

Prayer Devotions
September 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.

Sudan

Persecution Type: Islamic Oppression, Organized corruption and crime, Clan oppression, Dictatorial paranoia

Main Religion: Islam

Government: Presidential Republic

Leader: Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan

India

Persecution Type: Religious nationalism, Dictatorial paranoia, Clan Oppression, Ethno-religious hostility

Main Religion: Hinduism

Government: Federal Parliamentary Republic

Leader: Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Syria

Persecution Type: Islamic & Clan Oppression, Dictatorial Paranoia, Organized corruption & crime, Christian denominational protectionism

Main Religion: Islam

Government: Authoritarian Presidential Republic

Leader: President Bashar al-Assad

Daily Prayers for September: “You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” C.S. Lewis

Friday, September 1st, 2023: Security in Jesus

When I was quite young, I remember crying myself to sleep often because I was worried that if I sinned and the rapture occurred before I had time to confess my sin, I wouldn't go to heaven to spend eternity with Jesus. The fear was real, and my silent struggle to be perfect emerged.

I was still so fearful about my eternal destiny that I was diagnosed with an ulcer at the ripe old age of 13. I was too ashamed to talk to anyone about my fears because as hard as I tried, I couldn't be perfect, and I couldn't bear to admit my failure. So, my silent shame continued.

Over time, I learned a little more about God's grace, but I still thought that I should try to be perfect every minute of the day ... you know, just in case. Better safe than sorry, right?

Wrong! Paul reassures us about this very concern in **Romans 8:15-16**. The Passion Translation says it so beautifully, ¹⁵And you did not receive the “spirit of religious duty,” leading you back into the fear of never being good enough. But you have received the “Spirit of full acceptance,” enfolding you into the family of God. And you will never feel orphaned, for as he rises up within us, our spirits join him in saying the words of tender affection, “Beloved Father!” ¹⁶For the Holy Spirit makes God's fatherhood real to us as he whispers into our innermost being, “You are God's beloved child!”

As believers, we are a new creation. The old is gone and the new is here! God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, gave us the ministry of reconciliation and does not count our sins against us. He will not condemn us when we sin. Through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit set us free from the law of sin and death.

When we sin, the Spirit convicts us, and His conviction is done in love and grace. God designed us to feel sorrow over sin so we will seek repentance that leads to victory instead of remorse.

However, God's grace does not give us free rein to sin, nor should we abuse it. God knows our heart, and He knows our motives. We must face our sin honestly and truly seek His forgiveness.

Once I started earnestly praying and saturating myself in God's Word, the fear and shame lifted. Out of the fullness of Jesus Christ, I have received grace upon grace!

2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Romans 8:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:10; John 1:16

Saturday, September 2nd, 2023:

Fear Leads to Faithfulness and Freedom

Proverbs 9:10 reads “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” The word used for fear is yirah and means to be in awe or to have reverence for; it’s a holy fear of God because we truly are seeking to know and acknowledge Him as our sovereign. Things like wisdom, truth, justice and mercy come from Him; and without Him and His boundaries, we wind up making our own rules. The problem with no boundaries is that there are also no walls of protection. Boundaries are like a fence that keeps the sheep from wandering and the predators from devouring.

The prophet Hosea’s description of the northern kingdom of Israel bears a striking resemblance to where we are in this country. “There is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.” Hosea 4:1-2 To break it down a bit, the word for faithfulness is emet which can also be translated as truth; kindness is chesed which denotes mercy and goodness; and knowledge is vedaat, the origin of which is yada. The takeaway is without a knowledge of God we are left to our own devices, and that leads to deception and the deterioration of truth, kindness, goodness and mercy. The result is a “natural” wisdom and an alleged truth which are really just “yada, yada, yada.” The New Testament equivalent is found in Paul’s letter to the church in Rome with the indictment that even though they knew God, they failed to honor Him or give Him thanks, and the result was that they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Pretending to be wise, they became fools. Romans 1:21-22 We might refer to that as talking heads. Don’t listen to them!

As followers of Jesus Christ we need to keep our heads on straight, and that means we need to be filling those heads with a knowledge of Him and His words. We need to be prepared and properly protected to defend ourselves against the assault by being grounded in the truth - His truth. We won’t be able to effectively wield the sword of the Spirit, aka the word of God, if it’s unfamiliar to us and we’ve never spent time putting it into practice. When we’re properly prepared, our shield of faith will protect us from the attacks of the enemy and we can then display the kindness and mercy and truth of our King because we are showing Him the honor He deserves by submitting to His wisdom. Our “fear” will build our faith, our faith will lead to faithfulness, and our faithfulness will display His kindness and mercy to hopefully lead others to freedom. Ephesians 6:10-18

14 Seek Him The depth of God’s love for us and His patience are honestly so immeasurable that I don’t think we are even able to wrap our minds around it.

Sunday, September 3rd, 2023:

When Life is Confusing

Life is confusing; we wrestle with our emotions and thoughts as we try to make sense of it. David, the writer of Psalm 13, seems to understand such confusion.

Psalm 13

¹ O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever?

How long will you look the other way?

² How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,

with sorrow in my heart every day?

How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

³ Turn and answer me, O LORD my God!

Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.

⁴ Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!"

Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.

⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me.

⁶ **I will sing to the Lord because He is good to me.**

After four verses of distress, the psalmist changes suddenly to praise. It almost seems as if the suffering tone of the initial verses is somehow discounted, as if such praying is unfit for a believer. But the Bible never makes light of suffering. Rather, verses 1-4 express David's starting point, and verses 5-6 show where David ends up.

Between the two may lie a short or long (possibly an extraordinarily long) period of time during which God takes our hand amidst suffering and restores our joy.

Take heart my friend, God invites us to come with all our hurt, pain, and confusion. We need not hold anything back. And through this intimate communication He turns our challenges into the praise of His faithful presence, guidance, and love. Come as you are, and He will show you who He is!

Monday, September 4th, 2023: Labor Day Prayer

Psalms 90:17 “May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands.”

Deuteronomy 10:18 “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.”

Psalms 140:12 “I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted and justice for the poor.”

Almighty God, Creator of the world, we give You thanks for the gift of stewardship and work. Deliver us, in our various occupations, from the service of self alone, that we may do our work in truth, honor and for the common good. God of justice, we pray for all workers, that they would receive fair compensation and treatment in their labor. For those who seek work, provide jobs — both citizen and immigrant alike. For those who cannot work, provide sustenance. Make those who lead the industries and commerce of this country responsive to Your perfect will. Build up in the leaders of our country a respect for all labors. Deliver us, Lord Jesus, from the maligning evils of greed, sloth, and gluttony that we may lead lives of holiness in service to You and our neighbor. We ask all these things for our good and Your glory. Amen

Tuesday, September 5th, 2023: The Shepherd

I long to lead you just as a shepherd leads his precious flock. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.” **(John 10:11)**. My sacrifice brings living water to all who seek after me. I know the way you should go. I will show you the path of life. I will lead you to “green pastures”. I will be by your side if a storm arises. I will be there to comfort you. I will never leave you. I will be there to protect you from behind. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” whenever you turn to the right or to the left.” **(Isaiah 30:21)** I am the light in the darkness. My word is a light shining on your path to keep you from slipping. I invite you to seek my face and live close to my presence. I will be your shepherd. I know the way to my Father’s house. If you choose to follow me, I will prepare a place for you. I will satisfy the desires of your heart not only in this present life but throughout eternity. Follow me for “I am the good shepherd.” **(John 10:11a)** Trust me to lead you “...in paths of righteousness for my name’s sake.” **(Psalm 23:2b)**

John 4:14, Psalm 32:8, Psalm 23:2, Mark 4:39, Hebrews 13:5, Isaiah 52:12, John 8:12, Psalm 119:05, Psalm 27:8, Psalm 23:1, John 14:12, John 14:2, John 15:7,

Wednesday, September 6th, 2023:

Jars of Clay

“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.” 2 Corinthians 4:7 Author Jonathan Cahn in his devotional *The Book of Mysteries* poses the intriguing question: “Can that which is finite encompass that which is infinite?” The obvious answer would seem to be no, but the author then holds up a clay jar and removes its lid. It is now an empty vessel which can be filled to overflowing - it has no limitations. We are those clay jars! That excites me because it means that there are no limits to what God can do through me - no limits to what I can come to know about Him - no limits on the influence I can have for the kingdom. The only catch is I have to be open, willing to be filled with whatever He has for me and to put no restrictions on the what, when or how much. As long as I remain open, the possibilities are endless and beyond my imagination. That’s how big and generous and creative my God is, and the same holds true for you. We are finite and our wisdom is finite, but He is infinite and He lives in us. That means when we are open vessels we can be recipients of His infinite wisdom and power and peace. His very thoughts can become our thoughts. In his devotional writing, Cahn goes on to say, “A closed vessel can never contain anything larger than its own size. But an open vessel has no limitations. It now can contain the blowing of the wind or the outpouring of the rain. It could even contain the flowing of a river.” Our possibilities can even go beyond the adage “the sky’s the limit” because Paul tells us in Romans, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (Romans 11:33) And James even assures us that if we are lacking in wisdom, all we have to do is ask Him in faith of the God who gives to all men generously and without reproach. (James 1:5) Don’t ever let anyone tell you to put a lid on it. I want to be open to all He has for me.

Thursday, September 7th, 2023:

Boundary Lines

I had spent some great time in God's Word. It wasn't a lot of time, but I had read a familiar verse that renewed my heart of gratitude to the Lord. "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance." **Psalm 16:6**. Throughout the Old Testament God had given His people physical land and fulfilled His promises of provision to them with places of rest, places to herd and farm and even the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. These were pleasant places, reminders of God's fulfillment of His promised blessings. I spent time that morning thanking God for His provisions in my own life. I felt grateful and agreed with the Psalmist that indeed for me, the boundary lines God had given me had fallen in pleasant places. I could be thankful for both the limitations and blessings in my life, a delightful inheritance.

Then, not even an hour later, standing in the kitchen trying to get out the door for work, and the kids ready for school and the necessary morning tasks accomplished, I called out, "This is too hard. I can not do this anymore." My voice was louder than I intended and my tone that was desperate for change. Oh, how quickly my heart had turned from gratitude to despair.

Then, the Holy Spirit reminded my heart that my delightful inheritance is His presence in my life, an eternal home, the power of the Holy Spirit in my life and the body of Christ to come alongside.

He reminded me that His grace is sufficient for me even in my weaknesses, **2 Corinthians 12:9a**. Acknowledging God's goodness AND my need for God's presence and power in my life could happen simultaneously. I could, like Paul, boast about my weaknesses so that Christ's power could rest on me **2 Corinthians 12:9b**.

Lord, we trust that you have been involved in the details of our lives, our skills and strengths, limits and shortcomings, our jobs, families and friends. Instead of comparing our own boundary lines to what you've given others, help us to delight in your perfect presence and power in our lives. When we fall short of feeling delighted, remind us again that in our weakness Christ's power rests on us. We need you. We love you.

Friday, September 8th, 2023:

Living a Worthy Life

Each one of us wants to know God's will – both for ourselves and for the others we love and pray for. Paul wanted that for the believers in Colosse:

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light” (**Colossians 1:9-12**).

Paul wanted the Colossian believers to live a life worthy of God, to bear fruit, and to have power, endurance and strength. He wanted them to be kingdom Christians! Knowledge of God's will was more for living a life that glorified God than for discerning every decision we need to make in life (though choosing what God would want us to choose is certainly important). The more we pray for spiritual wisdom and understanding and a knowledge of God's will, and live out a Spirit-filled life, the “decisions” will become easier and easier. As we live lives that bear fruit, that please God, choosing wisely in the day-to-day decisions will come more naturally.

Father, help me to desire Your will above my own. Empower me with Your Spirit so that I will bear more fruit, walk worthy of You, and display patience and endurance. Bless me with a thankful heart as I live out my everyday life for Your glory.

Harvest Prayer Ministry published 5/17/2023

Saturday, September 9th, 2023:

Our Editor and Our Defense Attorney

There's a biography already written for each of our lives, and it's an adventure story about conquest and destiny. However, there's also a villain who will do everything imaginable to keep us from reaching the triumphant conclusion and convince us to write our own story. Imagine that you, the hero or heroine of this story, are heading south on I-10 for Texas, but in Tucson you accidentally take I-19 south headed for Nogales. When you realize the error you have several options. You can shrug it off and forget about Texas, you can stay on the wrong road and hope that somewhere it might connect you with another road that is at least closer to Texas than you are now, or you can own up to your mistake and look for the nearest exit. This can be likened to how we deal with sin. We all make mistakes! But then we have a choice. The sooner we realize that we're on the wrong road, the faster we can make correction. Satan will tell us to ignore the bad decision and just figure our original destination wasn't that important. In essence, he wants us to rewrite the intended story and will turn it into either a comic book or a tragedy. Or we can admit we made a wrong choice and get off the wrong road. Tony Evans refers to this as taking the Confession off-ramp. Now what are we supposed to do? There's an overpass that's already been erected – it's called grace, and it will take us from the wrong road to another choice. And then there's an onramp that will get us heading back toward our intended destination. It's the Repentance on-ramp that puts us on the restoration expressway. And it's a freeway for us because there are no tolls that need to be collected from us. It's already been paid, but we have to choose to get back on the road and not just coast along on the frontage roads because that's where we're more likely to hit potholes or discover that there may not be another access.

The devil is in the details and we already know he's the accuser of the brethren. He has a legitimate case against us because we are guilty, we did get off the intended route, and he wants to drag us into court and convince us there are no rewrites. But our case was settled before we even came to trial. However, we need to go through the legal process. We are not adequately equipped to defend ourselves alone because we can't pretend we didn't make a wrong turn. God's laws are still valid, and we're still expected to observe them. That hasn't changed, and we still have to face the Supreme Judge to give an account. The difference is we already have the best defense attorney ever, and that's the only way we can win this case. He's not only our righteous judge, He's the author and editor of the best version of our story. Fight Satan legally. As soon as the accusation is made, admit the offense, take it directly to the Judge, and allow His Son (aka your Defender) to show the evidence for your pardon. Case closed! Just remember to follow His advice - go and sin no more. Then your story can be one of victory. **1 John 2:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; John 3:16-17**

Sunday, September 10th, 2023:

Does God Hate?

If God is love, He can't hate, right? That's a reasonable assumption but the truth is, God hates sin. He hates sin because He's holy. Holiness is the most exalted of all His attributes. He also hates sin because it separates us from Him.

Since God is love and He commands that we love one another, hate feels like such a ... hateful word! But we are actually supposed to hate sin.

When I think about what God hates, the first passage I think of is **Proverbs 6:16-19**. Solomon recorded six things that God hates and seven that are detestable to Him. While these aren't the only sins we should avoid, they do spotlight our greatest obstacle...our hearts. From our heart comes our motives which can lead to action (sin) that God hates.

The first thing listed that God hates is haughty eyes. The definition of haughty is arrogantly superior and disdainful. In other words, it's pride. Pride also holds first place on the list of the seven deadly sins delineated by Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century.

Scripture says, "To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech." **Proverbs 8:13**

Satan was cast out of heaven because of pride. He thought he could replace God as the sovereign ruler of the universe. Jesus tells us, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." **Luke 10:18** Pride has kept many people from accepting Jesus as their Savior. Being able to admit that we have sinned and come short of the glory of God and acknowledge that we need to repent and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior to have eternal life is a constant struggle for prideful people.

There is a difference between the kind of pride that God hates and the kind of pride we can feel about a job well done **Galatians 6:4** or the kind of pride we express when our loved ones excel 2 Corinthians 7:4. The kind of pride that stems from self-righteousness or conceit is sin, however, and God hates it because it is a hindrance to seeking Him.

Since God hates pride, it stands to reason that He loves the opposite. So, let's strive to have God-approved eyes of humility. When pride is knocking at our door, let's answer it with prayer. Let's ask God to humble us. Ask Him to search our hearts and reveal where we have let pride take over, and ask that He would, through His almighty power, help us destroy the grip of pride in our lives. **Psalms 139:23-24**

Monday, September 11th, 2023:

Step into Your Assignment

The days are getting shorter because we're entering a new season. That can be said in both the physical and the spiritual sense. You don't wait until mid-July to check you air conditioning, and you don't decide to cover your plants after the temperature hits below freezing. That said, we can't afford to "put off until tomorrow" what we should be doing today.

We're being called into active duty, and His vision and assignments are definitely above our pay grade. They're larger than both our natural abilities and resources, but praise God they are not greater than His provision or power. That means we're going to need to be willing to step out of our comfort zones and step up our game. Remember, He recruited us so that means He sees potential in us to be active participants. We weren't called to just be bench warmers. Nobody tries out for a sports team hoping to watch from the sidelines. We are each in this place, in this season, for such a time as this, and the Coach wouldn't have picked us if He didn't have a special spot for us. **Ask Him what part He has chosen for you.**

When Joshua was asked to fill Moses' shoes, they were entering into new territory and the rules had changed. God had brought them thus far, but now they would be responsible for actually taking possession of their promise. He fully understood how desperately they need God's continued guidance and empowerment, but he also understood it would mean listening and obeying whatever they were instructed to do, even if it meant marching silently around a highly fortified city for a week and then giving a shout out as their battle plan. It didn't depend on their military or tactical abilities; it depended on their willingness to trust and obey. He saves us in order to commission us into His service.

No matter how gifted we might be, His plans for us are going to stretch us beyond everything natural. But the good news is that whatever is asked of us, we will have all we need because He is all we need. Salvation is a gift; living in victory over sin and the flesh is our inheritance - our Promised Land, but we have to fight to possess it. Pray that at the end of our physical lives we will all be able to agree with Paul in saying we have fought the good fight. He saved us and called us, not according to our works or natural abilities, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted to us in Christ Jesus. Time to suit up! 2 Timothy 1:8-12

Tuesday, September 12th, 2023:

Possess the Land

As a nation we are so extravagantly blessed that we can easily become entitled and forget that it was God who established us, who gives us our very breath, and then we fail to express gratitude. The same attitude could be seen in the children of Israel when Moses was leading them from slavery into their Promised Land. On the heels of being miraculously delivered from the pursuing Egyptian army through the parted waters of the Red Sea, even walking on dry ground and then seeing the waters annihilate their enemies, just three short days later they were grumbling about the water. Their food literally fell from the sky and they complained about the limited menu.

Lack of a thankful attitude is nothing new. Immediate gratification was more important to them than the promise they were pursuing. The instructions Moses gave them before they entered the land was not what would be described as a feel good pep talk. The land was theirs to possess, but there were conditions to be met. They had responsibilities attached if things were to go well for them that included following the guidelines He gave them, teaching them to their children, and loving Him with their entire beings. They were to remember and honor Him as their provider, their protector, and their perfect patriarch.

He gave us a beautiful homeland too, and He inspired our founding fathers to establish conditions or guidelines to ensure our prosperity. Our Declaration of Independence even affirms that we have been endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. And the following words are attributed to President John Quincy Adams in his speech, given on July 4th, 1821, commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence: “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.”

So many of our founders acknowledged the absolute necessity of God’s guidance and their dependence on Him if their plans for a free country were ever to succeed. And succeed they did, but not without sacrifice and a fierce determination to uphold these foundational principles. The results were the United State, which for years has stood as a beacon of hope and favor and freedom to the nations. That status has deteriorated to the point that there is so much internal strife and dissension and lack of morality or integrity that we are no longer held in such high esteem. We haven’t held up our end of the bargain. Yet God has not totally rejected us – not yet. His promise still stands that if His people will humble themselves, pray, seek His Presence, and turn their backs on their wicked ways, then He’ll listen, forgive our sins and restore our land. We all have a part to play, both in accepting responsibility and in waking up and redirecting our hearts to follow His guidelines, ensure sure they are passed on to the next generation, seek to love Him wholeheartedly, and to truly honor Him as Almighty God. Then we can honestly pray for God to bless America...again. **2 Chronicles 7:14**

Wednesday, September 13th, 2023:

We Are Not Our Own

“Christ in us, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

I believe there are two foundations for lifelong service. The first is our desire for God Himself. This desire must be cultivated. It is not automatic. Without this desire, everything else becomes mechanics...merely "how-to" courses in the spiritual life. Psalm 63 is a great example of a leader (David) who had cultivated desire in his life. One of the most helpful things we can do is to pray Psalm 63 as a way of developing this desire for God. The English Standard Version titles this Psalm “My Soul Thirsts for You.” David poured out this lament to Father, God while in the wilderness. He was not just in a dry and parched land physically but spiritually. David sought nourishment and refreshment to fulfill his call to service. What wilderness are you currently walking in? How are you cultivating your spirit? Has God given you a call and you feel stuck? Are you unsure of Your call? Filled with doubts and why’s?

My friend, I encourage you to cry out in prayer, dig into the written Word, and wait on God’s Rhema word of refreshment. Matthew 7:7 reads “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.” The answer is there, and it will be revealed. Stand strong friend, your thirst will be quenched.

The second foundation to a consistent life of service is an awareness of Christ living in you. As we go through the day, whatever the tasks ahead of us, we must always keep before us this amazing truth: The Lord of the universe has come to take up residence within us. We are not on our own. Jesus lives within. God does not want us to wander the wilderness, but claim and live out the hope of glory, through the gift of Jesus.

Father, I long for all that You are to be part of all that I am. Develop a deep desire within me for greater intimacy with You so that serving others will be a natural result of our relationship.

Thursday, September 14th, 2023: Gnats and Camels

“You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” **Matthew 23:24**

I love the way God works. I'll be dealing with something, God will teach me, then I write a devotional about it. It's almost like He has a plan.

This past week I was in my head over a translation and pronunciation thing in scripture, and it was messing with me to the point I was losing sleep and unable to focus during my time with God. And I kept asking God for clarity and wisdom. So, he showed me Matthew 23:24.

Jesus is calling out the Pharisees for being, well, Pharisees and hypocrites. They are so concerned about following every LETTER of the law, of making sure all the customs and traditions are followed, that they forget to pay attention to what God MEANT. And that is exactly what He tells them in v. 23.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have ***neglected the weightier provisions of the Law***: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” **Matthew 23:23**, emphasis mine

Jesus calls them out for ignoring the ***human side of the law***, the very reason Jesus came to Earth, to make sure they comply with the ***rules about THINGS***.

And then I realized just how often I do that. In my quest to please God, I start focusing on straining the gnats, making sure I am paying attention to the ***things*** while ignoring the intention. I neglect relationships with those I hope to lead to Christ. I get irritated with and snap at my husband when he interrupts my “God time.” I ask my granddaughter to leave me alone while reading my Bible. I am doing the right ***things*** in trying to focus, but I am strangling relationships to do it. Swallowing a camel - letting the important things slide by while I focus on things that are insignificant on a Kingdom scale. People are what matters to God. Relationships.

You know, I thought this devotional would go in one direction - but God had other plans. He took me back through Matthew 23, had me examine my heart and the things that I do, and illuminated ways I was becoming like the Pharisees. I encourage you to read all of Matthew 23. What are the gnats that distract you so that camels slip by unnoticed?

Pray: Lord reveal the insignificant gnats that I am focused on and show me camels I am letting slip by. Show me YOUR heart, let Your Will be done and not mine. Father God, change me to being Kingdom-minded and not small-minded.

Friday, September 15th, 2023: The Cleanest Profane Mouth

Sister Sally is having coffee with Sister Sylvia. At the next table is someone who lets a few cuss words slip. Sister Sally “My word! Did you hear what she just said? What a foul creature! I am so glad I don’t associate with people like that!”

Meanwhile, the cusser overheard every word. She watches Sister Sally walk out and get into her car with the “You need Jesus!” and church stickers, honk at another car, and drive off in a snit. And the cusser is glad she is not like that angry, bitter woman.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, ***that it may impart grace to the hearers***. Ephesians 4:29, emphasis mine

Who spoke the corrupt words? This is a gnat and camel issue! For some people, any bad word puts them on their faces repenting, but they will speak ***badly*** about others all day long. Or how about the person that uses the excuse of a “prayer request” to spread the latest gossip?

While digging through the Bible for verses for this devotional, I noticed a common theme. It was filthiness, perverse speech, and cursing that the Bible teaches against. I found many more verses that intentionally and specifically teach against gossip and slander than specifically mention cussing.

A perverse man spreads strife, And one who gossips separates intimate friends. **Proverbs 16:28**

He who goes about as a gossip reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy and faithful keeps a matter hidden. **Proverbs 11:13**

Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. **Psalm 34:13**

And cussing and cursing are not the same thing. “I hope they get what is coming to them” is a curse.

Bless those who persecute you; ***bless and do not curse***. Romans 12:14, emphasis mine.

We need to think about the words that come out of our mouths, and not just if they are considered a bad word in this place and moment in time.

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this person’s religion is worthless. **James 1:26**

We shouldn’t go around cussing, but we need to be more concerned with the content of the message than the words that are spoken.

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**

This is true about what we speak, too. None of us are perfect, but if we focus on speaking life and not death, blessing and not curses, things that are true, honorable, and commendable, then we would avoid having a profane mouth.

Saturday, September 16th, 2023:

Unless the Lord

“Unless the Lord builds a house, they who build it labor in vain; Unless the Lord guards a city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.” **Psalms 127:1**

There is such freedom in the words the Psalmist has penned. “Unless the Lord.”
Our good intentions, obedience, planning and even follow through cannot create an outcome
that hasn’t been filtered and approved by the heart of God.

The Lord makes it clear through Scripture that He desires our lives to line up with His heart.
John 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

James 1:25 “But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues
in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they
do.”

So then, what happens when things don’t fall in line with our expectations, especially when we
feel like we’ve done our part? For me, there is often frustration and disappointment. My
desire for control and a logical outcome causes me to evaluate what went wrong or if there
was something I could have done differently. While that is a natural response, **Psalm 127**
reminds us, “unless the Lord.” **Isaiah 55:8-9** states “For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.” Gods way is not
often our way. It doesn’t always mean that we didn’t obey or aren’t in alignment with Gods
will. If we feel like we are walking according to the Spirit of God, we can release control and
trust that the Lord is at work, in His way and timing.

Lord, when I am discouraged help me to be reminded that unless You are at work my efforts
alone can’t produce anything. Thank you for your Holy Spirit that leads me and for the joy that
comes from walking in obedience to your word. Help me release control and feel the freedom
that comes from the words, “unless the Lord.”

Sunday, September 17th, 2023

Listen to the Prophets

It's almost chilling to read the Old Testament prophets and realize how closely their messages fit our current culture. Malachi prophesied at a time of prosperity and peace for Israel in the physical realm, but there was crisis in the spiritual. It's such a sadly predictable cycle.

In the early 1700s the people of the United States were turning to the Age of Reason, also referred to as the Enlightenment, where traditional authority was questioned (as in the Bible and the idea of a sovereign God) and the idea was embraced that humanity could be improved through what was deemed rational change. The problem with rejecting the truth is that it can only be replaced with a lie, and we can see how "enlightened" we have become. When we try to rely solely on our ability to reason, we're getting in way above our pay grade.

Job got a pretty direct answer from God when he was trying to reason with Him. God reminded Job of a few things that were inexplicable to our finite brains and beyond our ability to ever reproduce. The most brilliant scholars still cannot explain how we came into existence or even how the intricacies of an eye work to produce sight. God has named the stars and planets, and yet the most gifted astronomers have no clue how many there are and we are still discovering new galaxies. His ways are beyond our searching out, yet in our arrogance we think we can barter with Him and pick and choose which of His laws we embrace and which we disregard as irrelevant or outdated. It all comes down to a matter of faith. We either believe Him or we don't, and all you need to do is study the accuracy of the prophets in pronouncing the judgment that was to come for those who rebelled against God and rejected His sovereign authority.

And now we find ourselves facing the introduction of artificial intelligence. What an apt name – it is artificial as in fake, false, an imitation. We may feel threatened by this, but God isn't! The One who created the authentic doesn't look at man's feeble attempt to replicate it and think, "Wow! What a brilliant invention – wonder how it works." He's still God, and we can still find everything we need to live a productive and full life by reading His Word and seeking His guidance through His generous provision of His Holy Spirit. His Word is still living and active, and when we see His faithfulness and accurate assessment of cultures through His prophets, we can be assured that He's still the same. We can learn through the mistakes of others and change course before the hammer falls because He is also a God of grace and redemption, and we see that played out in Scripture as well. Malachi 2:2; Hebrews 4:12

Monday, September 18th, 2023:

Praying for Our Enemies

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45a).

"But I tell you who hear Me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28).

Jesus had enemies...and they crucified Him. Yet, as we know, He had the ultimate victory in the end. But because God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to die, His Son did not leave the earth without praying for those who were responsible for His death. Jesus, who told us to love and pray for our enemies, demonstrated the ultimate gift of love while hanging on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34a). Jesus prayed for His enemies...how can we do less?

One of the most amazing commands of Christ is to love our enemies. In our flesh, we naturally want to retaliate or fight back when we are treated unkindly or persecuted. Jesus preached forgiveness and mercy: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). His lifestyle demonstrated grace, that ours might also. He took His command one step further, adding another level of difficulty: "Pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44b). Jude also spoke about the importance of mercy: "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them..." (Jude 1:22). Because of God's mercy, we were saved. We must extend His mercy to those who are still enemies of God, so that they might also receive what we have been given.

Father, give me a heart filled with mercy so that I am able to love and pray for those who mistreat me. Give me Your grace to love them as You do, and to see them with Your eyes of compassion.

Tuesday, September 19th, 2023:

Taking the High Road

Oftentimes when someone says they've chosen to take the high road, in their minds it is an elevated position to take. They see themselves as rising above the situation, and although it may be subtle, there's a certain element of pridefulness in that attitude. It occurred to me that when you're hiking, the easier paths to take are often the lower, less challenging ones. The higher you get, the more difficult the terrain usually becomes. And frequently when we speak of taking the high road it has to do with personal interactions. Possibly we've been misunderstood, offended, slandered or harshly criticized. The easiest response is for a quick come back, but most of us aren't that good at fashioning a response that has been seasoned with grace and wisdom without giving it some thought.

James reminded the churches that they were a kind of first fruits in this new representation of God's truth through Jesus. James knew they would be under scrutiny and that they would be facing opposition. They needed to be prepared and to be quick to hear but slow to speak and especially to be slow to anger because anger doesn't achieve the righteousness of God. Being quick to hear suggests listening for the purpose of comprehending. We might add to that how we respond to someone's body language or how we react when we learn about any given situation. Seek to evaluate through a biblical lens, and that would require us to have a knowledge of what the scriptures say and what His righteous looks like.

Going back to the analogy of hiking, taking the higher path is challenging and requires focus on choosing each step wisely and intentionally. Peter reminds us that through His divine power God has given us everything we need to navigate wisely. "Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you— your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust... With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus. Without these qualities you can't see what's right before you, oblivious that your old sinful life has been wiped off the books." (2 Peter 1: 4-8) Once you've followed His path to the higher ground, there's nothing to compare with the spectacular view! And that makes it worth the sacrifice, and it gives a better picture of Jesus in you.

Wednesday, September 20th, 2023:

Filled With All the Fullness of God

Have you ever gone to the grocery store when you're starving? Clutching your detailed shopping list and reminding yourself to stay true to your new clean eating plan, you enter the store with resolve...until you see and smell the baked goods fresh out of the oven. And every aisle is filled with beautifully packaged goodies calling out to your rumbling belly. How do you resist temptation?

This same scenario could be used to describe other temptations we continuously face. How do we equip ourselves to resist these temptations on a daily basis? Research has shown that willpower only goes so far. But what about the power of God's will? What if we live in the fullness of God? Do you think it would be easier to resist temptations if we were living in all the fullness of God?

So, what is the fullness of God? It's everything God is. His love, His power, His holiness, His character, His attributes, His perfection. God is all of these and He's so much more!

You might be thinking, but I'm just a flawed human, how could I possibly be filled with all the fullness of God? He's God and I'm... just me!

But what if you think about the fullness of Jesus? It's a little more relatable because he was fully human. Paul tells us in Colossians that God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Christ. Paul went on to say, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.

Imagine living a life filled with all the fullness of God! This is a spiritual reality for those of us who are willing to continually seek Jesus.

And that reality begins as we come to God in prayer. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is a wonderful prayer to make your own so I changed the pronouns to create a personalized prayer for you.

I kneel before you, Heavenly Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. I pray that You may grant me, according to the riches of Your glory, to be strengthened with power in my inner being through Your Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. I pray that I, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of Your love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that I may be filled with all the fullness of You, Father God.

Colossians 1:19; Colossians 2:9-10; Ephesians 3:14-19 (CSB)

Thursday, September 21st, 2023:

A Good Name

Most, if not all of us, have had (at least at some point in our lives) the desire to make a name for ourselves. We read in Proverbs that having a good name is to be chosen above great riches. God even delights in exalting His chosen ones and giving them audiences before kings!(**Proverbs 22**) However, we also have an adversary who likes nothing better than taking the spotlight away from the King, and that's where we have to be extremely vigilant and cautious. The question has to be what determines a "good" name and whose name it is that we ultimately want to see exalted.

There are names that we recognize immediately: Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, Steve Jobs. All three made names for themselves in a sense, but it's the underlying motivation that determines the goodness of their names in the only economy that really counts, and that would be God's economy. Neither Billy Graham nor Mother Teresa set out to exalt themselves. They wanted the name of God and His goodness and life transforming power to reach as many as possible. They wanted to bring His good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners of sin, and to declare the Lord's favor. (**Isaiah 61:1-2**) The recognition that followed was merely a byproduct of their heart's intent. Steve Jobs was brilliant, but he was also self-absorbed and spiritually adrift. Both Billy Graham and Mother Teresa lived long and fulfilling lives. Jobs died at the age of 56 having achieved greatness in the business world but having failed miserably in his personal relationships. His first job in the electronic field was with Atari, and Atari's cofounder Nolan Bushnell described him as "difficult but valuable", pointing out that "he was very often the smartest guy in the room, and he would let people know that."

Interestingly, in the original text of Proverbs the word good is not even present. The actual word used in the proverb is shem which is simply "name," but the implication was that the person was of good repute and moral standing, and several verses later it is stated that the reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life. This truth is valid not only for individuals, but also for ministries and for the Church. Seeking "brand recognition" is far too short-sighted and is a dangerous path. When we seek to lift up the mighty name of Jesus, having His name be the "brand" that defines us, we give Him full rein to bring favor and influence and success far beyond anything we could imagine. It will bring a return that is eternal and far more precious than silver or gold...or fame and fortune. Let's put everything we have into making a name for Him.

Friday, September 22nd, 2023:

Do Your Homework

As a teacher I used to have different types of assignments for my students. Some were due the following day, some were repetitive such as weekly vocabulary tests, but others were long term, giving the students plenty of time to do all the necessary research and to fine tune the finished product. Needless to say, there were students who began right away and others who put it off until the last possible minute.

God has assignments for each one of us as well. Some are what you might call short term – meeting an immediate need that He places in our path. Others may be repetitive, like tithing or getting into the Word on a regular basis. But we all have a long term assignment, and the catch is that we aren't given an exact due date. He could tap us on the shoulder at any given moment and tell us it's final exam time, and if we haven't been diligent in doing our homework, we could find ourselves up the proverbial creek. Our assignment is to take His good news to the world, and it begins in our own homes. We need to be cultivating righteousness and purity and holiness in our personal lives so it reflects in every short term assignment and is building a solid, observable faith that we are not only willing but eager to share with whomever He asks us to do so. The most obvious but often the toughest is the repetitive one – the consistency with those closest to us. Our kids and our grandkids, our neighbors and our co-workers need to not only see the integrity in our behavior, they need to see the hope in our hearts, and we need to be ready to explain to them how important our faith is to us and how it could give them the same hope and joy. Being that bold may cause some to distance themselves from us, but rest assured that nothing will ever distance us from the Father if we're being diligent in carrying out His assignments.

As Paul encouraged Timothy, "Preach the message, be ready whether it is convenient or not, reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and instruction. For there will be a time when people will not tolerate sound teaching. Instead, following their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves, because they have an insatiable curiosity to hear new things." We can't afford to be slacking off; nobody knows when it will be time to give an account, and we all should want to be found diligently applying ourselves to the Father's business. **2 Timothy 1:2-4**

Saturday, September 23rd, 2023:

American Prodigal

In some ways, I think our country has become very much like the prodigal son. His father was apparently a wealthy man, and both sons had the advantage of enjoying the blessings of this while they were under the authority of their father's house. The younger son, however, was not appreciative of what he had if it meant having to answer to his father, so he demanded his share at once. The father granted his request, and the son promptly squandered his inheritance. It wasn't until he was destitute that he realized what he had forfeited.

We forget sometimes that we have a heritage as citizens in the United States. Our inheritance is the liberty and freedoms which are ours to enjoy, but there are conditions attached to these. The tenets of our founding documents echo our country being established on Biblical principles and a reliance on the providence of divine authority. We've become like a bunch of petulant children who can't see beyond their immediate wants being satisfied. We have some of the best medical care in the world available – we want it for free, and we will shout and demand our “rights” on the street corners and on our ballots. As George Bernard Shaw once quipped, a government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul. The government is not our savior! The best we can hope for is a governing body that is submitted to and guided by the benevolent Father who has given us this country as an inheritance to show forth His goodness – to be a light to the nations.

You've probably heard the expression that everything we need to know we learned in kindergarten. Substitute Sunday School for kindergarten. Jesus loves us, God created the heavens and the earth, this is our Father's world, and He's got the whole world in His hands! Maybe this is why we need to come to Him as children. Where we realize that it's His world and He's the final authority even when we may not totally comprehend His reasoning at the time. Nevertheless, we trust Him to take care of us and realize the futility of thinking we would thrive outside His protection and provision. Even though we may “run away from home” for a season, prayerfully we will come to our senses as a nation. Thank You, Father God, for being such a good and gracious Father. Forgive us for our childish attitudes. Help us to recognize and run from the feeding trough of the pigs before we forfeit our inheritance.

Sunday, September 24th, 2023:

Wonderful Words

If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. - Thumper (Bambi)

Although a recognizable quote and solid advice, the Bible gives instructions to Christ followers that holds so much more. **Ephesians 4:29** "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Worldly wisdom suggests that we stay quiet if we can't be kind. However, because we have the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, admonishes us to speak words that will build others up. Words that would encourage faith and offer grace. Encouragement that would address the current need and provide truth.

1 Thessalonians 3:10 says "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith." Paul knew the Thessalonians were struggling and lacking faith and he desired to come to them and speak words that would benefit their faith in Jesus. Paul's personal letters to churches during the early years of the church communicate how much he desired to be with them and provide blessing to them through his encouragement. **2 Corinthians 1:15** Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace." Paul was confident his conversation would edify God's people.

May we be people that choose to speak words that encourage faith in those around us. Instead of speaking worthless or even corrupt words, would we allow our words to speak hope and life to those around us. I desire, like Paul, to be used by God to supply faith in those around me and that the result of my conversations with others would result in them experiencing a second dose of God's grace.

Lord, give me the ability to not speak when the words that I would choose are unkind, worthless or corrupt. Beyond that, would you allow my words to bring life, to renew faith, to draw people to your grace. I want to be aware of others needs, and speak Truth that would benefit those who are listening. Help the words that I say point people to the hope that is you, Jesus. Amen.

Monday, September 25th, 2023:

God of Second Chances

Have you ever done something that you were so ashamed of you could hardly believe yourself that you were capable of, let alone tell someone else about it? It may even be something that you feel disqualifies you from ever being really used by God because, in your mind, it's just too horrendous. Or maybe it's not that monumental, but you still feel somehow unfit. You've probably heard people say that God doesn't call the qualified – He qualifies the called. If that's just a little too cliché for you, look at some of the great heroes of the Bible. Consider Moses. He was a murderer, and he dishonored God when he struck the rock at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin rather than simply speak to the rock as God had instructed him. In doing so, he showed a lack of faith and trust in God and he took credit for the miracle in the presence of the people. This disqualified him from entering into the Promised Land. But maybe even more unimaginable was when he spent 40 days in the very Presence of God as He hand wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone and then in a fit of rage, dashed them to pieces! These were the originals! Forty days! Personally written by God's own hand! Did God throw up His hands and say, "Seriously?" He simply took Moses back up the mountain for the second printing. And in the closing verses of Deuteronomy we read that since the time that Moses laid hands on Joshua, no prophet had risen in Israel like him, whom the Lord knew face to face. Not a bad legacy, and certainly a testimony to God's favor and blessing and anointing despite the missteps.

None of us is beyond His reach or the depth of His hesed love. Hesed originates from a word that means to bow one's head toward another and signifies a covenant relationship. That's how God loves us. It's how He loves me, and it's how He loves you. He knows our weaknesses and He's patiently waiting for us to come to Him in humility and honesty. If we will simply confess our sins, He Himself will cleanse us and purify us from all unrighteousness. All unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) Paul reminds us in his letter to the church in Ephesus that our minds have been renewed – made new and transformed – by the Holy Spirit. As a result he tells them to, "Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy." (Ephesians 4:23-24) Believe that, and then believe that what He has done is sufficient and His desire is to see you walking in that freedom. His call is for all of us, and it's not a robo-call. It's personal, and He wouldn't be calling if He didn't want you to answer. He's giving you another chance. Give Him a chance.

Tuesday, September 26th, 2023:

Ready to Take the Heat

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah didn't go around flaunting their faith, but neither did they try to hide it. You may know them better as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It began when they were being groomed for service in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and they politely asked to be served vegetables and water rather than dine on the rich king's food and wine. They were reinforcing their resolve to stay true to their one true God and trust in His provision rather than become accustomed to the delicacies of the world, and He came through for them. This prepared them to refuse to bow to the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had erected of himself, even though the alternative was being burned alive. They didn't try to cover up or make excuses for their noncompliance; they simply professed their allegiance to God and placed the outcome in His capable hands. We all need to be willing and prepared to do what is right in the eyes of God even if He doesn't respond the way we may want or expect Him to respond. In the words of Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15) Too many professing Christians are banking on being able to get to Heaven by taking the back roads, and as Charles Spurgeon described it, they hope to skulk into glory in disguise. You can't compromise on the small stuff (like accepting the king's food) and think you'll have the chutzpah to stand when the big challenges come, and they will come. This is why Paul tells us: "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out." (Romans 12:1-2, Message) That way you'll be teflon-coated to protect you when the heat gets turned up!

Wednesday, September 27th, 2023:

Run to Me

“For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand. Saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you.’
“(Isaiah 41:10)

Let me be the first one you run to in times of trouble. I will always be there for you. I will walk through the “fire” with you. Lean on me as your sure foundation. Build your spiritual strength on my word. I am always watching over you. I am a “light to your path.” Your part is not to struggle with anxiety but to trust me for answers even when the situation is darkest. Bring all your cares to me in prayer. I have said “ask and you will receive.” I have given clear instruction in my word to “abide in me”, “to trust me in all your ways”, “to be strong and courageous”, and “to fear not”. Fear is a spirit, and it is not from me. I have given you a “spirit of love, power and a sound mind.” Run to me, I am your helper. Jesus spoke these words: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (**Matthew 11:28 NIV**) Instead of fear or worry seek my presence. In my presence you will find the peace “that surpasses all understanding.” Seek me and I will deliver you from all your fears.

Isaiah 43:2, Isaiah 33:6, Psalm 121:8, Psalm 119:10, 1 Peter 5:7, Matthew 7:7, John 15:4, Proverbs 3:6, Joshua 1:9, 2 Timothy 1:7, Philippians 4:7, Psalms 34:4

Thursday, September 28th, 2023:

Lifestyle Transformation

“Against you, and you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge” (Psalm 51:4).

Confession is simply agreeing with God concerning our sin. Like the parable of the lost son, we must say to the Lord, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you” (Luke 15:21). Then we will hear Him say lovingly to us, “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24). As soon as we confess with a repentant heart, we have His forgiveness! Repentance is when we determine to make a change in our mind and our will that comes out of deep sorrow for sin. It leads to a transformation of lifestyle! David certainly determined to live a life worthy of God’s call upon his life. Read Psalm 51 to hear his heart on the matter.

Loving Father, help me to keep short accounts with You from day to day, so that I am not overcome with sin. May Your Holy Spirit convict me quickly so that I may confess and repent of my sins before You. Thank You for promising to forgive when I come before You with a “broken and contrite heart.”

Harvest Prayer Ministry Published 5/26/2023.

Friday, September 29th, 2023: Bail Out - Baal Out

My mother-in-law used to have a refrigerator magnet that read “A moment on the lips - a lifetime on the hips.” That’s very descriptive of the lure of sin. I personally have an affinity for dark chocolate sea salt caramels. At the moment they seem immensely pleasurable and fulfilling, but the aftermath leaves me feeling guilty and yet lusting for more, both for the momentary high and often also to assuage a feeling of guilt and failure. Having an occasional piece of candy isn’t sinful, but when I use it as a substitute for turning to God in times of need, I’m using it as a poor substitute. In a much broader sense, this could be descriptive of what has happened to our country as it has sought fulfillment in things other than God. Instead, we have pursued Baal! Before you shake your head and dismiss such a ridiculous notion, consider what Jonathan Cahn writes in his new book THE RETURN OF THE GODS.

“So Americans now served and were mastered by the Baals of money, pleasure, success, acceptance, sexual gratification, addiction, work, comfort, the internet, self-fulfillment, selfobsession, and countless other gods and idols - the Baals of the modern world.

Instead of freedom, Americans saw their culture becoming increasingly driven, restless, conflicted, obsessed, and addicted. And the further the nation moved from God, the more powerful the Baalim became. To America, devoid of God, the pursuit of money and success became an unbridled spirit that possessed millions. With Americans devoid of God, the pursuit of pleasure led to a multitude of addictions and self-destruction.”

The name Baal can be translated to mean “lord,” “owner,” and “master.” He was the chief pagan god of the Canaanites, the leader of spirits, and he would become the chief enemy of the God of Israel. He still is, and he’s our enemy as well. He’s the spirit of antichrist. Anytime we place our greater energy and focus on something other than God and His purpose for our life, we’re actually serving Baal. We’re making financial security, pleasure, comfort, escape etc. a higher priority in our lives than that of serving and honoring the King of Kings and Lord of lords. To bring it even closer to home, in the financial district of New York City stands a 7,100 pound bronze sculpture of a charging bull, the symbol of Baal, the god of fertility - as in prosperity or productivity. We even refer to a strong economy as a bull market and praise the power of the “almighty” dollar. Then we use it to turn to sensuality to titillate us and alcohol or pharmaceuticals to numb our pain, only to discover that neither provides adequate and permanent gratification or escape. And Obi Wan Kenobi isn’t going to help us either.

“They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread.” **Deuteronomy 32:17** News flash - Obi Wan Kenobi isn’t going to be able to save us. We need God - He’s the only one who can! “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” **Ephesians 5:12** Lord, show us any areas where we have opened the door to serving the Baals and then help us to kick him out. You sent Jesus to bail us out of our hopeless condition; now it’s our turn to get Baal out so we can once again serve and honor You, our true Lord and Master.

Saturday, September 30th, 2023:

We Can't Earn It

Have you ever felt like you weren't good enough in your relationship with Christ? Or thought you needed to do more to earn your spot in heaven?

Imagine what it must have been like in the early church after Christ had ascended to heaven, the Day of Pentecost occurred, and the disciples were enthusiastically sharing the gospel. In spite of fierce opposition and violence, the church was experiencing massive growth.

But some of the Jews who converted to Christianity came to Antioch from Judea and began teaching the non-Jewish believers that they couldn't be saved if they weren't circumcised as Moses taught. They decided the Gentile Christians weren't "acceptable" in God's eyes unless they looked like Jews and obeyed the law of Moses.

Paul and Barnabas were against this teaching and headed out to Jerusalem to talk to the elders about it.

⁷At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: "Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. ⁸God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. ¹⁰So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? ¹¹We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus." **Acts 15:7-11**

The Jews, who had over 600 moral and ceremonial laws to follow, could not get their heads around God's divine grace. How could these unscrupulous Gentiles waltz into God's kingdom when they hadn't "earned" it and certainly didn't deserve it?

The truth is that none of us deserve God's grace. In fact, we can never behave "good enough" to reach holy perfection. **Romans 3:23**

That's why God sent His only begotten Son to live a perfect sinless life and die a sacrificial death to make perfect atonement for our sin. And His grace is free to anyone who believes in Him because none of us could possibly afford it.

As Paul said in **Galatians 2:16**, "Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law."

