

Prayer Devotions

May 2023



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.

Kazakhstan

Persecution Type: Islamic Oppression & Dictatorial Paranoia

Main Religion: Christianity

Government: Presidential Republic

Leader: Kassym – Zhomart Tokayev

Jordan

Persecution Type: Islamic / Clan Oppression & Dictatorial Paranoia

Main Religion: Islam

Government: Parliamentary Constitutional / Monarchy

Leader: King Abdullah II

Nicaragua

Persecution Type: Dictatorial Paranoia / Communist & post-Communist Oppression / Organized corruption & crime.

Main Religion: Christianity

Government: Presidential Republic

Leader: President Jose Daniel Ortega Saavedra

Daily Prayers for May: “Will God ever ask you to do something you are not able to do? The answer is yes--all the time! It must be that way, for God's glory and kingdom. If we function according to our ability alone, we get the glory; if we function according to the power of the Spirit within us, God gets the glory. He wants to reveal Himself to a watching world.” – Henry Blackaby

Monday, May 1st, 2023:

Instrument Of Praise

"Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: Sing forth the honor of His name, make His praise glorious." **(Psalm 66:1-2)**

I love to hear the joyful sound of my beloved; it opens the door to my heart. If you will, “delight yourself also in the Lord, (He) I will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4) You are a jewel. You are my beloved. My word in you is spring of fresh water that you give freely to those who cross your path. I will send many souls to hear a word of refreshing from you. My words, spoken by you can turn the darkest countenance into one of countless joy and lift up the heavy heart. You are an instrument of praise. Open your mouth and pour out praise and adoration for your King. God hears you when you praise Him. Your praise brings the Almighty, honor and blessing, your praise brings you into the presence of the Lord. Your praise is a weapon to defeat the enemy. "But you O LORD, are a shield for me. My glory and the one who lifts up my head. **(Psalm 3:3)** "Sing forth the honor of His name, make His praise glorious." **(Psalm 66:2)**

Psalm 89:15, Song of Songs 6:3, Psalm 22:3,

Tuesday, May 2nd, 2023:

The Advocate

Scripture Reading: **1 John 2:1-2**

The Holy Spirit is our advocate, standing with us and pleading our case before God. He is the perfect advocate, always pointing us towards Jesus and reminding us of His grace and mercy. Today, thank the Holy Spirit for being your advocate, and ask Him to help you walk in the light of Christ, trusting in His forgiveness and righteousness.

May we always turn to the Holy Spirit for help and comfort, knowing that He is interceding for us and guiding us according to God's perfect will.

Wednesday, May 3rd, 2023:

Focus on the Dos

“When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. **1 Corinthians 13:11**

When I was a child, and most of my life, I tried to stay out of trouble. I focused on NOT doing bad things. I didn't want to make my parents angry, make bad life choices, or go against God's will, yet it always seemed like I was doing the wrong thing. Why did this happen? I wasn't a bad person; I didn't want to be disobedient. But all of my focus was on NOT doing certain things, yet those are the things I did.

“Don't get dirty!” So, I jumped in the mud puddle in my pretty new yellow dress. My mom has pictures.

“Don't hit your sister!” So, I sat on her.

“Don't go anywhere but to Arcadia HS and back!” So, my BFF and I decided to cruise Central on our way home.

“Don't be boy crazy!” So, I was 6 months pregnant when I got married.

“Don't smoke!” So, I was addicted to cigarettes for 32 years.

“Don't drink!” So, I tried to drink more than everyone else.

“Don't break your marriage vows!” ...

I was saved when I was about 10, but my upbringing was always about the “don'ts”, and I never heard about the “dos”.

Multiple self-help coaches and inspirational speakers use some version of this saying “What you focus on, you become.” I was focused on the “don'ts” and that is what I did.

Paul understood this. That is why he says: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Philippians 4:8

What you focus on, you become.

Today, I choose to focus on being a little more like Jesus. On loving people the way, He loved them, in their brokenness and dirty rags. On pleasing my Father, not by avoiding doing bad things, but by asking Him what are the things HE would have me do. I will make this a choice day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute (because that is about how long my focus lasts). I will focus on the Grace that God has given me, and choose to give myself grace when I stumble. I will NOT focus on my failures, but on the little wins. And I will focus on becoming who my Abba created me to be. Today, I will become the “Dos” and not the “Don'ts”.

Thursday, May 4th, 2023:

National Day of Prayer

As the nation gathers for prayer today, seeking God's Holy Hand of provision and movement in this nation (in this world). We declare victory over the enemies attempts to kill, steal, and destroy our nation and our people.

Heavenly Father, Creator, of life! We come before Your Holy Throne crying out that Your church will be powerful in voice, steadfast in Biblical direction, fruitful in connection, and effective at spiritually transforming our world for You!

Take a moment and pray for...

A great spiritual awakening in all the earth.

Revival and unity of the Church.

For your believing family to be powerful and effective witnesses.

Marriages to be protected, restored, and transformed.

Protection over all levels of education. That the next generation will be protected physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

Salvation for the lost, hurt, broken, and forgotten of this world.

Government officials to walk in integrity.

Isaiah 52:10

“The Lord has demonstrated His holy power before the eyes of all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the victory of our God.”

Friday, May 5th, 2023:

Set Your Hearts

" Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." **(Colossians 3:1-2)** Why does this matter? There are so many distractions that become a snare to keep us from the peace and joy that is found by seeking Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us over and over in different ways to "...seek first the Kingdom of God" **(Matthew 6:33)**. Jesus came to set us free from the "cares of this world" **(Mark 4:19)**. Jesus Christ invites you to seek Him and trust in Him and let Him guide you. In Luke 10, Martha invited Jesus and His disciples to her home. Her sister, Mary "sat at Jesus feet and listened to Him." This made Martha anxious because Mary was not helping her. So, Martha complained to Jesus because Mary wasn't helping. Jesus answered her and said "you worry too much". And Jesus further said, "There is only one thing worth being concerned about, Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her." **(Luke 10:42 NLT)**

Prayer: Lord, open our spiritual eyes that we might see Jesus and help us to let go of the temporal things that distract from our relationship with you. Amen

Saturday, May 6th, 2023:

Center Of It All

When God raised Jesus and enthroned Him in Heaven, He put Him in charge of running the universe, everything from governments to galaxies with no name or power exempt from His authority. And this wasn't a term of office that would be reviewed every four years to see if He was doing His job. This is Christ's office forever, and it has been His assignment from the beginning of time. He was always a part of God's redemptive plan for us, and it shows us how ridiculously lavish the Father's love is for us as well as the magnitude of the sacrifice that was made by the legitimate Son that we might become adoptive offspring, welcomed into the family and made heirs to all the promises and privileges of the Son. All of this was sealed up in the Father's will for us with the Holy Spirit – a down payment that gives a taste of the magnificent inheritance to come, to the praise of His incomparable glory. Paul's beautiful prayer for the church in Ephesus as well as for all who accept God's gift of redemption is that the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory would make us intelligent and discerning in knowing Him personally, that our eyes would be focused and clear so that we would be able to see exactly what He is calling us to do, and to grasp the immensity of the glorious way of life He has for those who will choose to follow Him. (**Ephesians 1:17-19 MSG**) Jesus is at the center of it all. That's why we are to be known as "Christ followers." He's the One who's in charge; our expectation is to follow His lead. That's what it means to be part of the body of Christ – it's **His** body. And as the Message states, "The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which He speaks and acts, by which He fills everything with His Presence." (**Ephesians 1:22-23**) If we truly expect to see Him turn the tide (which He most assuredly can do) then the body needs to be responding to all that the head is asking it to do.

Let's keep our hearts and minds focused and attentive to His voice so that we might usher in the riches of His glorious kingdom. **2 Corinthians 3:18**

Sunday, May 7th, 2023:

The Picture Of

As I continue to meditate on Resurrection Weekend, Simon of Cyrene, keeps coming to my mind. We do not know much about this man. Was he a follower of Jesus' teachings? Was he a religious man? Where was he coming from? Why was he in Jerusalem? Nowhere in scripture does it say that Simon of Cyrene was a disciple. We know him only as the man forced to carry a condemned man's cross. Simon of Cyrene was mentioned by name in three of the four gospels. **Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26** What is the significance of his story?

We know that Simon of Cyrene, was coming into Jerusalem as Jesus was being forced out; Simon had to turn around and head in a new direction. This emulates the action of a disciple, turn away from your ways, desires, or plans. The Gospel tells us that Simon walked behind Jesus, which portrays a disciple, a follower of Jesus. I must imagine following Jesus to Calvary that day was a slow-moving journey. Jesus had been beaten and abused for hours; I can't imagine the walk was easy. This reminds me that our journey to fulfill God's will on this earth is not an easy task. It is critical for us to stay in line with Holy Spirit and follow Jesus at His pace. We see that Simon took up Jesus' cross (burden) he carried the weight of Jesus' pain and suffering to the mountain top. Is that not a passionate expression of compassion?

Too often we get pulled away from doing the work of Jesus, because we can't be distracted from our plans and purposes, our compassion gets lost in business, the burden too heavy, so we look the other way. Can you imagine how much more pain and suffering our King would have endured if He had to carry that cross alone?

Simon of Cyrene may or may not have been a disciple, but he was the picture of **Matthew 16:24** "Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me."

Whose burden can you help carry today? Who can you walk with and show them the compassion that Simon of Cyrene showed Jesus, that day?

Monday, May 8th, 2023:

He's Coming Back

The Gospel of John records that early on the third day after Jesus' crucifixion, Mary Magdalene went to his tomb, only to find it empty. She ran back to the disciples reporting what she saw (or rather what she didn't see), fearing that Jesus' body had been taken away. So, Simon Peter and another disciple (presumably John – as he did not write his own name when referring to himself) went to investigate for themselves. Upon arrival, Simon Peter went into the tomb first and saw for himself that the body was indeed gone. The burial clothes had been left laying about – except for the small cloth (some translations state this was a napkin) that covered Jesus' head. Instead, it was neatly rolled up (some translations say it was folded) and placed away from the rest of the burial clothes. The other disciple then went into the tomb, gazed upon the scene, and believed.

It is easy to overlook this detail, especially when we don't understand its full meaning. But to those who are familiar with the Jewish culture of those times, this seemingly tiny detail is actually quite significant.

According to custom, a servant would prepare his master's dining table, then stand aside just out of his master's sight so that he could eat his meal undisturbed. When the meal was over, the master would take the napkin to wipe off his fingers, his face, and his beard. Then he would leave the napkin crumpled up on the table. This was the visual cue letting the servant know it was okay to come and clear the table. However, if for some reason the master were to leave the table with the napkin left folded, this was the signal stating that he would be returning, and the servant was to remain out of sight.

Many times, Jesus told the disciples that he would be leaving them, yet he would return to them. When Jesus neatly put that napkin aside, he wasn't being neat for neatness' sake. He was giving a signal. Note that the Scripture says that the other disciple saw – and believed. He saw the napkin. He got it. Jesus was stating – once again – what he had been telling the disciples all along. He's coming back!

John 20:1-8, Matthew 24:27, Hebrews 9:28, John 14:1-4

Tuesday, May 9th, 2023:

Forever Grateful

My high school biology teacher frequently told my class that if we couldn't think of anything to be grateful for, be grateful that our body's cells, organs, and systems were all doing their appointed job. Honestly, before this class, I didn't realize the true complexity of the human body. I learned quickly, however, that we are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made" (**Psalm 139:14**). The word "fearfully" in this verse indicates that when God creates life, it is a reverent and holy process (christianity.com). The next verse adds that we are "skillfully wrought" by God in our mother's womb (**Psalm 139:15**). The New King James Version appropriately uses the word "wrought". It is defined as "worked into shape by artistry; elaborately embellished; processed for use; deeply stirred" (Merriam-Webster). We can be grateful for the life our body allows us and we can also be grateful that our God didn't create us flippantly. We are created by the first and most pure artist. He elaborately gave us details and features that no other person has but us. Each and every one of us has been created for a purpose, thought through ahead of time by the Maker Himself. Finally, through this holy and mighty process, He remained deeply stirred. In other words, our Creator was boundlessly excited throughout the entire process! I feel as if I will never fully understand the deep love God has for all of us. I certainly can see it through Jesus and feel it around me through the Holy Spirit, but my finite mind just can't fathom how He created everything and everyone one with such intricacy and love! Perhaps that is the point, though? Our God's divine and deep nature is far above our human imaginations. I've now gained a profound insight into Psalm 103:2: "Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things He does for me." Amen brothers and sisters! We always have something to be grateful for!

Wednesday, May 10th, 2023:

Get Filled and Refilled

Ephesians 5:18 Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit,

Paul sets an example here on how we should constantly be pressing in for more of God. It should be a continuous lifestyle of crying out for an increased filling with the Holy Spirit. The language here is saying, "Be constantly filled with the Spirit." It is not a one and done type of deal. God wants more for you than to just receive salvation and then have you coast the rest of your life on that one experience. Sadly, this is where many Christians remain. They think that going to heaven is the pinnacle of Christian life, but He has so much more in mind for us. Jesus, Himself tells us in **John 14:12** "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to the Father." Through the Holy Spirit, we have access to all that Jesus did while He was on earth. We have the power to pray for healing spiritually, emotionally, and physically. We have power to cast out demons and shut down Satan's attacks upon us, we have power to declare the gospel and make disciples. We see the disciples cry out in **Acts 4:30 – 31** "Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."³¹ After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness."

This power is alive and active today! The more we seek God's will, the more we ask for the Gifts of Holy Spirit the more dynamic our lives will be, and the atmospheres will shift toward the heavenlies. Mediate on what it means to be continually filled with Holy Spirit.

What do you think this looks like in your daily life?

Thursday, May 11th, 2023:

Jesus Asks a Question

In Mark chapter 10 a blind man heard Jesus was coming and when Jesus was passing by him, the blind man called out to him: "Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me." **(Mark 10:47B)** Jesus stopped and called the blind man to come to Him. So, Jesus answered him saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" **(Mark 10:51)** The blind man answered Jesus saying "Rabboni, that I might receive my sight. Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." **(Mark 10:51-52)** The blind man's sight was restored. So, 2000 years later we know, according to **Hebrews 13:8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Does some aspect of your life need to be restored? Jesus is asking you the same question: "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus wants you to ask and believe like the blind man. Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." **(Matthew 7:7)**.

Friday, May 12th, 2023:

The Impact of the Holy Spirit

Scripture Reading: **Galatians 5:22-23 Romans 15:13**

The Holy Spirit's power brings about transformation and change in our lives, producing fruit that glorifies God and blesses others. Have you allowed the Holy Spirit to work in your life, transforming you into a person of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Today, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to produce this fruit in your heart and life, and to help you impact the world around you with God's love and grace. He brings us hope to see what the transformational changes in our lives will produce, to stand strong, persevere what the world is trying to impact you with. Take a moment to allow the Holy Spirit to impact your actions, words and how you love those around you to bring Glory to His kingdom.

Saturday, May 13th, 2023:

Intimate Obedience

Today, I did not murder anyone. I didn't steal anything. There are no idols in my house. I honored my parents. I read my Bible for 30 minutes, I read my devotional. I am a "good Christian".

But God told me to wake up at 3:00 am, get out of bed and pray for my coworker who is so annoying and never has a kind word for me. In fact, she has been actively trying to undermine my reputation. I roll over and go back to sleep murmuring "God please bless her so that burning coals are heaped on her head."

I want to make something clear; this is not about works-based salvation. Salvation comes ONLY through the redeeming Blood of Christ Jesus, and my works or lack thereof do nothing to add to or take away from my salvation.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **Ephesians 2:8-9**

Intimate obedience. This is about relationship. Intimacy. Being everything that God created me to be. Walking in the power of the Holy Ghost and the authority of Christ Jesus. I am saved. I don't have to do anything else and I am going to Heaven. But God has created me for a greater purpose. There are things that only I can do, divine appointments in the lives of others that only I can show up for. But that requires intimate obedience. Complete surrender to the authority of God. Not following a list of laws that God never wanted to create. It is personal. It is intimate. It is KNOWING the Father's voice.

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

It is doing what He says, when He says, how He says, where He says, and to/with whom He says, with no hesitation, no thought for how silly I might look or sound, and no concern for my reputation among men. I was never created for rules or laws. I was created for intimate obedience that comes ONLY when I KNOW The Father. When I am constantly seeking His Face. When I surrender completely to Him. The cost is too great to not be completely obedient. And it does not always make sense. But the benefit? KNOWING that I am His Beloved. KNOWING that I am doing my Father's Will. KNOWING that someday I will hear "Well done, good and faithful servant", and KNOWING that I will have crowns to lay at my Savior's feet! I have my Father's Business to be about, and there is no time left to be a "good Christian". I MUST be intimately obedient!

Sunday, May 14th, 2023:

Mother's Day

Dear Heavenly Father,

We come before you today to give thanks for the gift of motherhood. We thank you for the love, care, and sacrifice that mothers give to their children each and every day. We ask that you bless all the mothers in the world and give them strength and wisdom to continue to guide and nurture their children.

We also pray for those who have lost their mothers or have strained relationships with them. We ask that you comfort them and heal any wounds that may exist. May they find peace and love in their hearts.

We thank you for the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She showed us what it means to have faith, trust, and obedience to your will. May we learn from her example and strive to follow your plan for our lives.

We ask that you bless all the families in the world and help them to grow in love and unity. May they always remember the important role that mothers play in the family and honor them with love and respect.

We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Proverbs 31:26-31; Proverbs 22:6; Proverbs 24: 5-6

Monday, May 15th, 2023:

The Witness of the Holy Spirit

Scripture Reading: **Romans 8:16-17**

The Holy Spirit confirms and testifies to our identity as children of God, empowering us to live confidently in His love and grace. Are you living a life that reflects the glory of God and the witness of the Holy Spirit? Today, ask the Holy Spirit to help you live in such a way that others can see God's love and grace shining through you. May the Holy Spirit empower us to live boldly and confidently as children of God, sharing His love and truth with the world around us.

May we depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to transform us and impact the world around us for God's glory.

Tuesday, May 16th, 2023:

Correct Course

My very first teaching job was in a small rural community with only one road leading into town, and it dead-ended in the dump! If you weren't paying attention to where you were going, the end result would be an undesirable destination that was filled with decay. The only remedy would be to do a complete 180 and head in the opposite direction as fast as possible. The same could be said for the way some people profess their Christianity but pay little attention to the road they're on. They don't want anyone telling them how to navigate, and unfortunately there are plenty of voices reinforcing the notion that they can do whatever they please because God's grace will cover all of their bad choices. It's what one pastor used to refer to as sloppy agape. It is absolutely true that God's grace is boundless, but it is also true that He is just. Grace is a precious and costly gift that we must fully receive in humility, with thanksgiving, and in agreement with Him that we have a choice to not be ruled by the sin that would lead us to the trash pit. To think we can live any way we want, apart from how God leads us and squandering the benefits of His sacrifice, yet still belong to His family seems like bad doctrine. If we're truly listening to His voice, we'll be headed in a direction that leads to greater life and freedom. When we find ourselves being tempted to choose flesh over faith (and we will), we need to remember that we're not ruled by sin anymore and we don't have to listen to its deceptive, sugar-coated promises, no matter how enticing they may sound. The short-term benefits may be gratifying, but they will lead to a rotting and brutal final outcome. Set your sights in the right direction, and if you find yourself on the wrong road or heading in the wrong direction, it's never too late to pull out your road map (the Bible) and correct course.

Romans 6:1-2; Psalm 25:4-5; Proverbs 4:25-27

Wednesday, May 17th, 2023:

Strife, Lies, and Haughty Eyes

“There are six things that the Lord hates, Seven that are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, ¹⁹ A false witness who declares lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. **Proverbs 6:16-19**

But what does the world see when they look at us?

One church shouting “Denomination XYZ a cult!”

A gathering of elders decrying “They let WOMEN be pastors!”

Older people in the church judging “They let people with TATTOOS in their church!”

Younger people complaining “They don’t have instruments!”

Pentecostals mocking “They don’t raise their hands!”

Pastors saying one thing and living a completely opposite life.

Christians, who claim that their God is the God of Love screaming “God HATES YOU!”

Strife among the body of Christ.

Followers of Christ living a life of lies or spreading gossip and lies behind “prayer requests”.

Christians looking down on everyone else with haughty eyes.

Strife, lies, and haughty eyes, 3 of the 7 things that are an abomination to God. In our churches. In our lives. Disrupting our testimony. Blocking the Light of Christ that should be shining through us.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ ***Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.***” **Matthew 5:14-16** (emphasis added)

God created us for greater things! We are not meant to be in the world, but set apart from it! That does NOT mean we withhold ourselves from life outside of church and Heart Crews. It means that we do not look like, act like, or sound like the rest of the world.

Not haughty eyes - but eyes that see people the way Jesus sees them.

Not lying tongues - but keeping the secrets we are trusted with and interceding and speaking only in love and truth.

Not hands that shed innocent blood - but hands that lead others TO Christ and not chase them away towards ETERNAL death!

Not a heart that devises wicked plans - but a heart that does the will of the Father!

Not feet that run rapidly to evil - but feet that run rapidly to STOP evil! We have got to stop standing aside and letting evil happen!

Not a false witness who declares lies and spreads strife among brothers - but unity among the Body of Christ!

Christ DIED for us. It is time we started acting like it, instead of acting like the world.

Thursday, May 18th, 2023:

Correction: Received

I think everyone likes the feeling of being correct, but most of us don't feel the same way about being corrected. The problem is that the only way to succeed and stay on course is if you are made aware of those areas where you need to improve or maybe get rid of unnecessary baggage or faulty information. And that takes being corrected. What we really need is the ability to learn how to receive correction and to not take it too personally. We also need the maturity and wisdom to filter all of the "helpful" advice we receive through the filter of God's word. An image I had that related to this was that of a roof. Think of it as your head – lots of different things will rain down on the roof, and at times it may come like a downpour, but the trick is to know how to differentiate between what might be beneficial to clean the roof and what needs to be channeled off into the drain gutters. Water off a duck's back. We need to keep reminding ourselves that we are children of the King, He loves us with an unending and perfect love, He has created each one of us with a purpose and equipped us to fulfill that purpose, and if He allows us to be disciplined in some area it is because He loves us and wants to see us succeed and flourish. We need to be able to take an honest look in the mirror and decide when we are being corrected if what is being shared is valid. Even if it's only partially true, we can receive it with grace and take what is for our edification as a blessing. The rest can get funneled away. Be receptive to what the Spirit wants to impart and impervious to any of the extra pollution that might be mixed in with it – water off a duck's back. If we truly want to be correct – approved, acceptable, truthful – then we must be willing to receive correction.

Proverbs 10:17, 12:1, 15:32; 2 Timothy 3:16

Friday, May 19th, 2023:

Spiritual Nakedness

Have you ever had that weird dream? You get off the school bus and realize you are naked. You are in a meeting presenting and you are naked. You are in bed then you realize you are actually naked in front of the whole church, but the only clothes you can find are tattered and full of holes. No? Okay, that last one was mine. But through it, God showed me so much!

Did you know the Bible is full of nakedness? I found 54 verses. And in only one did it say, “they were not ashamed”.

“And the man and his wife were both naked, but they were not ashamed. **Genesis 2:25**

Before sin entered the world, nakedness was not shameful. It was human beings standing before their Creator, and they were not ashamed. But in just 7 verses they went from unashamed to: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves waist coverings.⁹ Then the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”¹⁰ He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and *I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.*” **Genesis 3:7, 9-10** (emphasis mine)

Why are we afraid to be naked? Because it makes us vulnerable. To the elements, the environment, the judgment of others. The judgment of God.

I used to laugh at the silliness of Adam and Eve. They WALKED with God, yet they had the audacity to think they could hide their nakedness from Him? But I do the same.

Every. Single. Day.

Then I think about the church. We come to church dressed, physically and emotionally.

“Good morning, how are you doing?”

“Great/fine/blessed and highly favored!”, while hidden behind the smile is all the worries and fears that I am hiding. That I am carrying. Alone.

But yesterday? God stripped me naked in front of my sisters, in front of the church, as I kneeled at the altar, sobbing, praying, ranting, crying out to God. Tears poured down my face and snot ran out my nose. I left everything that I had been carrying alone before My God, and I let Him take up my burdens, then I took up His.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light.” **Matthew 11:28-30**

And I got up from the Altar, naked before My God and the whole church, and I was not ashamed.

Saturday, May 20th, 2023:

Armed Forces Day

“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.” **Hebrews 6:10**

We come before you, Lord, to pray for our armed forces. We thank you for the brave men and women who have dedicated their lives to serving and protecting our country, Your creation. We pray for their safety and well-being, both physically and mentally.

“Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.” **1 Thessalonians 5:23**

Lord, we ask that you be with them in their daily tasks and guide them in their decision-making. Give them strength and courage to face the challenges that come their way.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” **Matthew 7:7**

Help them to be a source of hope and inspiration to those around them.

We also pray for their families who sacrifice so much for the sake of our country. Comfort them during times of separation and uncertainty. Provide for their needs and give them peace that surpasses all understanding (**Philippians 4:7**).

Lord, we ask that you bless our armed forces and keep them safe. We pray that you would bring an end to war and conflict around the world.

“May the LORD give strength to His people! May the LORD bless His people with peace!”

Psalm 29:11

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Sunday, May 21st, 2023:

Walking in the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

Scripture: John 14:16-17, John 16:13

The Holy Spirit is our divine guide, leading and directing us in every aspect of our lives. He is our Counselor, Comforter, and Helper, and He desires to guide us in all truth in our daily lives.

"Listening to the Still Small Voice" - 1 Kings 19:12

The Holy Spirit often speaks to us in a gentle, still small voice. He whispers to our hearts, guiding us in the right direction and revealing His will for our lives. However, we need to be attentive and tuned into His voice, amidst the noise and distractions of this world. Taking the time to listen and discern the Holy Spirit's voice through prayer, meditation, and reflection is essential for walking in His guidance.

"Trusting in the Spirit's Wisdom" - James 1:5

The Holy Spirit is the source of all wisdom and knowledge. When we seek His guidance, He will provide us with the wisdom we need to make the right decisions and choices in life. His wisdom is perfect and surpasses our human understanding. Trusting in the Spirit's wisdom means surrendering our own thoughts and plans to His leading and relying on His guidance in all circumstances.

"Following the Spirit's Prompts" - Galatians 5:16

The Holy Spirit prompts us in various ways, nudging us towards God's will for our lives. He may convict us, encourage us, or prompt us to take certain actions. It's important to be sensitive to His prompts and obediently follow His leading. This may require stepping out of our comfort zones, taking risks, or making sacrifices, but we can trust that the Spirit's guidance will always lead us towards God's best for us.

"Seeking Confirmation in God's Word" - Psalm 119:105

The Holy Spirit's guidance will always align with God's Word. When we are unsure of His leading, we can seek confirmation in the Scriptures. God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, providing us with clear guidance and direction. By aligning the promptings of the Holy Spirit with the truth of God's Word, we can ensure that we are walking in His guidance.

"Practicing Patience and Surrender" - Proverbs 3:5-6

Walking in the guidance of the Holy Spirit requires patience and surrender. Sometimes, we may not immediately understand or receive clear direction from the Spirit. In such times, it's important to patiently wait and trust that He will.

Monday, May 22nd, 2023:

Stronger Together

Do you know how many times the idea of unity is referred to in Scripture? One source lists around 179 instances that could be viewed as calls to the body to live in unity. That would imply that God is more interested in us all coming together as one than He is in which denomination or individual church has a better handle on theology. Paul even exhorted the church of Corinth to not have any divisions but that they would be perfectly united in mind and thought and purpose. Here's how the Passion Translation puts it – "I urge you, my brothers and sisters, for the sake of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree to live in unity with one another and put to rest any division that attempts to tear you apart. Be restored as one united body living in perfect harmony. Form a consistent choreography among yourselves, having a common perspective with shared values." (**1 Corinthians 1:10**) Take note of the caution to put to rest any division that attempts to tear apart. We can bicker about some pretty trivial issues: the music is too loud, too contemporary, too (fill in the blank); the preaching is too political, not political enough, too convicting; the auditorium is too big, too small, too cold... None of these is anything that will determine one's salvation and have nothing to do with a personal relationship with Jesus or with representing the heart of the Father. They are personal preferences, and when we place more importance on our own preferences than we do on honoring God and promoting His kingdom, we're tearing down rather than building up. And as Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, what would really fill him with joy would be to hear that they were "...living in harmony and being of the same mind and one in purpose, having the same love, being in full accord and of one harmonious mind and intention. Doing nothing from factional motives [through contentiousness, strife, selfishness, or for unworthy ends] or prompted by conceit and empty arrogance. Instead, in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) letting each regard the others as better than and superior to himself [thinking more highly of one another than you do of yourselves]." (**Philippians 2:2-3, Amplified Bible, Classic Edition**) This is also what fills the Father's heart with joy and both honors the sacrifice Jesus made to unite us and exhibits to outsiders the beautiful unity that can exist in the Spirit. We truly are better (and stronger) together!

Tuesday, May 23rd, 2023:

His Truth: Transforms

I started seeking therapy as a young adult to help deal with past childhood trauma. To be honest, I thought I could live the rest of my life “dealing” with the uncomfortable things of the past, but not truly heal. I believed the hurt would always be there, but I would be able to live my life “normally”. Praise God that He lovingly showed me I was wrong and so graciously intervened. He met me in the midst of a deep, oppressive depression and it was then that I finally gave it all to God, for good; No more burying the hurts of the past. At that time, God led me to take a leave of absence from work and attend an outpatient therapy program. I absolutely believe that once I finally gave my cares and anxieties to Him, as He instructs us to do in His Word, my healing journey rapidly progressed in such a powerful way (**1 Peter 5:7**). I began to intentionally walk by faith each day and pray that God would help me gain wisdom, discernment, and tangible skills that would lead to His true healing. In therapy, we began each day by saying daily affirmations, even if we chose ones that we didn’t quite agree with yet. I chose Bible verses to speak over my life about how God sees me, how He loves me, and how I’m already healed. Verbally speaking His truth over my life was so powerful! I’ve always struggled to see my true self-worth, so this was a very difficult exercise for me. Filling my mind and heart with the truth of what He says about me, not what I say about myself, was a huge step of faith. In essence, God showed me how to “live by faith, not by sight” (**2 Corinthians 5:7**). Even when we look at the way God worked in the Creation story, “He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm” (**Psalms 33:9**). We should then follow His lead, even if it doesn’t make sense at the time, for His ways are much higher than ours (**Isaiah 55:9**). I truly believe that God walked me through the valley and healed me by His mighty power and love. I wipe tears as I share this with you because by healing me, He showed me that my worth is found in Him. My healing is found in Him. My life is found in Him! Friends, He is knocking, He is waiting, He is more than able! Let us answer and spread the Good News!

Wednesday, May 24th, 2023:

Prayer-Care-Share

Many years ago, I learned about the power of prayer and its connection to love. Through what is now known as **Prayer-Care-Share** formula.

By praying for neighbors, then looking for ways to show the love of Christ to them, and finally getting the opportunity to share Jesus with them. We are unable to truly impact our community for Jesus until we develop relationship with those around us.

What I found was that as I prayed by name for neighbors (employees at my neighborhood gas station, grocery store, Walmart, etc...) a natural desire to get to know them started to form within me! Remember in Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10: 25 – 37; Jesus makes it clear that our neighbor is anyone around us, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or socio-economic status.

God was giving me His heart for them and a capacity to love them.

I suspect that is why Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). He knows that if we start praying, He will fill us with this love!

Our nation seems filled with hatred fueled by social media, the news media, and politics. Sadly, many believers are also caught up in it. Yet we are instructed—**commanded**—to love.

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Matthew 22: 37 – 39 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

How do we love? By praying for people with whom we disagree (including those who post things on Facebook that drive us up a wall). And by praying for ourselves and our fellow believers, that we would put on love.

When we pray, Jesus will make more room in our hearts and fill us with His love.

Who will you begin to love today through the power of prayer?

Thursday, May 25th, 2023:

Call To Him

God is rich in mercy and his love endures forever. My soul longs for God. You alone can fill the emptiness of my soul. "For He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness." (**Psalm 107:9**) All the pleasures of earth are not enough to satisfy the hunger of the soul. In **John 7:37** Jesus was at the feast and He stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." If you are dry and thirsting, know this, that only Jesus can satisfy what you are searching for in life. Seek God's presence and you will find His peace. In His presence you will find the joy of your heart. Call to Him this day and He will surely answer the cry of your heart. Are you ready to throw off the temporal things of earth and find the true riches of the Kingdom of God? If so, ask Him to open your spiritual eyes and ears that you might see Jesus in all His glory and splendor.

Ephesians 2:4, Psalm 136:1

Friday, May 26th, 2023:

The Comforter Within: The Holy Spirit as our Comforter

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." - **Psalm 23:4**

The Holy Spirit is our Comforter, who walks with us through the all the challenges of life. In our darkest moments, when fear gets the best of us and we become uncertain in our thoughts and next steps, the Holy Spirit brings comfort to our souls. The Holy Spirit's presence is like a gentle hand that soothes our weary hearts and reassures us that we are not alone. When we feel overwhelmed, the Holy Spirit whispers words of peace and calm, reminding us of God's unfailing love and faithfulness. Let us open our hearts to the Holy Spirit, our Comforter within, and allow Him to bring us the comfort and peace that surpasses all understanding.

Saturday, May 27th, 2023:

Face Uncertainties

Circumstances can bring us down and cause us to become discouraged. The definition of discourage is simply to rob of courage, and courage is defined as “the ability to face danger, difficulty, uncertainty, or pain without being overcome by fear or being deflected from a chosen course of action.” (Encarta Dictionary) In the book of Mark we read of an encounter Jesus had with one of the synagogue officials named Jairus who had every reason to feel desperate. His *little* daughter was at the point of death. The diminutive form of the word for daughter was used to underscore the fact that she was little, tender, vulnerable. Even though most synagogue officials were opposed to Jesus and His teaching, Jairus humbled himself at the feet of Jesus and begged him to lay hands on his precious little child and heal her. Yet on the way to his house, Jesus stopped because He perceived someone had touched His garments. By this time there was a large procession following Him and pressing in on every side. And it was discovered that the woman who had touched just the hem of His robe had a long-standing issue of blood which would have made her an outcast and untouchable. But Jesus stopped for her and assured her that it was her faith that had healed her. While He was still speaking a group arrived from the house of Jairus to inform him it was no use – his little girl had died. Can you even imagine what was running through his mind? But we are told that Jesus “overheard” what was being said, and He told Jairus not to be afraid *any longer*, but only to believe. The word used for overheard is *parakouó* which can mean to overhear, to hear amiss, or to take no heed. Jesus was telling Jairus to take no heed – not to get discouraged. Jesus allowed no one to accompany Him from that point except Peter, James, and John. When they arrived at the house to find weeping and wailing, Jesus assured them that the girl was only sleeping, and their response was laughing and most likely ridicule. They all got kicked out except for the aforementioned disciples and the girl’s parents. These were the ones who had faith in Him despite the apparent evidence that it was a lost cause, and the miraculous result was that the girl “woke up.” We need to constantly remind ourselves that this is the same Jesus who has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. There will always be those around us with little or no faith in Him who will try to convince us that the odds against us are too big and maybe we should look elsewhere for a solution. When we “overhear” these words of discouragement or mockery, let’s remember to take no heed because we have a loving, miracle working Savior who can defy the odds. And like the woman with the issue of blood, our faith in Him will enable us to face the uncertainties, dangers and pains with courage. He’s that kind of Savior. **Mark 5:22-42; John 16:33**

Sunday, May 28th, 2023:

Pentecost

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. Acts 2:1-4

God's promise delivered! The most precious gift of His Presence to all who believe in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the Anointed One! The one who takes away all sin and brings those who believe in Him back into the right relationship with their Creator, The God of Heaven and Earth! Who desires to be close to His children -- so deeply that He chooses to dwell within us.

We read in the Gospels that everything Jesus did while here on the earth happened through the Holy Spirit. Jesus was concerned about us being alone. So, He promises us that the same spirit that sustained Him during His ministry will be given to us. The same spirit that unites The Father and The Son can be set loose in our lives, bringing us in unity with the trinity.

On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus sent His spirit to dwell within us and prepare us to be His intimate disciples.

How often do we really pause and think of The Father and The Son's desire to be close to us?

We were created to **love** (feel deep affection for) and **commune** (Share one's intimate thoughts or feelings with, to feel a close spiritual connection) with Him. We were created for action - physical action, mental action, and state of being.

God wants to be in an active relationship with His creation and those He created.

He moves in His spirit as close to us as we will allow Him to come. It is possible for God to place a portion of Himself within each of us, but only if we yield to the presence of His spirit.

God's eternal desire is to be so close to us that He is in us. God-in-you and God-in-me.

Do we have the same desire that God has? Do we want to be as close to God as He wants to be with us?

By accepting the precious gift of Holy Spirit, we allow God and Jesus "to live in us." and their presence in us is powerful!

Isaiah 61:1; John 1:29-34, John 3:16

Monday, May 29th, 2023:

Memorial Day

Dear Lord,

We come before you today with heavy hearts as we remember the brave men and women who have given their lives in service to our country.

“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” 2 Timothy 2:3-4

On this Memorial Day, we honor their sacrifice and remember the families they left behind. We ask that you comfort and strengthen them in their grief.

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

“Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:7

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Revelation 21:4

We also pray for the men and women who are currently serving in our armed forces. Protect them as they carry out their duties and bring them home safely to their loved ones.

Finally, we ask that you bless our nation and grant us wisdom and courage to work towards peace and unity.

“... Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

May we always remember and honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, May 30th, 2023:

The Conqueror

The people of Israel had been oppressed for so long. Throughout their history, they had been conquered by the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, and now they were under the harsh rule of the Romans. Many of the Jewish people clung to the hope given by the Prophets that a mighty king would come and deliver them from their oppression.

On the day that we commemorate as Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem like the rival king the people had hoped for. The crowd was enthusiastic – even ecstatic – upon arrival of their Messiah. And thus, Jesus began the work of overthrowing the old system.

On Monday, he challenged the established religious authority when he went into the Temple and drove out the merchants and the moneychangers who had made a mockery out of their sacrifice to God. By Tuesday, the religious leaders had grown so incensed that their authority was challenged, but also they finally were able to seize an opportunity presented by one of Jesus' own – Judas Iscariot – to stop Jesus in his tracks. On Wednesday, Jesus was anointed just as King David had been anointed before him. And on Thursday, he announced the new covenant treaty with God.

Friday was the sixth day of this amazing world-changing week. When Roman soldiers mocked and beat Jesus, and placed a robe and crown upon him, this served (in the world's eyes) as his coronation. When he was nailed to the cross, he was actually going into an epic battle on behalf of his subjects. And as he died, Jesus declared victory and the completion of what he came to do, saying, "It is finished." So, on Saturday – the seventh day – Jesus did as his Father had done after he finished the Creation. He rested.

On Resurrection Sunday, Jesus rose as the conquering king, enthroned as sovereign over all nations, powers, and kings. When all is said and done, Jesus had done so much more than what the people had hoped or even imagined. For the people did not truly understand the depth and scope of their oppression. Jesus conquered way more than the Roman Empire and the Jewish authorities. He conquered death and sin itself.

Zechariah 9:9; Luke 19:45-46; Matthew 27:27-29; John 19:30; 2 Timothy 1:10

Wednesday, May 31st, 2023:

Victory

The Bible is pretty clear that we shouldn't be surprised by the mass confusion and moral decay that we see all around us. Jesus' word has always been challenged, and almost every generation has questioned whether they were indeed in the end times. In fact, Pope Sylvester II predicted that the Millennium Apocalypse would occur on January 1, 1000 AD. When that didn't happen, the date was changed to 1033 to theoretically coincide with the crucifixion of Jesus rather than His supposed birth date. Ironically, I recently heard it's quite probable that Jesus was actually born around 3 or 4 BC. The point is, we already know that when someone gives an exact date for Christ's return we can rest assured that it's incorrect because Jesus Himself said that no one knows the day or the hour of His Second Coming – not even the angels or Jesus Himself.

(Matthew 24:36) Only the Father knows, and He's not telling. He wants us to be prepared all the time, living our best possible lives and being so in tune with Him that we simply trust in His timing and spend our hours going about His business. All of our thoughts and actions are going to have to line up with Scripture because it's game on. We can't afford to be spectators in the bleachers simply cheering for our favorite team. The fans at the Super Bowl may feel an adrenaline rush when their team wins, but only the players on the field receive a ring. We can't help but see the rapid escalation of ungodliness and total disregard for not only God's word and authority but also for common decency or sense. Neither of these seems to be common anymore. All of this seems to point to the conditions described in the Bible as indicative of end times, but the one factor that was not part of the equation in earlier times was the reestablishment of Israel as a sovereign nation. From the invasion of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD until May 14, 1948, the Jewish people were scattered across the globe and were not reassembled until after the Holocaust. They came from more than 100 countries and totaled around 650,000 to form the New State of Israel. The surrounding Arab countries immediately declared war, but against all odds this tiny new nation survived. This is unquestionably the intervention of God in fulfilling His promises and the prophecies of old. And this should cause us all to wake up and take note. It's time for us all to become intensely familiar with His game plan and to be ready to be called onto the field at any time to execute the assignment we've been given. The Bible is our play book, and any time we have questions, all we need do is ask the Coach for more specific details as to how we are to run with the ball or to defend those who are the play-makers. In the final championships, there are only two teams. Make sure you're on the right team and then commit to being an active participant. Whether this is in fact the final game or a preliminary, the outcome is still critical and we all need to be involved and committed to the One who has already assured us the victory as long as we're active participants on the team. **Deuteronomy 20:4; Amos 9:14-15; 2 Timothy 3:1-5**