

Prayer Devotions

March 2023



M A R C H

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.

Comoros: (Southeast Africa): Islamic Oppression / Main Religion: Islam

Malaysia: (Southeast Asia): Islamic Oppression / Main Religion: Islam

Tajikistan: (Central Asia): Islamic Oppression / Main Religion: Islam

Daily Prayers for March “I believe with all my heart that standing up for America means standing up for the God who has so blessed our land. We need God's help to guide our nation through stormy seas. But we can't expect Him to protect America in a crisis if we just leave Him over on the shelf in our day-to-day living.” Ronald Reagan

Wednesday, March 1st: Pastor Steven Furtick gave an interesting perspective on the story of Jacob. Jacob willingly worked for seven years to obtain Rachel as his wife, only to be tricked into being wed to her older sister Leah. We read that Rachel was beautiful and what is said of Leah is only that her eyes were weak. Needless to say, Jacob was upset when he discovered the deception, but he agreed to work another seven years for Rachel because he truly loved her. The Lord saw that Leah was unloved and He opened her womb to bear children, but Rachel was barren. A great deal of drama ensued, and finally Rachel had a son and named him Joseph. This is a very brief and incomplete synopsis, but some interesting observations were made. Would Jacob have worked seven years at the beginning had he known that it was for Leah first before he could be given Rachel? Sometimes we may have a vision of a beautiful mission or endeavor that we desire, but then we discover we first have to put in time in a less desirable undertaking. Are we willing to do whatever it takes to fulfill the dream? It would do us well to remember that although when Rachel was finally able to conceive, she gave birth to Joseph, one of the great figures in Biblical history and the one who is credited with saving his family during a great famine and preserving the Jewish race. Physical salvation. However, it was through one of Leah's sons – Judah – that the Messiah was born. Eternal, spiritual salvation. God saw Leah's pain and rejection; He knew she was not as highly esteemed or as “attractive” as her sister, but she had a pivotal role in His eternal plan. Lord help us to trust You to lead us and sustain us even when we don't understand the path we're on, knowing that You truly do cause all things to work for the ultimate good of those who love You and are called according to Your purpose.

Romans 8:28-29; Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 58:11

Thursday, March 2nd: When we first get saved there's a sense of freedom and joy – like when you first fall in love with someone. Unfortunately, if we don't get some good discipling or direction, it's easy to fall in the trap of systematic religion – also known as legalism. This can even be placed on us by other Christians who have a skewed understanding of God's grace and the true freedom we have as a result of this. When Jesus died on the cross to buy our freedom, He said Himself that it was finished. The only thing we have to do is accept His gift. But when we try to add to it by submitting ourselves to a long list of rules, thinking it will give us a better standing with Him, we're actually squandering some of His hard-won gift of freedom. Living a life of rigid rules or religious plans will never bring us closer to God. What really matters is internal. It's faith expressed in love. It can be summed up in the simple command to love others the way you love yourself. Just don't use this as an excuse to do whatever you want. Use your freedom to serve one another in love. Living in the freedom of a Spirit filled life will help you resist the compulsion we are all born with to be driven by self-interest. The list of what this kind of life produces is long and undistinguished and the bottom line is you'll wind up destroying your relationships with others and will impede the Spirit life you were created for. This is not the path to inheriting God's kingdom. Legalism only seeks to get its own way and gets in the way of freedom. Don't accept this as just an idea in your head or a sentiment in your heart – work out what it means and let it permeate every aspect of your being. Remember that we're each an original masterpiece made in the image of God Himself, and that applies to those around you as well. Love as Christ loved and how He still loves and leave the rest up to Him.

Galatians 4:4-7; Romans 8:1-5

Friday, March 3rd: Imagine the things we could do in Heaven that we were too afraid to do down here the moment we lost our childlikeness and became too aware of what others would think. The comments they might make? The kind of reputation we might receive? But in Heaven...would we care? Oh, the dances we would dance in the Presence of the King with no self-conscious feelings, no inhibitions. The songs we would sing before One who delights in every melody from our heart – the music we would play out of pure joy and just be able to laugh off the wrong notes. What freedom! Being who we were born to be! What if it could become our reality here on earth, living out of love and not fear? Could it really become a reality, here and now? It could if we're willing to shake off our inhibitions and delight in Him, knowing that He will take delight in our gladness, His love will calm our fears, and He will rejoice over us with singing. Honestly, that kind of childlike faith is the hallmark of a mature follower of Christ.

Zephaniah 3:17; Matthew 18:3; Hebrews 13:15

Saturday, March 4th: Doesn't it seem like the best prizes are free? My favorite radio station frequently hosts free giveaways. Listeners only need to call in or submit their name online. To be honest, I always want to win the prizes: free gas, free vacation, free tickets. There is a sweetness that comes along with receiving a free gift, especially when we inherently long for it. I can think of one thing every person truly needs today, regardless of wealth or status: eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. In the same way radio stations are able to give away free prizes, so it goes for our salvation. Someone has to foot the bill, pay the price. The good news is that Jesus already paid the cost for all humanity! He lovingly paid the ultimate price, a criminal's death on the cross, for our prize of a newfound life! Salvation frees us from the grip of sin and we step into a definitive life full of God's love and power. In His perfect love, all of our shortcomings and sins of the past are forgotten by our Savior as far as the East is from the West (Psalms 103:12). By His power, you inherit the authority to trample over the ways of the enemy: spiritual, mental, physical (Luke 10:19). Now, like with any other giveaway, we need to submit something in order to truly attain the highest, most costly of prizes. The Bible tells us we are to confess Him as our Savior and lay down our lives in order to follow Him (Romans 10:9 & John 12:25). When we submit our lives to Christ, we are made a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)! For those who lose their lives in honor of Christ, will gain a new and glorious life only possible through His sacrifice on the cross. Ultimately, our salvation comes with the highest possible price tag, but praise our Father in Heaven that He continues to bless all of mankind with the promise of a lifetime. Each day, let's give Him praise for a life that was only made possible by a loving and powerful God! He is our perfect prize forever (1 Peter 5:10)!

Sunday, March 5th: Casting Crowns has a beautiful and moving song entitled “Scars in Heaven” which begins with the lines, “If I had only known the last time would be the last time, I would've put off all the things I had to do.” Hindsight. We are only given a limited amount of time in our physical bodies, and only God knows the expiration date not only for us but also for those we love. I was recently reminded of how important it is to keep that perspective at the forefront when I’m planning out my daily schedule. We all have our “to do” list of things that are necessary: quiet time (hopefully at the top of the list), groceries and meal prep, cleaning, work, appointments, etc. But somewhere on that list we have to remember that our model is Jesus, and He didn’t take on physical form to “do” things per se. He came for people – for us. For God so loved the world. The agenda wasn’t to erect a magnificent temple that would glorify His name; it was to build His temple in us, that we might be empowered to glorify His name and demonstrate His love and compassion to others that they might know how much He loves them too. We all have things – tasks – that need to be addressed, and we can’t shirk our responsibilities. But these things should never take precedence over people. If you have the opportunity to let those who are dear to you know you care, tell them. And if you’re not certain about their relationship with Jesus, talk to them about it. Do it in love, but don’t ever think that you’ll always have time “the next time” you see them. We never know when it may be the last time. There’s never a wrong time to tell someone how much they mean to you and to encourage them in their eternal journey.

John 13:34-35; 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Monday, March 6th It can be interesting and even almost amusing sometimes to watch spectators critique professional athletes. They have all kinds of advice to dish out on how the person or team could have done something better or responded differently to a given situation. It's so much easier to criticize how someone else is doing their job than it is to examine and execute judiciously our own responsibilities. Often when people spend an inordinate amount of their attention on how other people are conducting themselves it's because their own lives are out of control. It could also be an indication of someone who is so self-absorbed that they are convinced that they have all the answers. Either way, they're on a dangerous path for themselves as well as others. We reap what we sow. A person who plants selfishness and harshness is going to harvest weeds, but one who plants according to God's leading and provision will get a harvest of eternal life. We need to be more absorbed in discovering what His assignment is for us personally and then put all of our effort into doing it. Galatians 6:5 in The Message reads, "Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life." We're urged to walk in a manner that is worthy of our calling, but just what does that mean? If we profess to belong to Christ, that means we have an assignment. He has called us to a holy life – one that is befitting an ambassador. We've all witnessed how indiscretion or blatant sin in the life of a politician can reflect poorly on the party that person represents. How we live out our lives before others should reflect His nature. That would include being humble, patient, showing love to one another and seeking to preserve unity with the interests of all in mind – not just our own. It means looking for the best in others rather than being quick to find fault. Lord, help us to be serious and introspective in how we conduct our own journey with You, and in the lives of those around us may we be faith builders rather than fault finders...all to Your glory.

Galatians 6:5; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:1-4; 2 Timothy 1:10

Tuesday, March 7th: Nobody intentionally wants to be known as a sluggard, and most of us probably wouldn't consider ourselves as one. But when you study the definition and characteristics of "sluggard" it might be a bit uncomfortable. The simple definition is a lazy person, but the word is used 14 times in the Bible with every reference being in the book of Proverbs. This is where we get a revelation of the characteristics that identify such a person. One of their hallmarks is habitual procrastination. We all have fallen into this trap at times, putting off a task or an assignment that isn't due for days...weeks...maybe months. It's scrambling to get you taxes figured on April 14th! Or maybe it's always thinking that "someday" you'll go on that diet, or tomorrow you'll call that person God put on your heart. A good procrastinator can always find an excuse for putting things off. And if they do actually begin the task at hand, chances are it will never get finished. In fact in The Living Bible, Proverbs 26:15 says that he's too tired even to lift his food from his dish to his mouth! We may not be *that* lazy, but how many projects are started and now sitting somewhere in a closet? And a diligent person doesn't need constant supervision to ensure that what is expected of them actually gets done. Solomon tells his son to observe ants if he wants to understand what it means to be productive and reliable. Ants know what their assignment is and they just do it. They don't need an overseer reminding them insistently that there's a deadline to meet or they won't have provisions when winter comes. To be fair, this is not intended to put anyone on a guilt trip or to imply that God wants us to become work- (or works) -aholics. In fact He commands us to have times of rest. The problems arise when rest becomes our greatest pursuit, either intentionally or by default. "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest." Most people have a desire for good things, but if they lack the ambition or intentionality to pursue them – if their hands refuse to work – we read that it puts them to death! (Proverbs 21:25) We were created to be overcomers, creative, useful – to walk in the good works for which He created us. We were created in His image, and He worked for six days creating. It wasn't until He saw that His work was both completed and good that He rested. When we think that we shouldn't have to ever work, we're implying that we're better than He is. We might even be deemed a sluggard! Instead, be encouraged by Solomon's words in Proverbs 10:4, "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." This is not a guarantee of financial wealth (although it could be), but it is a promise for a rich and fruitful life. And that's something we all want.

Proverbs 6:6-8, 13:4; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 3:23-24

Wednesday, March 8th: YOU ARE MINE: "My beloved is mine and I am his..."(Song of Songs 2:16). I love you and you are precious in My sight. My heart has heard You say, "Come and talk with Me." And my heart responds, "LORD, I am coming." (Psalm 27:8 NLT) Listen to your heart as I sing a song over you. Seek My face and find the joy your soul longs to embrace. Just put aside all of your worry and anxiety and come and sit at My feet and be refreshed from your weariness. Stay in My presence and you will find that your cares melt away as peace floods your soul. Here in My presence is joy unspeakable. My joy is not found in worldly pursuits but in the quietness of your soul. You are surrounded by My beauty, in nature that is all around you. I speak to you gently and you must be still to hear what I am saying. I surround you with songs. My mercy is poured out on you each morning and daily I load you with benefits. Come and walk with Me and I will lead you in "paths of righteousness for My name sake." (Psalm 23:3) I will be with you all the days of your life. "See, I have written your name on the palms of My hands..." (Isaiah 49:16 NLT) I don't see any of your flaws but only the person of beauty that I breathed life into. "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. (Song of Songs 4:7 ESV) Come and stay awhile with Me.

Isaiah 43:4; Psalm 16:11, 46:10, 68:19; Zephaniah 3:17; Lamentations 3:23; Joshua 1:5

Thursday, March 9th: One of the more difficult attributes for me to master is the practice of perseverance. By its very definition it doesn't sound appealing: to patiently endure, as in bear hardship, tolerate disagreeable things, or just survive. Not at the top of the list of gifts of the Spirit that people stand in line to sign up for. There are certain people or situations for which I have been praying – some for over a decade – and I only see an attitude of indifference or even a veiled hostility towards any idea that a change might be warranted. It can be very discouraging, but a quote by Charles Spurgeon both made me smile and encouraged me. "By perseverance the snail reached the ark." I don't know how much distance the snails needed to cover, but at 153 feet per hour they couldn't have afforded to take too many breaks in their journey. Their motivation had to have been that they knew reaching the destination was a matter of life and death, and they also knew that it was God who was both leading and sustaining them. I know the situations for which I am praying are in line with God's word, and I know that He is good and faithful to accomplish what concerns me. Encouragement can also be found so many places in His word. The way The Message translates Proverbs 25:15 is, "Patient persistence pierces through indifference; gentle speech breaks down rigid defenses." Even though I may not see the breakthrough now, I firmly believe that as I patiently persevere in gentleness without compromising the truth that He will break down the defenses and pierce through the indifference. All of His promises are yes and amen. I just need to remind myself of that truth and not grow weary.

Isaiah 26:3; Romans 5:3-5; James 1:4,12

Friday, March 10th: The voice of God is communication from God to humans, heard by humans as a sound with no apparent physical force. God speaks to each of us differently, and to some in multiple ways. The most common starting point to hearing God's voice is through His Word. Our bible is a life guide to His wisdom and direction for His beloved children. It is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12) and through it we begin to understand and know Father's heart and plan for us. As we foster an atmosphere of silence & solitude, prayer, and meditation in His Word we become more apt to His nature and recognize His voice. Matthew 7:7-8 tells us "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." This is a promise from God and as a believer we have full access to hear the voice of God! But we must engage in intimacy to recognize it! It is a process and a journey, but I promise the more time you give to Him in these disciplines the stronger your ability to hear and recognize all that He has for you. You will continually see Him in new fresh ways. There are no limits to God's power or abilities. He can speak through dreams and visions, through nature, through music, through other Christians. We can hear Him through a stirring in our spirit, through thoughts in our mind, and some have heard His voice in the natural world. God has no limits, and to see and hear Him we must leave space in our busy lives to get to know Him better. His power and voice are available, the only barrier rests within us. Think about it for a moment, we know the voice of our loved ones and close friends. I can hear a friend laugh from a distance and know that she is in the building. I can hear two notes of a song and recognize it immediately. The more time we devote to a person or time listening to a song we create a connection. This is the kind of connection God desires for us to have with Him, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27. To recognize His voice, we must first belong to Him, and seek to hear and understand what kingdom purpose He is communicating; that we may impact lives daily and display His Glory.

Saturday, March 11th: Today's devotion stems from Isaiah 61: 1-3 take a few minutes and read these three verses and let them penetrate your heart.

Verses 1 and 2 are such mesmerizing words to describe Our Lord, Jesus Christ, a foretelling of His presence on earth and the sacrifice He chose to endure that we may become the picture described in verse 3. Through relationship with Christ, the Anointed One we receive a crown of beauty for ashes, blessings instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. And this is the phrase that resonated in my heart. **"In their righteousness they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for His own glory."** God pursues us that we would bring Him glory; that we would proclaim His Name every where we go. Because we have received Jesus, as Lord and Savior, we are righteous in God's eyes. We are like **great oaks**. You might be thinking "Ok, so what does that mean?" Let's examine the earthly oak tree, for a moment. The mighty oak tree draws from the soil it is planted in, and grows and grows, from glory to glory until it is strong in those roots and immovable. Strong winds and storms no longer sway the mighty oak, for its roots are strong at the foundation. Now let's relate the earthly qualities to spiritual qualities. We draw from holy soil because Holy Spirit is within us. We are planted in the Word of God. We go through the process of sanctification (being made holy) moving from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory as we respond to Holy Spirit's movement, calls to action, and holy convictions. As we respond to Holy Spirit our roots grow deeper and become stronger (faith strengthens). We become unshakeable even when the wind is strong because our foundation is in Mighty God. Anyone who receives Christ as Savior is a mighty oak because God's word says we are. Some of us are just seeds in the ground, others are sprouts that just popped through the ground, some are 4 feet tall and still a little wobbly, and others are 20 feet tall rooted, grounded, and still moving toward full maturity. (Remember we are never finished growing, until our last breath God has something to teach us.) All of God's children are Mighty Oaks we are just at different stages in growth. This is the seed He has planted in us, according to Isaiah 61:3. We Are Mighty Oaks for His Glory. Like anything in life, it is a process, it takes time, and as we feast in His Word and lean into Holy Spirit. Our feet will be planted on the foundation of His Word and our mind will be focused in the heavenlies. And we reveal His Glory. Amen.

Sunday, March 12th: Ignore the lies. Come home.

I love spending time with God. The days that I can get up early and sit down with my Bible, and God. Those are days when I can bask in Him, hear His voice, pour out my heart, and just BE with my Lord and Savior.

Most days? I'm rushed. No putting on the Armor, Bible reading, or listening to the Voice of Jehovah. That's when the enemy creeps in. With his lies. His accusations. His legalisms.

"Ohhhhh, God is mad at you!"

"How can you love God when you don't have time for Him?"

Guilt sets in. Condemnation. Doubt. Fear of God's anger. The anxiety of entering back into His presence. So, I do what I do best in uncomfortable situations. I avoid them.

What was one day of missed time becomes two. Then a week. A month. Church gets skipped. Then it's a year. Two. Three. Finally, the condemning voices in my head stop because the desire to seek the Lord's company is gone. All that is left is emptiness. No condemnation. No joy, peace, love. I've lost my Best Friend. My Confidant. The One I went to for everything. There was no fight. I just stopped talking to Him. But why?

Condemnation. The enemy's lies. Joy stolen. A dead friendship. My identity in Christ Jesus destroyed.

"**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;**" John 10:10

But you know what? This is God's response:

"**I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly.**" John 10:10

"For I desire loyalty rather than sacrifice, And the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Hosea 6:6

Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. Romans 8:1-2

God wants ME. He wants YOU. He doesn't NEED us. The Creator of everything needs nothing. But He **WANTS** us! He **CHOOSES** us. Our hearts. Our minds. Our flaws. Our humanness. Yes, He wants our time, but that is because we NEED time with Him. We should WANT to run to Him, not from Him. But the enemy lies. He wields the Word against us, using the law to show us everything we lack. But God. He shows us how all-encompassing His Grace is!

"**So he set out and came to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.**" Luke 15:20

Come home. Come back into His abundant Grace, His Word, time in His Presence, fellowship with His Church. Come Home.

Read Matthew 11, Luke 15

Monday, March 13th: When we read about the men who lowered their friend through a roof in order for him to receive healing from Jesus, we marvel at their faith and determination. When Jesus honors their resolve by forgiving the man his sins, the Pharisees begin their diatribe about Him being guilty of blasphemy. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus proceeds to do what the friends had originally expected – He heals the man; he tells the man to rise, take up his stretcher and go home. So why did He not heal the man of his obvious infirmity first? Jesus was demonstrating to them that the physical need was the easy part; this caused them to glorify God and they were filled with awe, knowing that they had witnessed something remarkable. And Jesus Himself said that it was in order that they might know that He also had the power to forgive sins. This should also be a reason for us to want to walk in His power. Not that others would think we are anything special, but that they would know that if the God we serve is capable of miracles we can see, He is also capable of even greater things that are beyond our ken. His desire is to impart complete healing, but the greater is that of our souls. Miracles are a means of blessing and a means of grasping the attention of non-believers so that they are ready to listen to the deeper needs that He can satisfy. Lord, give us the desire to walk in Your power to the end that all will turn to You and give You glory.

Luke 5:22-26; Mark 16:17-20; Romans 15:18-19

Tuesday, March 14th: I grew up attending a religious, private school. At the end of 8th grade, we took a survey about our experience at the school and our thoughts about God. I only remember the very last question: “How do you picture God in your mind?” It didn’t take me long to pick my answer, however it didn’t sit right with me at the time. At the end of all my years at a religious school, I chose to pick the depiction of God as sitting on a throne in Heaven, like a judge, condemning us all for our mistakes. I saw God as a legalistic figure, full of judgment and pointing out every mistake we make. Wow! I thought I knew Him because I had obtained a lot of knowledge over the years, but I didn’t have the most crucial part: a true relationship with Him. It wasn’t until the next year when one of my new friends invited me to his youth group that I discovered a completely different God: a gracious God, a loving God, and a redeeming God. My new relationship with Him took off as I accepted Him into my heart as my Lord and Savior. Sometimes I think that it’s easier for us to keep track of all our wrongdoings and perceive God as doing the same. Thank God that, although He is the ultimate judge, His grace is sufficient. (2 Corinthians 12:9) We all fall short, but He is there to rescue us from our sin and place us on solid ground. His unending love, mercy, and grace are all found on the cross where Jesus died for our sins. (John 3:16) I wonder how many people in our lives we may think have it all together but are still missing the most vital part of the puzzle: a true relationship with Christ. If you gave them a survey, about their thoughts on God, what would it look like? Maybe asking a simple question, or even extending an invitation to church, would be the catalyst they need to start their journey with Jesus. I often think about my friend and thank God for putting him in my class that year. May we ask the Lord for daily courage to step out in faith and start a conversation with someone that would change their life forever. Psalm 31:24

Wednesday, March 15th: Let the perfection of Jesus' presence refresh your mind and heart. There are so many things in life that try to pull us out of Jesus' presence and peace. Some are challenging heartbreaking circumstances that are just a part of life. In this broken world, there will be death, sickness, violence, and heartbreak that pull us down and tries to steal our peace and joy. Take heart Jesus is with us (John 16:33) and knows exactly what we are feeling and experiencing in a way that no one else can. When the hurt is strong **Dig Deeper** into the presence of Jesus'. He is hurting for us and will provide the comfort, strength, and peace to pass through the stormy waters (Isaiah 43:2). Our relationship with Jesus does not guarantee a peaceful walk in the park, what it does promise is that He will **never** leave or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6). The best way we can overcome the challenges that the world will throw at us is to refresh our minds and hearts daily in His presence. This brings us back to the many things that vie for our attention keeping us out of Jesus' presence and peace. And this is the busyness of life; we have jobs, responsibilities, children, spouses, a house to clean and so on and so on. The list can be endless and if we do not intentionally take time daily in His Word and presence the pressure builds up in our lives and we become overwhelmed by our self-inflicted circumstances. Some storms just happen and others we create. The beauty of this statement is that we do have control over the storms we create. In God's presence we are being continually filled and ready to face our day; we gave the day to Him and going along for the ride. It is a daily equipping to face our day without being completely depleted at the end of it. The discipline of refreshing our minds and hearts, equips us for unexpected storms. We have the choice to either daily cover ourselves in His Presence or walk until we are empty or the brokenness of this world slams in to our life. I pray we all choose the daily refresh; it will equip us for the suddenness of life.

Thursday, March 16th: UNFAILING LOVE: "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10). The Lord will always be with you, dwelling deep within "... leading you in paths of righteousness for His name sake."(Psalm 23:3) He is with you in the lowest valleys and in the highest mountain tops. He is for you. Lift your hands in worship to your King. "Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. (Psalm24:9-10). Lift your hands in adoration of the King. Listen to your spirit and "soar on wings of eagles"(Isaiah 40:31) to new heights. Listen to the still small voice. Its' like a soft whisper. "Give to the Lord the glory He deserves...(Psalm29:2) He has turned your mourning into dancing. He has drawn you to himself with unfailing love. Run to Him! Let His unfailing love light in you a passion to know Him

Romans 8:31; Psalm 63:4, 46:10, 30:11; Philippians 3:10

Friday, March 17th: If you asked most Christians, they would probably say that they believe in prayer. However, if you ask them how regularly they spend time in prayer they may hesitate a bit and have to think about it. Their answer may be something like – at night before I fall asleep, or when Lord’s Prayer is recited in church. If we honestly believe in prayer, then it should be a regular part of our day and we should be constantly growing in how we pray. We need to be open to learning new ways to deepen our prayer lives, knowing that the more you do something, the better you get at it; and there’s always something new to learn. Even the disciples who were closest to Jesus asked Him to teach them how to effectively pray, and there were still times when He had to give even them a refresher course. The more time we devote to prayer, the closer we’ll become with our Father and the more we will see outcomes that are in line with His heart. Over and over we are told to pray – pray without ceasing – ask and it will be done. He is our firm foundation and the source of all blessing. The only two caveats are that we must ask, believing that He hears and answers, and that we be walking uprightly. If we want the door of blessing to be opened, we first need to knock. And when we knock and present our requests, we need to do so according to His will. In Ronald Reagan’s fourth State of the Union Address he remarked, “America was founded by people who believe that God was their rock of safety. I recognize we must be cautious in claiming that God is on our side, but I think it's all right to keep asking if we're on His side.” If we will align ourselves with His purposes, there’s nothing that He cannot accomplish for us and through us. When King Hezekiah’s army was woefully outnumbered by the army of the Assyrians, instead of seeking assistance from other nations he prayed to the Lord and asked Him for deliverance from the hand of the enemy and the Lord’s answer was, “Because you have prayed to Me...” Then the angel of the Lord went out and destroyed 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians! This is what can happen when we ask in faith, but we have to ask. It’s time we took a closer and more serious look at prayer. He may answer immediately and miraculously, or He may answer in a timing beyond our understanding, but He really does hear and He really does respond. We have to knock on Heaven’s door; nobody is going to answer a silent door.

Luke 11:9; Mark 11:22-24; Jeremiah 29:12-13

Saturday, March 18th: In the closeness of Jesus, we receive peace and strength. Let's examine the meaning of closeness. It is defined as a feeling of being intimate and belonging together; it also means a close and warm friendship. Take a moment and soak that in. Jesus desires for each of us to be His closest friend in a deep and intimate relationship. He longs to be the first person we communicate with when we rise, the last person we communicate with as we drift off to sleep, and every moment in between. This is friendship! This is intimacy! When we open every aspect of our life and being to Jesus in complete surrender God's power actively flows through us empowering us and providing peace. A peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:6) no matter what circumstance we find ourselves in, we need not fear or be anxious, because the Ultimate Lover of our souls lives within us. As Christians we belong to Jesus, we are united together to do great things for the honor and glory of Our Father, the Creator of the universe, the Alpha and Omega, Beginning and the End (Revelation 1:8). Through this closeness we can rest in the truth that all things work together for the Glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). So, let all that you are, all that you do, and all you endure be for the Glory of the Father and through intimacy with Jesus it is possible! The bible says this about Jesus, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High." (Hebrews 1:3) Jesus lives in us and all He wants from us is closeness so we can embrace His peace and strength that He longs to provide to us. What an amazing friend He is!

Sunday, March 19th: My Idols

"You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol" Exodus 20:3-4

Phew. That's an easy one. I love God. I don't make idols and worship them. THIS I can do.

"Dear God. Please bring my prodigal children home. Please restore their Faith. Let them hunger and thirst for You. Thank you, Jesus, that you have my kids firmly in your hands. I trust you. Amen".

This is one of my prayers. I put my kids on the altar of prayer before God. I trust Jesus to hunt them down and draw them in like He did me during my rebellious years. Because I trust Jesus. I TRUST God.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5

Until I don't. Until He doesn't move fast enough. Or my youngest is homeless, and God tells me to stay out of it. Or my oldest won't speak to me, and God tells me to hold my tongue. Then I take them back off the altar and build a new altar to my children where I can do things my way. Or the altar of my husband's health. Or the altar of my financial situation. Or the altar of my reputation (how DARE she say that about me!)

"Now why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Luke 6:46

I have no idols. Until I no longer trust God with the things in my life. I put my need to control the situation BEFORE my trust in God. He told me to trust Him.

"From my distress I called upon the Lord; The Lord answered me and put me in an open space.

⁶ The Lord is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?

⁷ The Lord is for me among those who help me; Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.

⁸ It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in people.

⁹ It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in noblemen. Psalm 118:5-9

My God has been so very faithful. He has NEVER forsaken me. He has never once done evil against me, and He has pulled me out of the consequences of my bad choices more than I can count, even when I was running from Him. So why can't I leave the things I have laid on the altar of prayer there? Because THOSE are my idols.

Monday, March 20th: Today is the first day of spring, or the Vernal Equinox. In Latin, *vernal* translates to “new” and “fresh,” and *equinox* is derived from *aequus* (equal) and *nox* (night). The vernal equinox marks the turning point when daylight begins to win out over darkness. It carries with it the idea of new beginnings, new life, and rebirth. What a beautiful reminder this is for us that no matter how dark or bleak things may appear, we always have the promise of light overcoming the darkness. Through the One who controls the heavens we know that He has given us new life – a fresh start in which hope springs eternal. In many parts of the country there is still snow on the ground, but the tenacious crocus will push its way up even through the snow to announce that the rebirth of life and growth are just around the corner. It wasn't by accident that God mirrored His promise of redemption in Christ with the timing of Passover, which is closely tied to the Jewish observance of the beginning of spring. From death to life – light winning out over the darkness. Let today be a reminder to us that each and every day we can celebrate His promise to us that He brings the dead to life and His mercies are new every morning. He can even reflect His power in the throes of a delicate flower emerging through the frozen, barren ground of winter, so never doubt His ability to make us flourish and produce something beautiful in difficult seasons. Today is the first day of spring. Let it also mark the birth or rebirth of something fresh and vibrant in you. Resurrection power.

Romans 15:13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 1:3

Tuesday, March 21st: There's such a beautiful tension and contradiction between walking in the power and might of the resurrection and at the same time understanding and acknowledging our own weakness. We must come to the realization that the power has nothing to do with us except that we abdicate all authority over our lives to the One who truly has the power. The Apostle Paul got this. He had a thorn in the flesh. There have been a number of conjectures as to what this may have referred to, but Andrew Wommack presents a very plausible suggestion, and it wasn't illness. Instead, it may have been the many persecutions that Paul endured. Can you blame him for desiring not to be repeatedly beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, stoned, and rejected? But God's answer was that His grace was sufficient. As a result, the impact of Paul's ministry was profound. Paul even referred to his thorn as being a messenger of Satan, undoubtedly sent to diminish his effectiveness, but Satan was no match for the grace and power of God. And that is why His power was perfected in Paul's weakness. The Amplified records God's response quite effectively: “...but He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you [My lovingkindness and My mercy are more than enough—always available—regardless of the situation]; for [My] power is being perfected [and is completed and shows itself most effectively] in [your] weakness.’ Therefore, I will all the more gladly boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ [may completely enfold me and] may dwell in me.” Lord, help us to glory in our own weaknesses so that Your divine power, grace and glory would be revealed in us. And let there be no doubt in anyone's mind as to the source of that power. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; 2 Timothy 3:10-12; 1 Peter 5:6-10

Wednesday, March 22nd: The American Civil War was the most costly in our nation's history, a time when most of us think of the bloody battles between blue and gray-clad soldiers. But did you also know that the war was fought with "paper bullets?"

Both sides tried to wreck each other's economies with counterfeit currency. Confederate currency was especially susceptible to counterfeiting due to their simple printing methods. Union currency was harder to counterfeit yet it certainly was not impossible; it is estimated at that time one third of U.S. currency was counterfeit. This led to the establishment of the U.S. Secret Service as an agency within the Treasury Department in 1865. Although today we usually associate them with the protection of the President and other high-ranking officials, the Secret Service is still tasked with protection of our currency and the detection and enforcement of other financial crimes. Plus, nowadays our currency has many protections built in to protect it from counterfeiting, including the quality of the paper, the watermarks, the ink, and print quality. It even feels like real money.

Most of us have enough experience with handling U.S. currency that even we can spot an obvious fake that is being circulated. And it's not uncommon to see a merchant check larger bills under ultraviolet light for the security thread that cannot be counterfeited. But what about the currency from another country? Would we be able to spot a counterfeit Australian Dollar bill? Or a 20-pound note from the U.K.? Probably not, especially if we've never handled that kind of money before.

Unfortunately, the same goes for false teaching targeted at followers of the Christian faith. This is especially true for new believers. This is not something new – it has been going on since Jesus was resurrected. Jesus warned us that this would happen. Paul, Peter, John, and others warned us in their letters that it was already happening. And it is certainly true today.

So how do we protect ourselves from the false teachings of the Enemy who is hell-bent on deceiving God's chosen? Just as Secret Service agents, bank employees, and merchants are very familiar with U.S. currency, we Christians must become familiar with God's Word. Reading the Word certainly is beneficial for the renewing of our minds and for knowing the mind of God. But perhaps more important is that it trains us to "spot the fakes." As John tells us in his first letter, we are to "test the spirits" to determine if they are from God – or from a false teacher. Paul instructs us in Ephesians to put on the "full armor of God" which includes his Word (the sword). Simply put, your knowledge of the Bible can protect you from false teachings directed at you. The more you know, the easier it will be to spot a counterfeit. Sometimes quoting Scripture is enough to send the Devil fleeing!

1 John 4:1; Ephesians 6:17; Romans 12:2

Thursday, March 23rd: What a powerful example we are given by Paul, Silas and Timothy in their sharing of the Message to the church in Thessalonica. They first expressed that they could be confident in what they were saying because God had already tested their trustworthiness in remaining faithful to the call and how they had shared when they were in Philippi. The Thessalonians knew they had been badly treated there, but it hadn't slowed them down in their boldness to keep preaching. They weren't seeking men's approval – only God's. No mixed motives or hidden agendas, no bragging or attitudes of superiority, no judging, patronizing, or condescension. Everything they had to offer was done in genuine love. They weren't asking for any reward. Instead, they were demonstrating a sensitivity and concern for the people, whispering words of encouragement and affirmation in their ears and setting an example for them in both their words and their actions. They legitimately cared about them and were quick to remind them how proud they were of the steadfastness to the Message they could see in the lives of those whom they had disciplined. This is what Jesus is looking for in us. We can't let opposition or difficulties dissuade us from pressing on. The more faithfully and boldly we continue in spite of these things, the more He knows He can trust us with His Message. Our motivation should be sharing with others the love and compassion that He has first placed in our hearts. The need for people to hear the Good News is every bit as critical now as it was then, and we can expect pushback. Pray that the Holy Spirit would fill us with the same resolve, motivation and boldness that compelled Paul and his companions to persevere.

Romans 12:9-18; 1 Thessalonians 2

Friday, March 24rd: A BEAUTIFUL VESSEL: Are you longing for more? Are you dissatisfied with empty wells that have no water? Do you long for more than just a religious experience? Then, cry out to Me with your whole heart for the living water. Lay it all down and surrender your heart to the one who loves you with a deep and abiding love. The Lord is your love song and your beloved. His banner over you is love. The Spirit invites you to come to the banqueting hall and drink of the rivers of living water. In the presence of the Lord you can experience joy unspeakable. You are being prepared by the Spirit to spend eternity with the Bridegroom. Let go of all the world has to offer and surrender all of your idols and find lasting joy in the presence of the Lord. You are like clay in the potter's hand. You shall be like a beautiful vessel. "If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work." (2Timothy 2:21 NLT) You are a new creation. Walk with Me daily and I will lead you into the glorious path I have prepared for you.

John 4:14; Song of Solomon 6:3, 2:4, John 15; 11, 1Corinthians 10:14; Isaiah 64:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10

Saturday, March 25th: “We are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:10

Did you feel those words at the core of your being? Let me say it this way. **You Are a Piece of the Master!** Which makes us, His children, holy and pure. No matter what we have done, no matter what has happened to us, no matter what any person has said of us, or what the enemy is trying to keep us down with. We are the apple of God’s eye (Psalm 17:8). It is our right as a child of God to be called beloved. We do not have to earn it or need to prove we are good enough for God’s love. He loved us before we knew Him, He loved us when we were slaves to sin. He loved us then and loves us now. Love is the core of God’s being and when He looks at us, He sees a treasure and a gift to this world and His Kingdom. Our past does not define us, our current position in Christ is our only definer. Today’s scripture also states that we have been created new, meaning the past is gone and Christ’s hands and feet of love is within us. And we have full access to the power of Christ to do the good He has always known is in us. Sadly, some in the body of Christ are content to just have their place in heaven and have yet to discover and embrace the redemptive work God has planned specifically for them. They have Jesus but are missing their call. Stuck in the lie of the enemy. Their God-given power is frozen in fear or unworthiness. Hear this again child of God, **“You Are God’s Masterpiece!”**, you were created with and for a purpose take hold of this truth, ask Father to reveal your redemptive purpose; cry out to Him, “Break my heart for what breaks Yours.” Seek and He will show. Ask and He will shine the light upon your path for this season. Open yourself up to engage the abundance of supernatural power He has for you, through Christ Jesus.

Sunday, March 26th: Become Like Children

“And He called a child to Himself and set him among them, ³ and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ So whoever will humble himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:2-4

God, what does that mean? I actually asked God that one day. And He brought to mind my granddaughter and her constant questions.

“Why, Monkey?” (She calls me Monkey)

“Why is the sky blue?”

“Why can’t I play in the street?”

“Why do I have to go to bed?”

“Why do you love me?”

He reminded me that little children go to the adults they trust, and they are constantly asking why. They want to understand their world better and they seek guidance from the loving adults in their life. They want to be with us, learn from us, curl up on our laps, and bask in our attention.

God wants us to be like those little children. He wants us to come to Him with every question, no matter what it is! He wants us to seek Him, to know Him, to draw close to Him. He wants us to be like small children, with our constant questions. Because if we are constantly asking Him questions, we are constantly in His presence! Jesus wanted the little children to come to Him. He wants US to come to Him.

But Jesus said, “Leave the children alone, and do not forbid them to come to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Matthew 19:14

When children are in the presence of those who love them, they learn to recognize their voice. So when danger comes, they can hear the voice of a parent over the clamor “STOP! Come to me. Follow my voice!”

“My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;” John 10:27

But if you are not spending time in the Presence of God, how will you hear Him when the wolves are howling and the storm is raging around you?

But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” Matthew 14:27

God loves to spend time with us. There is nothing too small to bring to Him. Children get it. They are not afraid to sound silly. We need to be like little children. Curl up in God’s lap, put your hands on both sides of His Face, and ask Him, “Why?”

Monday, March 27th: In order to walk *into* what He has for us, we need to walk *out of* where we have been. The Lord delivered His children out of Egypt and everything they had known in order to lead them into the unknown of the Promised Land. Most of us don't like change. It's unfamiliar. It can be difficult and challenging and oftentimes there are things that quite frankly we don't want to let go of. It reminds me of the strategy sometimes used to catch monkeys. It is said that all one needs to do is place a bunch of bananas in a small locked cage. Once the monkey grabs a banana, its fist will never fit through the bars, and the monkey so desperately wants that banana that it refuses to release it. This ultimately leads to its capture. It is so fixated on the short term, immediate reward that it fails to recognize the long term consequences. And what it really is refusing to release is control. It's not willing to relinquish the banana it feels it deserves. What are we afraid of releasing? What do we think is so essential to our feeling of security and gratification in what He's leading us *out of* that we're dragging our feet, reluctant to fully follow Him *into* the unknown of what He now has for us. It won't be without sacrifice and it won't be without adjustment and probably some momentary inconveniences and light affliction, but He promises to always be with us and for us. No good thing will He withhold from us if we are walking uprightly, following Him.

Isaiah 26:3, 43:2; Matthew 6:31-33; 2 Corinthians 2:14

Tuesday, March 28th: At a prayer gathering several months ago one of the things being prayed for was the shaking that is taking place in our country and around the world as well as in the church and in the lives of many of us individually. During the discussion and prayer time, one of those in the group had a vision of a tree that was shaking off old fruit – fruit that was no longer at its best or was rotting. This is a natural occurrence in order to allow the tree to direct all of its nutrients to producing new and vibrant fruit that will bring health and savor to those who partake of it. The fruit that was being shaken off wasn't always unusable. At one time it had been fresh and sweet, but sometimes God wants to do a new thing that may require us to shake off some of our old ideas or ways of doing things and let Him produce new fruit in our lives. It doesn't mean we are to abandon the foundational truths of our faith. What it does mean is we need to be open to what God desires to do in the present season. In the words of Solomon, there's an appointed time for everything: a time to plant and a time to uproot what was planted, a time to tear down and a time to build up, a time to give birth and a time to die. We need to be so familiar and intimate with the word of God and understanding His purposes that we can readily take whatever resources that are available to us in a given setting and utilize them to share the good news. It isn't going to be very good news if we don't share it in a way that can be understood by the one receiving it. That's why we have so many different translation of the Bible. It's also why Jesus was willing to buck "tradition" to heal a man on the Sabbath. When we are seeking to honor and serve Him, trusting in Him with all our hearts and not depending on our own limited understandings, He will make a straight path for us. And we need to be prepared for the possibility of that path being something other than we expected. It may involve some shaking off of old driving habits.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Isaiah 43:18-19; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Proverbs 3:5-6

Wednesday, March 29th: “Interior Freedom is a basic theme to Christianity. The ability to discover in ourselves that even in the most unfavorable outward circumstance we possess within ourselves a space of freedom that nobody can take away, because God is its source and guarantee.” - Jacques Philippe: Interior Freedom

I strive to embrace this quote. To enjoy interior freedom from the constant challenges of life. I wonder, “Is there a formula to follow, a pattern that I have yet to obtain?” I would love to tell you that the moment a challenge arises I run straight into the arms of Jesus, but that would be a lie. Jesus is my Lord and Savior! The center of my life, but none the less, some storms slam me so hard it takes me a hot minute to bring it to the Lord. Am I ashamed of that? Yes and No. I am human, emotions flow, and the fact that I have been shaken is just testimony that I cannot do this on my own. I remember who I belong to (John 1:12) and surrender the situation to the One who knows all and can do all. (Matthew 10:30)

I am an imperfect person who is loved by a perfect and merciful Father. Now if I continue to walk out this challenge in my own strength, that is where the real problem arises. I have stepped into pridefulness and self-sufficiency. And this does not support my previous statement that Jesus is the Center of my life. I write this today to say, “Do not let a moment of shaking, and a delayed cry to the Father, let an ounce of disbelief surface in your heart about who you are, or your worthiness of His love.” Should Father always be our first defense? “Yes!” Does it make us less if He isn’t? “NO!” What it makes us is human and He knows and understands that. The fatal wound in this would be to never come to Him, in this challenge.

This brings me back to the beginning quote and my desire to embrace it. I strive to have this interior freedom and not be shaken! Until then I am grateful that I have a Father who loves me No Matter What and I continue to submit these words to Him as I grow.

Father I submit my will, my reason, and my mind to You, that I may walk in complete surrender to Christ Jesus. That I will possess a freedom and trust in my soul that nothing I face will shake me because of Christ in me. (My healer, my strength, my hope, and my provider.)

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” 2 Corinthians 3:17

Thursday, March 30th Have you ever been in a season of such joy experiencing God's love and faithfulness in new fresh ways and as you cry out with praise and thanksgiving to The Father of love and peace; the devil tries to come in and steal the joy? (John 10:10) This is right where I sit today. Having just spent 4 days at a prayer conference where the power of God was present in ways, I can't fully articulate: experiencing the most beautiful, peaceful, and awe-inspiring encounter of my life (thus far). Basking in the glory of God. And Wham! A double storm tries to pull me down. A loved one passes away and the next day a loved one lands in the hospital with symptoms and pain that are undefinable (at the moment). These back-to-back events can understandably shake one to the core, and it would be reasonable to see one's peace and joy be shaken. But the beauty of God is that He is all knowing and before these two storms hit, He prepared me both days with the same visible sign. The first afternoon a few hours before my loved one passed. I saw the most beautifully vibrant rainbow in the sky sitting amongst a sheet of gray and dreary clouds. And I heard in my spirit "Even in the stormiest moments My promises still stand!" (1 Corinthians 1:9). That evening I received the news, and I remembered the vision and words from the afternoon. And though my heart was mourning; God's peace and comfort was upon me. The next day, I had the same exact encounter with Father, dark skies, and another beautiful rainbow "My child even in the greatest storms My promises still stand", resounded in my mind. My point in this reflection is no matter how hard life tries to bring us down our Heavenly Father is fighting for us and preparing us to conquer every storm in life. And though I am mourning and sitting in uncertainty of another loved one. My heart is at peace for one reason, I have a Father in Heaven who loves me, and is present in every high and low moment. And I tell the devil, "NOT TODAY!" no matter what challenges I face I will turn my eyes to Jesus who provides for my every need. His provision in this was to prepare me through vision and words, that His promises to me are greater than any storm I face. Take heart my friends, He will never let us walk alone! We may be shaken but His power gives us the strength to conquer everything life throws at us.

Psalms 145:13 "The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made."

Isaiah 33:6 "He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear (awe) of the LORD will be your treasure."

Friday, March 31st:

I recently had a conversation with my husband about all the silly things I was afraid of as a child. Looking back, I laugh when I think about how the Bermuda Triangle was part of my top ten list of fears. Adding to that list would've been UFO's, tornadoes, spiders, and sharks (even when I was in a swimming pool!). Can you tell that I'm a child of the 90's? To sum it up, I allowed fear into my life at the first sight of anything dangerous or unknown. Oh, how I wish I knew God's heart back then the way I know it now! Did you know that the Bible instructs us to "fear not" 365 times? If we would like, we could read a passage reminding us to let go of fear every day of the year. God is like that. It's as if He knew we needed to be reminded every single day that we don't need to fear because we can trust Him with our life, no matter the circumstance. Psalm 23:4 states, "Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me." To be honest, I've read this verse numerous times and used to listen to it before I fell asleep in order to keep my runaway mind focused on God's presence and promise. It wasn't until I discovered the significance of the shepherd's rod and staff that I was able to genuinely understand the depth of this verse. Traditionally, the rod and staff were used as essential tools for the care of the shepherd's flock. A rod was used for protection, whereas the staff was used as a guiding tool to keep the flock together. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus uses His rod and staff to protect and guide us along, regardless of how somber things appear. Even when we stray outside of His will or find ourselves in trouble, He tells us that He will leave the herd in order to search for us (Matthew 18:12). It brings so much joy to know that Jesus alone is our Good Shepherd! The other takeaway here is that God's Word is truly alive. I admit that sometimes I'm guilty of reading a familiar verse and telling myself that I already know everything about it. That will never be the case, because the Word is not stagnant, nor will it ever be (Hebrews 4:12)! God advises us to stay in His Word and meditate on it day and night for good reason (Joshua 1:8). He is always ready and willing to reveal Himself to us in a deeper, more intimate way. My prayer is that we can walk with Him daily by inviting His guidance into our lives, as well as reading His Word with fresh eyes and open hearts each time. Thankfully for us, the closer we become to Jesus, the range of things we need to worry about becomes less and less.

