse ever did _____ (fill in the blank), we would leave them, never forgive them, leave the church, or any one of a number of unbiblical options. Satan now has a weapon to plant in the spouse's mind, maybe not even to actually do what we've stated, but certainly to make us think they have at least contemplate it. And the contention and deflection from our purpose begins. Maybe there's something from our past that we're ashamed of, and even though we know God has forgiven us and wiped the slate clean, we know that we were once guilty and we live in fear that someone else may find out or that we may slip back into that sin. Shame. Despite our strong suit in hearts, his little two of spades can defeat us. However, in the game of bridge you play with a partner. We have a partner, His name is Jesus Christ, and He forever holds the trump card of all trump cards – the cross is our ace of spades! It nullifies any guilt, sin or shame the enemy may try to throw at us, and all he can do is bluff because he knows that Jesus holds the ace. He took all of that sin and shame with Him, even though He despised it, and they were nailed to the cross with Him because He loves us that much. He wants us to remember that. Any time the enemy tries to make you think he's got you, remind him that you hold the ultimate trump card because Jesus is your partner.

Hebrews 12:1-3; Romans 8:1-2; Colossians 2:13-14

Monday, November 14th: We don't experience a lot of rain in the Phoenix area, but when we do it can be such a wonderful experience. This was the case on a Monday morning last month. The skies above the campus of Pure Heart were so crisp and the air was clean. It brought to mind a prayer that was centered on the correlation between His word and what it does for our hearts. As we receive His word, may it rain down over the Pure Heart campus to purify the atmosphere, cleanse our hearts, refresh us and bring us new life and vibrant health. Just as Moses proclaimed to the assembly of Israel before his death, "Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth! May my teaching drip as the rain, my speech trickle as the dew, as droplets on the fresh grass, and as the showers on the vegetation. For I proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God!" And the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it produce and sprout, and providing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes out of My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the purpose for which I sent it." How blessed we are to have pastors who faithfully share the word with us that it might wash us, refresh us, and provide what will help us to grow and flourish. Just as we read in Ephesians, we are being cleansed with the washing of water with the word. Don't waste that blessing, and praise God for His rain.

Deuteronomy 32:2; Isaiah 55:10-11; Ephesians 5:26

Tuesday, November 15th: Most of us would agree that we desperately could use more unity – in our nation, our homes, and within the body of Christ. Unfortunately, too many believe that unity means we have to ignore any differences and all think and act alike. That may be true of synchronized swimming, but you'll notice that the participants never get anywhere. They're just entertaining to watch. The unity we need to strive for would be more akin to an orchestra performing an exquisite opus. Each section has an integral part in the presentation. At various times there are some that have a more prominent part to play than others, but all are needed in order to create a beautiful and harmonious masterpiece. The necessary factors are that all are playing the same piece, they are on the same page, and they're attentively following the lead of the master conductor. This especially spoke to me in reference to the church, and this is one of the reasons that we should rejoice in the "Better Together" alliance of churches in the Valley. We can learn from and celebrate each other's strengths and give support to the weaker areas of each and every part of the bigger picture, because none of us is the main attraction. The result when all are setting their eyes on what the conductor has asked them to take part in, each playing their specific part and giving their very best, is something beautiful and harmonious and inspirational. The strings don't complain that the drums are too loud, and the horns know to blend with the flutes and the piccolos. But each also celebrates the wonderful contribution of every other section and member of the orchestra, right down to the crash of a cymbal or the clear ring of a triangle when all else is silent. Pray that we will always remember that we're part of an opus that God Himself has composed, is conducting, and He will lead us to a spectacular standing ovation at its completion as long as we stay together, keep in tune with one another, and are true to His direction.

Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:16; Philippians 1:27, 2:1-4

Wednesday, November 16th: A STEADFAST ANCHOR: I have said not to be anxious for anything, but at times, you worry about things that you cannot control. I am the Lord who longs to comfort you and carry your burdens. I see your tears. I know the pain you feel in your heart. I am here to comfort you. In My presence you will find rest for your weariness. I am watching over you. Trust Me with all of your heart and I will restore the joy you have lost. I have said, "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings of eagles" (Isaiah 40:31) "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction" (Romans 12:12). Be assured that..." I am continually with you."(Psalm 73:23) Even though you may be walking through a fiery trial, I will hold your hand and lead you to "green pastures". I declare that the battle is Mine and I will prevail, and in the end you will have a victorious testimony of My power. I sing a song over you. Come to Me with a song of thanksgiving. I will fill you with My joy and peace because you put your faith in Me." You can feel secure because there is hope."(Job 11:18) "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil." Hebrews 6:19

Philippians 4:6, Matthew 11:28, Exodus 33:14, Proverbs 3:5, 2 Chronicles 20:15, Zephaniah 3:17, Psalm 100:4

Thursday, November 17th: My husband recently got a book entitled *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease*. Although this book addresses the issue of controlling your diet to achieve the goal of improving the physical condition of your heart, the title intrigued me because it reminded me that we have another book that can do the same thing for the spiritual condition of our hearts. Both books offer dietary and lifestyle suggestions that will promote optimum health for our hearts. Jeremiah reminds us that in its natural condition our hearts are desperately sick and *very deceitful*. Sort of like our physical cravings for things that are pleasant to the taste buds but wreak havoc on the arteries that supply our life blood. In like manner we can be tempted to fill our hearts and minds with things that are not only detrimental but can be deadly to our spiritual health. We are warned in Proverbs to watch over our hearts with all diligence because the springs of life flow from it. According to the FDA, spring water is derived from an underground formation from which water flows naturally to the surface. We all know that water is essential to our health, and because spring water is naturally filtered underground through things such as limestone, sandstone, and clay, it is often richer in beneficial [minerals](#) than other types of water. From that we can derive that the type of rock that filters the water in the aquifer will determine how healthful the water is. That's good news if we're drinking from **the** Rock (not Dwayne Johnson). Paul reminded the church at Corinth that when Moses was leading the children of Israel to the Promised Land, "...all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ." So when what springs from our hearts has been filtered through our Rock, Jesus Christ – the Living Word, we can be assured that it will be pure, beneficial, life-giving, and healthy. Put yourself on a healthy heart diet.

Proverbs 4:23; Philippians 4:6-7

Friday, November 18th: Modern medicine never ceases to amaze me. Earlier this year a family member was involved in a horrific automobile accident, and one of the resulting injuries was their left eye was ruptured and had glass imbedded in it. Many prayers were offered up for this and many other catastrophic injuries, but the one I want to address is what should have produced blindness in the left eye. Because we serve a miracle-working, all powerful and gracious God who has also given amazing wisdom and resources to the medical profession, not only was the left eye saved but sight was restored. This was truly a miracle in the physical realm. None of us would want to forfeit our physical sight if we knew there was any way to preserve it. Yet many are suffering what could only be referred to as spiritual blindness, and the sad reality is that a good percentage of them are not even aware of their condition. One of the causes is putting on spiritual blinders in hopes of blocking out the chaos surrounding them. If we refuse to acknowledge our blurred perception of this present world order, we can't expect to have a clear understanding of how God wants us to lead us through it and clear the atmosphere. Pretending the storm isn't brewing won't protect us from its devastating effects. Just ask some of those who refused to heed the warnings to evacuate in Florida before Ian hit the coast. Another cause could be a failure to get regular eye exams. Are we satisfied as long as we can read the big print on the first line? Most of us are well aware of the rapidly eroding morality and economy of our country, but the question we must ask ourselves is what are we doing to combat it, and what is the reality of the dilemma we are facing behind the positive spin that so many of those in authority are trying to make us swallow. If the solutions they are touting are not God-honoring, it's like trying to wear dollar store glasses to correct cataracts. He is the only one who can restore perfect vision and enable us to not only see the problem with clarity but also to envision with Him what the best prescription for addressing it will be. Lord, we thank You that You are perfectly aware of everything that is happening and that it is within Your power to completely turn it around. All You ask of us is to see with Your perspective. Give us spiritual eyes to clearly see Your diagnosis and remedy, and give us a willingness to follow Your prescription that we might lead others out of the darkness so they may also see with spiritual acuity. Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever!

2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Matthew 13:15; Ephesians 5:8

Saturday, November 19th: Our niece and her family live in Kailua-Kona and got to witness the first Ironman competition in three years.(another victim of Covid) She said it was quite impressive. I remember just being there for a practice competition for some of the local competitors a number of years back, and the excitement of the spectators was contagious. Everyone was cheering the athletes on, and we were all feeding off one another's energy. We all need encouragement and we know what a difference a word of affirmation can make when we're struggling, disillusioned, discouraged, or just plain tired. We may not be running the Ironman, but we're all in a race. Sometimes we may be one of those on the sidelines offering words of affirmation and encouragement to others. Other times we might be the ones in need of a boost from someone. This is one of the easiest ways we can advance the kingdom. It costs us nothing, requires no training, and it's actually a command. In fact, we're told to encourage one another day after day. You never know the impact a kind word may have in the life of someone else; it could be what tips the scale between them giving up or moving up. One of the wisest men who ever lived (Solomon) wrote that pleasant words are like a honeycomb. Not only are they sweetness for our souls, but they are also health to our bones. "They are the means of curing the diseases of the mind; of healing wounded spirits, and broken hearts, and broken bones; they make the bones which were broken to rejoice; what heals the bones strengthens the whole man, a man's strength lying much in his bones; these strengthen the inward man, cause believers to go from strength to strength, and to hold on and persevere to the end," (Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible) Lord, help us to season our words with grace for the building up and encouragement of one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13, 10:24-25

Sunday, November 20th: An interesting thing about roots is they're vital but invisible. We typically judge things by their visible attributes and the things we tend to give most of our attention to are what we can physically observe. But quite often what we can't see is far more important than what we can. I can't see air, but I'm really glad God created it! We can't normally see the roots of a plant or tree, but without a healthy root system, what's visible above ground won't thrive. In September and October we learned about the seven disciplines or rhythms of the "Rooted" discipleship curriculum: daily devotions, prayer, repentance, generosity, serving, sharing your story, and worship. Each of these contributes to a healthy root system for our spiritual vitality, but only if they become part of an intentional and regular routine – a rhythm. They need to become more than an intellectual acquisition; they need to be something we value and envision as being essential to our well being. We need to see them as being something that is going to bring greater fullness and depth to our faith. The roots, though not visible, become established and the result will be visible fruit. If we aren't focused on what God is revealing to us through each of these disciplines and practicing them on a regular basis, we'll never see His vision of what we can become and we'll never be firmly planted...rooted.

Colossians 2:6-7, 3:1-2; Ephesians 3:14-21

Monday, November 21st: Every religion other than Christianity points to a regimen of works or leading what would be considered a moral or acceptable life as the basis for salvation. Since this is the predominant mindset of the unsaved population, it can be easy to get caught up in this deceitful belief or practice. After all, we are taught from childhood that hard work and following the rules are what will get us ahead. Besides, it can seem more attainable to **do** rather than to **become**. And we all know that there's no such thing as a free lunch. Right? Lunch may not be free, but forgiveness, grace, mercy and salvation are! We need to accept and celebrate that fact and never allow ourselves or others to get caught up in legalism or doubt. Christ died for all, and the free gift is available to any who will receive it. No bragging allowed because any good works are simply a result of our humble acceptance of His provision. Jesus loved us so much that He paid the price of our right standing with God by offering Himself in our place. Salvation is free to us, but it cost Jesus something to love us. In order to fully lay hold of that, we need to demonstrate our love for and faith in Him by taking up our cross. It's faith working through love, the first fruit of the Spirit, and when we walk in the Spirit we will build one another up rather than tear them down. The Law kills and condemns; the Spirit gives life. Praise God for your free gift and celebrate it in others.

Galatians 5:1, 13-15, 22-26; Romans 8:1-15

Tuesday, November 22nd: **COME BOLDLY:** I am your source of provision for whatever you need. Look to Me daily and ask for My help in all that you do. I am your strength to complete the day's work. I am your helper, but you need to call upon Me. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) Don't give into worry, anxiety or fear. That does not come from Me. You can overcome the temptation to give in to doom and gloom by fighting with words of thanksgiving and seeking My face in prayer and adoration. I love you and I have made a way for you to escape that which would pull you down into defeat. Simply humble yourself and "come boldly to the throne of grace. I will meet you and you shall find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16) Be certain that I hear your prayers even though at times the answer is delayed. Just know that My ways are higher than your ways. Trust in Me for the answer you are seeking. I am a sure foundation for those who trust in Me. I have given you my Holy Spirit to lead and guide you and bring you into all the truth. I am always with you so you can lean upon Me and walk boldly into My throne room. A privilege to all who are citizens of heaven. **I SAY: COME BOLDLY!**

Philippians 3:20, 4:6-7, 19; Psalm 34:17, 73:23; Daniel 10:12; Isaiah 55:8; Matthew 7:24; John 16:13

Wednesday, November 23rd: One of the enemy's chief weapons to weaken the church, the country, personal relationships, and nations is to cause division. Division is the child of opposing sides that refuse to listen to each other or consider their differing opinions as being invalid. According to Solomon, the way of a fool is always right in his own eyes. John Kennedy once said, "The unity of freedom has never relied on uniformity of opinion." We need to spend more time looking for common ground and digging for anything positive in the ideas of those who differ. Bing Crosby had a hit tune in 1945, (which is before my time but my parents taught it to me.) It's a secular song, but the message is sound: "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, and don't mess with Mister In-Between. You've got to spread joy up to the maximum, bring gloom down to the minimum; have faith, or pandemonium is liable to walk upon the scene." You won't find that quoted verbatim from the Bible, but the underlying message is echoed in more than one place. Consider Paul's letter to the church in Philippi when he urged them to let their minds dwell on those things that are honorable, right, pure, lovely, excellent, of good report and worthy of praise. We tend to become like what we dwell on. In one of his letters to the church in Corinth he reminded them that we only know in part, and James urges us to be quick to listen and slow to speak or become angry. When we're more interested in dialogue than debate and in winning a brother than in winning an argument, we'll find ourselves building more bridges than barricades. None of us is exempt from error, and if each of us only knows in part, that means that someone else may know a part that we aren't aware of. Let's all learn to accentuate the positive and to lean in to loving one another, for this can bind us together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3:13-14; Romans 14:19; John 13:35

Thursday, November 24th: Regardless of anything that is going on around us, as Christians we should always be able to find ample reasons for giving thanks. First of all, it's a command. We're told to give thanks in all circumstances, for it is God's will that we do so. If for no other reason, we can remind ourselves that He promises His love endures forever and His mercies are new every single morning. He created us, He sustains us, He gives us our every breath, and He gave His life to save us and to offer us the promise of an eternity in His Presence in heaven. If that isn't enough, Jesus Himself modeled for us a life of thanking the Father and acknowledging Him as the source of every blessing. Granted, life has changed a lot since the first Thanksgiving, but the reason for celebrating is still the same. The Pilgrims feasted with their newfound friends, thanking God for His provision of both the food and the friends that saved their lives that first winter. He's still in the business of providing for our needs, giving us friends, family and food as well as offering us comfort in hard times and the assurance that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Gratitude isn't always easy, especially when times are difficult, and we may have to make a conscious effort to remember those things that we do have to be thankful for. But attitude is everything, and when you receive with a thankful heart, you'll find that what you have becomes more than sufficient. He can turn what looked like a little bread and a couple of sardines into a feast. With leftovers, nonetheless! Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Colossians 3:17; Psalm 7:17; 1 Corinthians 16:34

Friday, November 25th: Most households today have a microwave oven, and they have made life easier and cooking faster, but they have an interesting history. The first microwave ovens were only for commercial use, partly because they were about six feet tall and cost in the neighborhood of \$5000 (or about \$51,000 in today's currency)! But they made food preparation so fast and easy, and although it took nearly thirty years to make them truly accessible for the general public, most of us would agree that we rely on them heavily. However, there are some things that just aren't the same when cooked in a microwave. Things don't crisp up, you can't brown anything, and most meats are less than delectable. There are just some things that take time, and there are no short cuts. The same is true in character development and sometimes in finding your niche in ministry. For certain things, there are just no short cuts. There may be a faster way of doing something, but the results won't be as satisfying and may even turn into something distasteful. We develop strong character through routinely making wise decisions that reflect consideration for both the immediate and the long term effects. Ministries that have the greatest impact are those that have been incubated, whether we see the small beginnings or not. Think of some of the greatest heroes in the Bible. David spent years both serving Saul and being hunted by him before he took the throne that God had appointed him to. After his miraculous personal encounter with Jesus and subsequent commissioning, Paul spent the next three years in Arabia sorting out this new identity and mission. When he finally did go to Jerusalem, rather than seeking approval from all the apostles, he only sought out Peter and stayed with him for 15 days. Then he spent another 14 years in the regions of Syria and Cilicia before returning to Jerusalem. The point is, don't be anxious for anything, especially trying to assume an identity or a ministry before God has done His work in you. When we rush into something, we're more likely to adversely affect the final outcome. It may come out lacking flavor and be less than satisfying or palatable to those around us. Even the microwave took thirty years to become something the rest of us could enjoy. We've come to expect and sometimes even demand instant gratification. Ask God to give you the perseverance and foresight to press on, being faithful to His calling and submitted to His timing.

Philippians 3:12-16; Galatians 1:15-2:1

Saturday, November 26th: Sometimes it may be difficult for us to fully grasp some of the imagery used in the Bible because it was written in a different time with a very different culture than what we know in the United States in the 21st century. Their weapons of warfare were more up close and personal, and one of the deadliest was the double-edged sword. In the early Jewish culture this was a very effective and deadly weapon because it had the capacity to pierce through armor and sink deep into the body, often penetrating the heart or other vital organs. We are familiar with the expression that something can be a two-edged sword when it can have both positive and negative aspects. The word of God is referred to as a double edged sword in several places, and as such it is both a weapon and a defense for those who are part of the Lord's army. In Hebrews we read that all things are open and laid bare before Him because His word is able to pierce through anything – our innermost thoughts and intentions as well as the lies of the enemy. That means He will expose and annihilate the enemy's lies and strategies, but His word will also reveal to us when our motives or beliefs are contrary to His best for us. In addition, the sword is a very strategic part of our armor when we find ourselves in any sort of battle. It's the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, but if it's going to be an effective weapon for us that means we first need to be familiar with it and always have it handy. His word needs to be hidden in our hearts and we have to be regularly giving it attention. Some tips that are given for properly caring for a sword are as follows. Protect it from contamination. When you are familiar with what is supposed to be there, you'll be able to discern anything that isn't. If what you see doesn't line up with the rest of Scripture, wipe it clean. Next, a sword should not be stored in its scabbard for extended periods without taking it out or the blade will eventually corrode. A bible lying on the nightstand will lose effectiveness if it's never taken out and read. And for me, one of the most interesting directions for proper care to ensure effectiveness is to clean and oil the blade after every use, whether used for combat, cutting, or simple training. We need to ask Holy Spirit to apply His oil of guidance and understanding every time we take out our sword. Think of Spirit + word = sword. When we handle His word accurately and with proper respect, it can protect, defend, and defeat our enemy. His word is living and active!

Hebrews 4:12; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19

Sunday, November 27th: American educator Noah Webster said, “The education of youth should be watched with the most scrupulous attention...[I]t lays the foundations on which both law and gospel rest for success.” Praise God that after several decades of naive unawareness, concerned parents have awakened and uncovered what could only be described as an evil agenda to brainwash and indoctrinate our children with an ideology rather than educate them to become independent and critical thinkers. This is not in any way an indictment against the many dedicated teachers and administrators who are still devoted to the welfare of the next generation. They too are victims of a system which has surreptitiously and systematically introduced curricula that not only dismisses but undermines and diametrically opposes Christian values, morality, realities of history and science, and the history and foundational tenets upon which our country was founded. If we expect God to continue to bless our country, as a united church we need to be on our knees combating the enemy and lifting up those in the field of academia who are fighting these battles every day. These students are not only our babies, but they are those who will be the decision makers and leaders of the next generation. We can’t lose them. We can’t abandon them. To ignore the spiritual warfare that is assaulting our schools and our children is akin to placing them on Baal’s altar and then asking God to bless us. We must not and cannot allow this to happen for their sakes and for ours. Heavenly Father, forgive us for our complacency and lack of awareness in overseeing what and how our children are being taught in the public schools. We praise You that these issues have come to light and already there has been progress in addressing them, but the battle is far from over and we know it is critical. Give us divine wisdom in how to pray, and show us how we can unite together and become involved in turning the tides. We pray for the continued expansion and impact of School Connect in bringing transformation in our schools. In all this, we give You the glory because we know full well that this is in Your will and that You desire only what is best for this generation.

Proverbs 22:6; Mark 9:42, 10:14

Monday, November 28th: Jeremiah had some strong words of advice for us on what we consider as acceptable cause for our boasting or bragging rights. God has graciously made some of us wise, some mighty, some rich – but that should not be the source of our confidence. Instead, we are told that if we are going to boast, it should be because we understand and know Him as the One who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness. In fact, He delights in these things! To understand means that we have the wisdom to recognize, comprehend, and identify with Him in all that He is. And to know Him suggests a familiarity that can only be gained through relationship, choosing to spend time with Him, and seeking to constantly be discovering more and more of His character. When He truly becomes our best friend and we accept and align with what He reveals to us about Himself, then He tells us we have something to boast about! O Lord, let us learn to value above everything else our intimacy with You and to devote ourselves to a lifelong pursuit of all You are.

Jeremiah 9:23-24; Ephesians 1:17; Proverbs 8:17

Tuesday, November 29nd: BE OF GOOD CHEER: In the world you will have trouble. It can be intense at times. Just as young trees need the wind to help establish strong roots, likewise, your faith grows stronger as you experience the storms of life. No matter what those storms bring, I am always there with you and I am for you. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33b) You can have My peace. You have the Holy Spirit living inside of you; He is there to bring you peace and comfort. This is not a worldly peace but a peace that comes from knowing Jesus. I am your anchor in times of trouble. I will be an enemy to your enemies. My plan for you is only to bring good into your life, "to give you a hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11b) There is nothing that will ever stand in the way of My love for you. "No power in the sky above or in the earth below---indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39 NLT) You are a bright light shining in the darkness. As the world grows darker, your light shines brighter to those who do not know Jesus. Be encouraged today in the Lord. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:3).

Matthew 28:20, 1 Corinthians 3:16, John 14:16, John 14:27, Hebrews 6:19, Exodus 23:22 Daniel 12:3

Wednesday, November 30th: My mother used to like to use a quote by Edwin Markham. “He drew a circle that shut me out – heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win; we drew a circle that took him In!” Isn’t that what we’re told to do in Paul’s letter to the church in Rome? We aren’t to be overcome by evil; we’re to overcome evil with good. Jesus told us to love our enemies and to pray for them. It’s pretty hard to hate someone you’re praying for, and if you focus on praying for their salvation, for God to bless them and perhaps forgive them, He may begin to give you a different perspective. We know that love is a choice which sometimes just flows naturally but at other times takes an almost teeth gritted, take-a-deep-breath commitment to intentionality and self control. Nonetheless, Love is from God, He loved us first and demonstrated that love in dying for ALL of us, and if we are made in His image we will seek to love others and to see them with His eyes of compassion. The enemy wants us to be so focused on our differences and to be suspicious of anyone who thinks, looks or acts differently than we do that we fail to see them as also made in the image of God. We need to remember that He is very gracious and patient towards all of us, and it is His desire that none should perish but that all should come to a saving knowledge of Him. Of course we need to be discerning, but discernment should not lead to judgment but rather to a more precise manner in which to pray for another person, group, or society. Judgment leads to segregation which leads to division. God’s love leads us to spiritual maturity and unity, compassion for the lost, and a desire to build His kingdom. Remember, it’s His kingdom! Ask Him to show you where you might need to be making your circle a little bigger.

1 John 4:7-8; Matthew 5:43-44; 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 12:20-21