

*Prayer Devotions*  
*February 2024*



**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.

### **Vietnam**

**Persecution Type:** Communist & post-Communist & Clan Oppression, Dictatorial Paranoia, Organized Corruption & Crime

**Main Religion:** Buddhism

**Government:** Communist State

**Leader:** President Nguyen Xuan Phuc

### **Turkmenistan**

**Persecution Type:** Islamic & Clan Oppression, Dictatorial Paranoia

**Main Religion:** Islam

**Government:** Authoritarian Presidential Republic

**Leader:** President Serdar Berdimuhamedow

### **Cuba**

**Persecution Type:** Dictatorial Paranoia, Communist & pos-Communist Oppression, Secular Intolerance

**Main Religion:** Christianity

**Government:** Communist State

**Leader:** President Miguel Diaz-Canel

## **Daily Prayers for February:**

"God loves each of us as if there were only one of us" - Augustine.

### **Thursday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024:**

#### **Gift of Peace**

The holidays are over, and the New Year has commenced. The hustle and bustle of the season has finally settled – or has it? Do you find yourself in an endless cycle of typhoon winds and never having enough time to catch your breath?

Daily I find myself saying “Next week will calm down” and the new week comes, and nothing has calmed down. If anything, more has been placed on my plate. The hustle and bustle of life never ends, there is always something new and peace has seemed to flee my life – but has it or have I forgotten to embrace it? Scripture reminds me that I must embrace God’s word and declare it over my life!

"Peace, I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be troubled or afraid." **John 14:27**

What an amazing promise Jesus has bestowed upon the one who calls on Him. No matter what our eyes see, or the storms faced. Jesus has given us the gift of peace. The problem is not that life is busy and stormy, the problem is that we are not utilizing the gift. It is sitting on the shelf rather than occupying our spirit.

I encourage you to embrace His gift and shift the atmosphere. Speak life over your day, the tasks it holds, and the challenges before you. Invite Jesus, to manage the day and the storms moving one step at a time under the gift of His peace, confident that He will provide all that you need (daily bread) and "keep in perfect peace those whose mind is stayed on You, because they trust in You." **Isaiah 26:3**

What do you need to surrender to Christ today, so you may walk in His perfect peace?

**Prayer:** Father, I thank You for the perfect peace that comes through Jesus, my Lord and Savior. I confess I have left this perfect gift sitting on the shelf and today I surrender to Jesus my worries and my list; trusting that as I walk this day in Christ’s power, I partake of Your peace every moment of the day. Father, thank you for the gift of peace. Amen.

**Blessing:** “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.” 2 Thessalonians 3:16

**Friday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024:**

## **The Cost of Comfort**

We love comfort! Comfort food. Comfortable shoes. 24/7 food delivery. Easy streaming and binge-watching. Easy conversations. And all the latest and greatest gadgets and gizmos that make our lives easier and more comfortable. The list goes on.

While there's nothing inherently wrong with any of these comforts, we must be aware that our focus and dependency on comfort can become a distraction and even lead to sin. When we start chasing the wrong things, our priorities can get all messed up. And even though we don't mean to, we can begin worshipping idols (our comforts) rather than our one true God.

Nowhere in the Bible does it tell us that our number one purpose on this earth is to be pampered and comfortable. In fact, Jesus tells us that in this world we will have trouble but He has overcome the world and in Him, we can have peace. And Paul reminds us to set our minds on things above and not on earthly things. We must allow the Spirit to direct every aspect of our lives.

Jesus also tells us to be generous to the poor, to share the Gospel to all creation, that we **must** love one another and that we must forgive people who sin against us or our Heavenly Father won't forgive us.

None of the things Jesus asked us to do fall under the worldly "comfort" category. In fact, they are impossible to do without God's help. But they are the very reason we are here. The way Jesus lived on earth is the way we should be living.

If we were to list how many worldly comforts we use every day vs. how many times we helped a poor neighbor or shared the Gospel with a friend, or forgave a family member who hurt us – which category would have the longest list?

Does this mean we have to give up all our worldly comforts and forego having any "fun" in our lifetime? Not at all! Breaks from the daily grind, vacations and even our gadgets and gizmos can be used to renew us spiritually. It's how we prioritize them that makes the difference. When our focus is on the things that offer us worldly comfort rather than on the Giver of true comfort and peace, that's when we can fall into the trap of spiritual complacency.

When we have the opportunity to enjoy any of our favorite worldly comforts, let's first give praise and glory to our Heavenly Father for providing us with these opportunities while continuing to fulfill His purpose for our lives.

**John 16:33; Colossians 3:2; Galatians 5:25; Luke 11:41; Mark 16:15; John 13:34; Matthew 6:14-15**

**Saturday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024:**

**Overcoming our Anger with Grace for Ourselves.**

**Ephesians 4:26-27** "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

Anger is a natural emotion, but how we respond to it is crucial. As the apostle Paul stated, we are called to be cautious in our anger, ensuring that it does not lead us into sin. Rather than allowing anger to fester and consume us, we are encouraged to address it promptly. By dealing with our anger in a timely and respectful manner, we prevent it from becoming a foothold for negativity and discord in our lives.

**Prayer:** Father God, in the heat of anger I ask that you calm my spirit and bring me into line with Holy Spirit's peace and guidance that I would respond in a godly manner, with the mind of Christ and not allow the enemy to turn this emotion into a mountain between me and others. Amen.

**Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

**Serving with Compassion**

**Psalms 82:3-4** "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

As followers of Christ, we are called to advocate for and stand alongside those who cannot defend themselves. Our hearts are moved with compassion to defend the rights of the orphaned, the oppressed, and those in difficult circumstances. Let us always seek out ways to bring deliverance and empowerment for those in need, reflecting the heart of our compassionate God in our actions through our serving.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, fill my heart with compassion for those around me. May I reflect the Good Samaritan throughout the day and show the love of Jesus to those you place in my path. Amen.

**Monday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

## **Yellow Lights**

We all know what a yellow light means when we're approaching an intersection. It's the same meaning as the triangular white signs with a red border. They read YIELD RIGHT OF WAY. We know what they mean; the question is, how do we respond? Do we submit to the directive, knowing that it's there to protect not only us but also everyone else on the road? Or do we choose to step on the gas and hope that (1) we can get through before the light turns red, and (2) there aren't any policemen around?

In yielding, it means we are giving up something. We're yielding our right to decide if it's really prudent to forge ahead, even when the caution signs are saying not to. We don't like to yield. We tend to equate it to not being in control, and there's something frightening about that. We want to feel like we have everything under control, but when that is our mindset, we're headed for disaster. Instead, we need to look to the source of all wisdom and authority and power to steer us in the right direction. Of course, you know the answer to that one - Jesus.

Paul spells it out pretty clearly for us in his letter to the church in Philippi. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

**(Philippians 2:5-6)** That's what it means to yield your right of way. Jesus, in His full humanity, even asked the Father if there was any other way. And in His divinity, He knew the answer and simply yielded His rights and His will to the Father's will.

To pass your driver's test, you need to have a working knowledge of the manual. To keep your license, you need to show a respect for the laws of the road that are spelled out in that manual. The same is true for leading a fruitful life in God's kingdom. We need to know what constitutes obedience and yielding to His will and character. Thankfully, He has given us a comprehensive manual that spells it out for us, but it won't do us any good if we don't study it so we know what it says, or worse, if we do know what it says but choose to ignore it. We need to yield what our flesh wants to do to His wise counsel. It will save us from consequences that could range from a slap on the wrist, the loss of certain privileges, or tragedy. Learn to recognize the caution signs He gives us and choose to yield to Him.

**Tuesday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

## **Be Joyful**

There seems to be a bit of confusion at times between being joyful versus being happy. They are not synonymous. Happiness is an emotion based on circumstances, whereas joy is more a state of mind which can transcend and is often experienced in spite of our circumstances. The Greek word for joy is *chara*. It's a noun which describes a feeling of inner gladness, delight or rejoicing that is based on spiritual realities and is independent of what "happens". It's a deep-seated sense of well-being that abides in the hearts of those who know all is well in their relationship with the Lord.

We know that we're three-part beings: we have a physical body, a soul (which includes our mind, will and emotions), and a spirit. Of those three, only the spirit is eternal, and our spirit is what is made in His image. We can experience happiness and pleasure in our soul and body, and there's nothing wrong with that, but we shouldn't allow that to become our primary focus. A Greek study of joy states that it is not only an emotion that comes from favorable circumstances but paradoxically (supernaturally) something which can occur when circumstances are most difficult.

Peter tells us that "...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." (**1 Peter 1:89**) We need to camp out there for a while - our faith is the assurance of things hoped for but not yet seen, and that promise is our eternal salvation! That's our hope for the *future*; Paul gives us a reason to rejoice in what we can experience in the *here and now*. He writes in **Romans 15:13**, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." This is the same power that can not only heal but can raise the dead! How could we not be joyful with that?

We know that God our Father delights in blessing us when we are in fellowship with Him. As Jesus told those who gathered to hear Him, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (**Matthew 7:11**) This provides us with happiness and pleasure - He can prosper us and show us His goodness. But beyond that, we can also find hope in the leaner and darker times, knowing that He has promised to never leave us and that His Holy Spirit is with us to direct our paths and to comfort us. "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (**Psalms 16:11**) This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (**Psalms 118:24**)"

**Wednesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **Blame For Our Shame**

Have you ever seen a child do something they were told not to do and when they got caught, their initial reaction was to run away and hide? And when questioned, they blamed someone else for their disobedience?

If we're honest, this behavior isn't limited to children. In fact, this behavior has been played out since the beginning of humankind.

When God created Adam and placed him in the beautiful Garden of Eden, He gave Adam one command. Adam could freely eat of every fruit in the garden except the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil - the tree that was smack dab in the center of the garden – because disobedience would result in death. God was very clear on that.

We know God said this to Adam before Eve was created but we don't know if God told Eve this command or if she relied on Adam's communication that the fruit of the tree was not to be eaten and the consequences if it was.

What we do know is that when the serpent approached Eve, Adam was with her. Why didn't he stop her from taking that first bite? And why did he then proceed to also take a bite? In fact, they had to walk to the middle of the garden to get the fruit so there was time to come to their senses.

As soon as they both willingly ate from the tree, their eyes were opened to their nakedness and they felt shame. When they heard God walking in the garden, they ran away and hid.

God knew what happened and He knew where they were but He gave them a chance to confess. When He questioned them, they both placed blame for their disobedience.

Adam blamed Eve, but he also blamed God when he said, "The woman You put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then Eve blamed the serpent for deceiving her.

Why do we sometimes hide and/or blame others for our sins? Why do we allow our shame to put distance between ourselves and God? It's not God who leaves us – it's us who leave Him. God will never leave us or forsake us. The Bible tells us if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We don't need to run and hide or place blame for our shame. When we repent, God forgives us ... not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us.

**Genesis 2:15-17; Genesis 3:1-13; Hebrews 13:5; 1 John 1:9**



Thursday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Trust and Obey

We know from the word that God hears our prayers, and in fact He desires to hear from us. However, according to **Proverbs 28:9**, God has no use for the prayers of a person who won't listen to Him. He isn't a vending machine, a rich uncle, or a magic 8-ball. This is not to say that He will turn a deaf ear to those who cry out to Him in crisis when they are truly in desperate need and are willing to humble themselves and put their trust in Him. But prayer is intended to be as much a part of our natural daily routine as eating and sleeping. It's every bit as much about listening as it is asking.

We all probably know someone who only contacts us when they need something. If you don't know of any such person, hopefully you're not that person! And when that person is continually asking for counsel but then refuses to listen and act upon sound advice, you reach a point where you will choose not to waste your time or breath. When James tells us that the fervent prayers of a righteous person are effective, one of the key words is righteous. It doesn't say perfect person, but righteous. That means the person is in right standing with the Father.

We are **declared** righteous through the blood of Jesus when we're saved, and we are **made** righteous as we listen to the Holy Spirit and cooperate with Him. We can't be truly righteous in our own strength. We need the power of the Holy Spirit living in us and working through us as we listen to His guidance and yield our will to His. It's as the old hymn declares, trust and obey because there's no other way to be happy in Jesus. Then we can be assured that God is going to respond to our prayers. "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (**John 15:7**)

**Friday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **A Matter of Trust**

It would be an understatement to say that we have all had our share of difficulties and trials in the past few years. Some trials have been greater than others, and some of us have had greater burdens to bear, but we are assured that there's nothing we can or will ever face that He has not already equipped us to handle. We also know that He will cause everything, the good and the not-so-good, to work together to bring about the ultimate good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. We should also know that it will facilitate our becoming conformed to the image of Jesus, who had His fair share of trials.

**(Romans 8:28-29)**

We are here to reflect His glory, and it can be said that the greater the trial, the greater the testimony. When we walk in confidence, not denying the trial but rather defying its power over us, we become beacons of hope to those who have no such reassurance. It's a time of tension between what we're *walking through* and what we're *looking forward to* in the journey. When we can come to view the trial as a blessing and an opportunity rather than a threat, we'll be able to understand that there will be a natural tension created.

The Israelites struggled with the tension of leaving the familiarity of Egypt, even if they were slaves there, and the uncertainty of a wilderness experience. This was uncharted territory for them, and they longed to return to the known captivity rather than deal with the tension of the unknown. Don't allow the harsh reality of the fact that only two of the original desert travelers were allowed to enter into the Promised Land be lost to you.

Consider the magnitude of the testimony to God's faithfulness in delivering these former slaves from bondage to blessing! Whatever you may be facing, praise Him for His ultimate purpose and provision in walking with you every step of the way. Remember, it is how we respond in the tension that determines our growth. We must ask and allow Him to reveal to us what He is in the process of leading us out of so we can fully appreciate and praise Him for where He is taking us. "With all your heart you must trust the LORD and not your own judgment. Always let him lead you, and he will clear the road for you to follow."

**(Proverbs 3:5-6 Contemporary English Version)**

**Saturday, February 10th, 2024:**

### **Step Out of Your Boat**

Sometimes when God moves it's like a fast current and you naturally drift with the water as He pulls you in the right directions. Other times it's like the faintest whisper and you have to be intentional to quiet your surroundings, slow your mind, and listen to His voice. As beautiful as both are, you can never predict which voice God is going to use but we have to be ready to move with the tide rather than try to paddle upstream.

We need to become comfortable in the uncomfortable because that's where we grow. We need to be willing to look wild and crazy for our faith, keeping wisdom in line. We need to be unafraid of God's yes...even when it seems impossible to us.

Peter had no idea, when he woke up that morning, that he would walk on water (**Matthew 14:22-33**). He just stepped out in faith and pushed on towards Jesus.

It was only in that moment of taking his eyes off Jesus did he become overwhelmed by the waves around him. When he did start to sink, who was there to catch him? Jesus!

Our growth is wholly contingent on our willingness to withstand something uncomfortable. If I chose to stay in what was comfortable, I would stagnate or even begin to deteriorate. Comfort can easily become the killer of growth if we allow it.

It would have been much easier for Peter to just let Jesus walk to the boat and prove to everyone it was actually him and not a ghost...but that wasn't enough for Peter.

Now that moment of being uncomfortable might look different for everyone and in every season. For some it might be finally taking that step towards healing you know you need to do but haven't wanted to face those hard memories. It might be cutting something or someone out of your life that is only bringing you down. It could be challenging yourself to do something new or talking to that person you know God has been putting on your heart. For all of us, it's probably dealing with that conflict we've been avoiding or ignoring for awhile.

The moment, the journey, that initial stepping out of the boat is going to be different for everyone...but you never know the long-term impact it will have on, not just you, but the people around you.

**Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **Going Deeper**

Most of us can look back at times when we were given a reading assignment and we breezed through it, only to realize that we had no idea what we had just read. We can see the words on the page without actually taking in any information. There are levels of learning in how we deal with the information we view. That's why I have a scrap of paper that I sealed with packing tape as a bookmark in my Bible. On it are written the words - eyes to see, ears to hear, a mind to comprehend, a heart to receive, and a will to obey.

Obviously, the first level is actually opening my Bible and "seeing" the words on the page. However, I need to be intentional in reading rather than simply scanning them; I need to try to "hear" what's being presented. The next level is seeking to understand what's behind the words I'm reading. I could read a book on astrophysics without ever gaining anything from it because I haven't studied that science, and I can honestly say that it isn't something on my bucket list. I have to want to understand or the reading is pointless.

The last two pieces of my reminder to myself are the most important. The first is having a heart to receive what I feel the Lord is saying to me. This will be dependent upon the level of my faith. Do I fully believe that He is omniscient, omnipotent, and the author of all truth? We read in (**Hebrews 11:1**) that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It's easy to believe in something we can easily see right in front of us, but He asks us to believe what we can't see or logically figure out on our own. And there will be tests! Thankfully, James reassures us that when that happens, when we're under pressure, the level of our faith-life is forced into the open. When we don't fool ourselves about what we believe but have to walk it out, it matures our faith and builds it up to fill in any gaps.

That brings us to the final, crucial element - having the will to obey. We can read the word, understand it, and even believe that it's true. Too often, however, we're eager to believe that it is true, but for someone else. God doesn't ask us to be good attendees. He asks us to be participants, and that requires our faith to prompt us to act on what we profess. Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount challenged the crowd with the words, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you who he is like." Jesus goes on to liken that person as one who is building upon a solid foundation. Make your foundation deep and sure. Eyes to see, ears to hear, a mind to comprehend, a heart to receive, and a will to obey. That will render you "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (**James 1:4**)

**Monday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

**Forgiveness in Anger's Wake**

**Colossians 3:13** "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

In the aftermath of anger, forgiveness holds the power to heal and restore. As we navigate our human emotions, let us remember to always be quick to forgive those who have caused us anger or pain. Just as the Lord has forgiven us, may we mirror His grace by releasing our anger and embracing a spirit of forgiveness toward others.

**Prayer:**

Father, lead me in the path of righteousness. Please take over my heart and mind when the spirit of anger rises in me. May I have a cool head and address this emotion without sinning. Center me in my spirit as I face adversity. Amen.

**Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

**The Generosity of Service**

**Matthew 25:40** "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

When we serve and minister to those in need, scripture tells us, we are ministering to Christ Himself. Through our generosity and service, we have the privilege of directly impacting the lives of those who may be unable to help themselves. Every act of kindness, whether big or small, carries immense significance in the eyes of God, for it is an expression of our love for Him and His children.

**Prayer:**

Father create in me a heart that sees all humankind as Your creation and extend my hand of service and support in this broken world. Father, break my heart for what breaks Yours and use me as a catalyst of revival to humanity. Amen.

**Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **A Love Story**

Sometimes I forget how deeply I'm loved; maybe you do too. Pastor Robbers Morris has a message on the parable in **Matthew 13:44** of a treasure hidden in a field that was an eye opener for me. It's a one verse parable that is packed with profound beauty and meaning. If you're not familiar, a man finds a great treasure buried in a field, hides it, and sells all he has to purchase the field. A common interpretation is that the treasure is salvation, and we are the ones who find it, but as Pastor Morris points out, the kingdom of God and our salvation are not something we can find on our own, hide, or buy. It's not for sale!

If you go back a few verses, Jesus is explaining to His disciples that the field is the world, and He goes on to explain that the one who sows good seed is Himself. When you apply that to the parable of the pearl of great price, you realize that you/we are the pearl! Jesus became a man who came to "find" us, and He gave all He had - His very life - to redeem us. (**1 Corinthians 6:20**) Remember, He bought the entire field - the world - in order that we might become His. For God so loved the world! But we need to accept His free gift. We're familiar with **John 3:16** and God's demonstration of pure and selfless love, but the gift is only for those who choose to believe in Him. Paul reminds us, "If you *declare with your mouth*, 'Jesus is Lord, 'and *believe in your heart* that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'" (**Romans 10:9** emphasis added)

When we consider the profound magnitude of the love He has for us, how could we not accept it? And it's His free gift to us...free to us, but at great cost to Him. Yet He offers it to any who will accept. It should be the easiest thing in the world to love one who loves us so deeply, purely, unconditionally, and eternally. And He's seeking us, inviting us to accept His love. Don't be deceived like Eve was in the Garden and be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Him. (**2 Corinthians 11:3**) He has already told us how precious we are to Him. Believe it and receive it as the best Valentine you'll ever get.

**Thursday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

**Love in Action**

**1 John 3:18** "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

True love is not just expressed through words, but through tangible acts of kindness, compassion, and service. Let our love be evident in our actions, reaching out to those in our families, friends, workplaces, and those in need. By living out love in our everyday lives, we show the truth of God's love for all humanity.

**Prayer:**

Father, place in my heart love and action. Show me today how I can make a difference in someone's life and give me the creative action to truly love people. Slow me down that I may see my surroundings and move according to the love of Jesus. Amen.

**Friday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

**New Beginnings**

**Isaiah 43:19** "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

In life, there are moments when we feel the need for a fresh start, a new beginning. It could be after a period of struggle, loss, or simply the desire for a new chapter. The promise of God's Word is that He is constantly doing new things in our lives. His plans for us are not bound by the past, but they are always filled with hope and purpose, for today and our future.

God brings new opportunities and blessings into our lives. While we may not always know it, God is at work, paving a way for us even when our souls dip. His grace flows through our wilderness, bringing life and renewal.

Let us always hold on to the promise of God's faithfulness. Let us always trust that He is making a way for us, so embrace God's new work in our lives. Let us open our hearts to His leading and rejoice in the hope of His promises. With God, every new beginning is filled with His love, grace, and endless possibilities.

**Saturday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

## **Fear is a Liar**

Fear can come in many forms. There's fear of flying, fear of failure, fear of the unknown, even fear of clowns. With what's going on around us, fear of the future is not uncommon. What if the elections are questionable? What if our economy tanks? What then? These are legitimate concerns, but we needn't allow them to enslave us to fear because no matter what the future holds, Jesus is still on the throne.

Rather than allowing the darkness around us to consume our attention, we need to become more aware of what the Lord is doing and then determine to partner with Him in bringing about His kingdom purposes. He has told us through the prophets and through the writers of the New Testament what to expect in both time and eternity, so whenever we see the fulfillment of such we should be encouraged and rejoice that what He says is true and He can be trusted. We may not know exactly what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future.

It isn't going to be easy, but then anything of incomparable value rarely is. Jesus bore the shame and the agony of the cross because of the joy set before Him. Even though He was fully God on this earth, He was also fully human and even asked if it might be possible to accomplish the goal without having to experience the cross. We can relate; none of us wants to have to endure persecution or pain. Fear would tell us to take the low road - any road that would lead us away from the testing.

Fear is a four-letter word, but there's another four-letter word that would tell us otherwise. It's love. For God so loved the world. Jesus knew that on the other side of the cross there was victory over sin and death and redemption for those He loved. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. **(1 Corinthians 13:7)** "There is no fear in love [dread does not exist]. But perfect (complete, full-grown) love drives out fear, because fear involves [the expectation of divine] punishment, so the one who is afraid [of God's judgment] is not perfected in love [has not grown into a sufficient understanding of God's love]." **(1 John 4:18 Amplified Bible)**

Our only legitimate fear is standing before a holy God if we haven't honored Him with our lives. Any other fears we have are a lie from the father of lies. We may have concerns, but those we lay at the foot of the cross where Jesus claimed victory. "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." **(Philippians 4:6-7 New Living Translation)**

And a final note - "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear..." **(Psalm 46:1-2a)**



**Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

## **Death and Taxes**

It's that time of year when we've received the necessary documents to file our taxes, and now we're just in the process of getting our personal records in order. How it all comes together will determine if we can celebrate the final assessment or cringe at having to write a check. In a letter written to Jean-Baptiste Le Roy in 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." There are three flaws in that statement. First, we are witnessing the dissolution of the Constitution at an alarming rate. Second, there are loopholes that allow some to avoid having to pay any taxes despite a healthy income. (It's sometimes referred to as cooking the books.) But the potentially fatal flaw is that there are only two things that are truly inevitable: death and judgment!

"And just as it is appointed *and* destined for all men to die once and after this [comes certain] judgment," (**Hebrews 9:7 Amplified Bible**) There aren't any loopholes, and for those who think they can somehow dodge the bullet or debate their way around the inevitable, they're what's going to wind up being cooked. Just look around and you see that there are quite a few indications that we could be called to make an account at any time. With that knowledge, we should all be paying attention to where we've been investing our resources and whether we're being good stewards of them. Are we looking to our bank accounts or the government to secure a favorable future? They can help for the short term, and God doesn't condemn wise handling of finances. Neither does He expect us to play no part in determining what kind of government we live under or how we respond to it. What He does expect is for us to make Him our first priority and to reflect that in how we manage what He has blessed us with: time, talents, finances, and spheres of influence. When our eyes are on Him and we're seeking His kingdom purposes first, all these other things will be taken care of. (**Matthew 6:31-33**) It's not too late to reprioritize so when "D" day comes we won't fear the judgment.

**Monday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **The Power of Faith**

Do you ever feel like everything around you seems to be crumbling and your own resources are miserably inadequate? What we need to come to grips with is the fact that in our own strength, we **are** inadequate! It is in those moments that we realize the magnitude of the gift of faith we have been given in Jesus. He is the author and perfecter of our faith, and as such we need to understand that sometimes greater faith is not in starting something new but rather in staying right where God has placed us. He didn't mess up when He decided when and where we would be born, what our particular abilities would be, and how He wanted to use us to build His kingdom.

Remember: Paul told the men on a sinking ship to stay on board or they would not be saved; the disciples were told after the trauma of the crucifixion to stay in Jerusalem until they received power through the gift of the Holy Spirit; and Jesus was mocked and told to come down from the cross and do something great. Instead: Not a single person on the ship was lost; the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and proceeded to turn the world upside down; and Jesus stayed where He was and did the greatest miracle of all time.

No matter how much we may desire change when the circumstances are not what we expected, not what we asked for, or seemingly hopeless; these are the times when we need more than ever to lean into our faith in Him and diligently seek direction from Him before we do anything. Then listen in faith – also defined as confidence, trust, assurance, reliance, belief, conviction, loyalty, devotion. Remember that without faith, it's impossible to please God because whoever comes to Him has to believe that He is, in fact, God and He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (**Hebrews 11:6**) The good news is that whoever is born of God overcomes the world, and the victory is our faith. (**1 John 5:4**) It isn't how much faith, but in whom we place that faith. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move." (**Matthew 17:20**)

**Tuesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **Four-Letter Words**

The idea of four-letter words carries a very negative connotation. We're not supposed to use those words! It occurred to me that wait is a four-letter word, and although it isn't considered to be foul language, for most of us it could rank right up there. We don't like to wait. Yet there's also an adage that good things come to those who wait. So is waiting a biblical precept?

Isaiah seemed to think so. The Holy Spirit prompted him to write, "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him." (**Isaiah 64:4**) And King David added reassurance with the words, "Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes." (**Psalm 37:7**) We are certainly witnessing wicked schemes increasingly being carried out in our cities and around the world, so what does it mean for us to rest in Him and wait patiently?

What I don't think it means is to do nothing. When the Lord told Joshua how to conquer Jericho, the instructions were to be willing to obey His voice, even if it seemed like a ridiculous battle plan. Do you think those who were defending Jericho felt threatened by a bunch of migrants marching around the well-fortified walls of the city? Do you think maybe there were taunts directed at the Israelites? Do you think after four or five days they might have questioned the plan? But God simply asked them to do what He asked while they waited for Him to act.

In **Acts 1:4** Jesus commanded the disciples to wait for what the Father had promised - the Holy Spirit. Wait can sometimes feel like the proverbial four-letter word. But remember that there's another four-letter word - love - and it's a command. We are commanded to love one another, even as He has loved us (**John 15:12**), but that we need to be willing to wait for the positive outcome because it's one of the fruits of the Spirit, and like any other fruit, it is developed when we abide in Him. Fruit doesn't instantaneously appear. It has to be intentionally nurtured. But through the grace of God in Christ, in everything we have been enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ has been confirmed in us, *so that we are not lacking in any gift as we eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (paraphrase of **1 Corinthians 1:4-7**) I would say that is something well worth waiting for!

**Wednesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024:**

**Persevere**

It would be an understatement to say that we have all had our share of difficulties and trials in the past months. Some have been greater than others, and some have had greater burdens to bear, but we are assured that there's nothing we can or will ever face that He has not already equipped us to handle. We also know that He will cause everything, the good and the not-so-good, to work together in collaboration for the ultimate benefit or good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. We are here to reflect His glory, and it can be said that the greater the trial, the greater the testimony. When we walk in confidence, not denying the trial but rather defying its power over us, we become beacons of hope to those who have no such reassurance. It's a time of tension between what we're walking *through* and what we are looking forward *to* in the journey. When we can come to view the trial as a blessing and an opportunity rather than a threat, we will be able to understand that there will be a natural tension created. The Israelites struggled with the tension of leaving the familiarity of Egypt, even if they were slaves there, and the uncertainty of a wilderness experience. They weren't used to it and as a result they longed to return to the known captivity rather than deal with the tension of the unknown. Don't let the harsh reality of the fact that only two of the original desert travelers were allowed to enter into the Promised Land be lost to you. But imagine the magnitude of the testimony to God's faithfulness in delivering them from bondage to blessing! Whatever you may be facing, praise Him for His ultimate purpose and provision in walking with you every step of the way. Remember it is how we respond in the tension that determines our growth. Ask and allow Him to reveal to you what He is in the process of leading you out of so you can fully appreciate and praise Him for where He is taking you.

**Proverbs 3:5-6; Romans 8:18, 28; James 1:2-4, 12**

**Thursday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024:**

## **Peace That Transcends All Understanding**

It's impossible to turn on the TV or scroll social media without reading or watching terrifying updates about what's happening in our world. Anxiety and depression are at an all-time high, and our future feels so uncertain.

Staying informed is important but we can't allow fear and negativity to consume us. So how do we balance all the frightening headlines that are bombarding us every minute of the day without getting caught up in the division and fear?

We rely on the One and Only solution!

Our future is secured by the hope and redemption available to us in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! He promises to give us peace when we face troubles and when we are afraid. He has overcome the world, and He gives us His peace. And His peace transcends all human understanding.

You might be thinking that His peace might work for others but it's not working for you. I know that helpless feeling because I've felt that way too. Fear, doubts, and anxiety crept into my heart and mind when I wasn't intentionally guarding them. Without even realizing it, we can allow the voices of the world to penetrate our soul and find ourselves getting swept up in the frenzy.

When we take our eyes off of Jesus and focus on world events, we leave ourselves wide open for the enemy to enter. This is a spiritual battle and one we shouldn't take lightly. Paul warns us in Ephesians that we are wrestling against the powers of this dark world. (Ephesians 6:12)

How do we prepare for this spiritual battle? With intentional and consistent prayer and consumption of God's Word. In the Scriptures, God provides the roadmap for this journey called life. The more we immerse ourselves in the Bible, the more God will reveal Himself to us and His plans for us! And the more we pray, our relationship with Him becomes more intimate.

This isn't a one and done scenario. It's like eating. We can't eat a meal once a week or a few times a year and expect it to keep us nourished and functioning at our best.

Rather than turning to the TV or social media for worldly doom and gloom, we should be on our knees and in the Word. Every remedy for our fears, anxieties and worries points to Jesus Christ. He is our Prince of Peace.

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

**John 14: 27; John 16:33; Philippians 4:7; Ephesians 6:12; Isaiah 9:6; Numbers 6:24-26**

**Friday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024:**

### **He's a God of Redemption**

There is such a beautiful picture of God's mercy and redemptive nature in the genealogy of Jesus. In the first chapter of Matthew, we find the mention of just four women in Jesus' lineage. (side note – mentioning women at all in a genealogy was unheard of in those times) The first is Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah. She was widowed to two of his sons, both of whom God took because they were evil, and she was then betrayed by Judah who had promised her his younger son but had no intention of honoring that pledge. She disguised herself as a temple prostitute and Judah went in to her and conceived Perez who is the next in line in the lineage of Messiah.

Next is Rahab, the prostitute resident of Jericho who hid the spies and was thus spared when the city was destroyed. She married Salmon and gave birth to Boaz. Boaz redeemed Ruth, the Moabite (Gentile) widow and daughter-in-law of Naomi. Ruth gave birth to Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. The final woman mentioned is Bathsheba who became David's wife after he engaged in an adulterous relationship with her, got her pregnant, and then had her husband Uriah killed. She became the mother of Solomon.

Each of these women had a questionable past. In many churches today they would be looked down upon as "less than" and would not be given any position of importance in the ministry. Yet they are specifically singled out as the ones God chose to honor in naming them in the lineage of the Messiah. That should be a compelling reminder to us that He is a God of mercy, redemption, and second chances. Nothing in our past has the power to derail our future if we allow Him to be in control and trust Him to bring it all together according to His divine purpose.

He calls us by name. "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine." He will work all situations we face for good when we are called according to His purpose. (**Romans 8:28**) When we humble ourselves under His mighty hand and according to His purposes, He will exalt us at the proper time. (**1 Peter 5:6**) He truly is our Redeemer.

**Saturday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **Learning to Lean In**

I've always liked the axiom (accepted truth) that God had a reason for giving us two ears and only one mouth. Think of how many arguments could be averted if people were twice as prone to listening as they were to putting in their two cents worth. Unfortunately, when a difference of opinion arises, most of us already have a firm grip on our own viewpoint and are convinced that it's the correct one. What we need to consider is that the other person undoubtedly feels exactly the same way.

James explains the two ears/one mouth design in telling us that we need to be ***quick to hear*** and ***slow to speak***. When we take the time to take that deep breath before responding, it's giving us time to think as well as possibly averting an escalation that could lead to anger. James goes on to remind us that the anger of man doesn't achieve the righteousness of God. (**James 1:19-20**) I especially like the way The Message puts it. "Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God's righteousness doesn't grow from human anger."

In his book *Grace in the Gray*, Mike Donehey writes, "Before we do anything else, we must learn the art of making room by leaning in. If we are to love in the gray spaces - the places where our arguments find justified footing on either side - curiosity and kindness must lead the way. Our desire to be heard must not overpower our need to hear what others have to say. Our desire to be heard must not overshadow our need to understand others." And Solomon puts into perspective the trap we are falling into when we're more concerned with being heard than with hearing. "A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind." (**Proverbs 18:2**) Let's learn to lean in rather than pull away. Not only might we learn something, but we could also find ourselves building bridges in our relationships rather than blowing them up!

**Sunday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

**Praise the Beloved**

*In the Beloved, I am accepted and free.*

*No need to please others, only follow His plea.*

*When I walk with my Father in all that He wills,*

*I bring delight to His heart and that is all that I need.*

*The world may not get me, reject me, and flee,*

*but my Father in Heaven will never leave me.*

*I seek to know Him more each day;*

*As I submit to Him, He directs my steps in every way.*

***Praise the Beloved – Yahweh!***

**- Author Unknown**

**Prayer:**

Holy Spirit reveal to me Father's will for today. Lead me to think, speak and respond according to His truth and purpose revealed. May I be His messenger and bring delight to His heart. May I honor and glorify His name, His power and magnificent love. May I be known as Enoch was – as one who pleases God. One with extraordinary faith sincerely seeking and fulfilling Father's will. Today, I choose to find my delight and true pleasure in Yahweh – my Lord – my Savior – my Redeemer – my Life. Amen.

**John 8:28-29; Hebrews 11:5-6; Psalm 37:4**



**Monday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **Developing Discipline**

Discipline. Not usually one of our favorite words, but without it we'll never be able to reach our full potential. Discipline is defined as instruction and exercise designed to train proper conduct or action, and the training effect of experience, adversity, etc. In layman's terms, we need to go through things and learn from them in order to be properly trained in how we conduct ourselves. You've probably heard the definition of insanity as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results! Mindless, fruitless repetition isn't discipline - it's just dumb.

One of the harder disciplines to learn is that of intentionally responding versus instinctively reacting in the flesh to situations. We need to develop the discipline to not react in the moment and to also learn from the mistakes we make "in the moment." As Pastor Steven Furtick puts it, "Never give up what you want the most for what you want now." We have to be willing to submit ourselves to choosing what God is showing us and how He is leading us rather than what we think will satisfy our own ideas of what will be fulfilling. My mother-in-law had a refrigerator magnet that read - a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips.

Discipline has everything to do with our decisions "in the moment." Every time we give in to the temptation to relax or ignore what we know are God's standards in order to do what "feels good" in the moment, we are weakening our resolve to achieve the higher goals which we know will be far more rewarding. Temptations are like termites in the timbers of our temple.

Paul urged the Corinthian believers with, "...let's make a break with everything that defiles or distracts us, both within and without. Let's make our entire lives fit and holy temples for the worship of God." (**2 Corinthians 7:1 The Message**) And the way we can accomplish that is by saying no to the moment by keeping our eyes on the prize. Paul likens it to running a race. When you're in training and when you're running in a race, you know what your ultimate goal is. For that reason, you don't plan your route to go past Krispy Kreme so you can stop in on your way. You shed the unnecessary baggage and stay on course. Don't give up what you want *most* for what you want *now*. It just isn't worth it, but He is! (**1 Corinthians 9:25-27**)

**Tuesday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

## **Jesus Christ Unveiled**

As a youngster, I grew up in a church that consistently preached the End of Times. I recall crying myself to sleep because I was so fearful that the Lord would return and I wouldn't make the rapture because I didn't put my toys away like I was supposed to.

That fear stayed with me into my adult life so I kept God at arm's length. I was exhausted from living in fear and convincing myself that since I couldn't stay perfect to make it to heaven, I might as well start living my life my own way rather than according to God's plan.

It wasn't until later that God revealed Himself to me through a book about ... the End of Times, ironically enough! Initially all my childhood fears came rushing forward but I continued reading and digging deeper with a newfound hunger. It was like the flood gates opened, and I finally realized that Revelation's main theme is the unveiling of Jesus Christ!

His identity is revealed to show us that through the victory of His death and resurrection, Christ holds all authority. Revelation reveals Him in His present glory. He only speaks His Father's words. He intercedes for us and releases mighty power to us. And He is the Ruler of the Kings of the earth.

Scary images and allegories aside, when we allow the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds to receive God's truth, the Revelation of Jesus Christ is unveiled IN us, not just TO us. And when we acknowledge that Christ dwells in us, we have hope of His glory no matter what happens in the physical realm.

It is up to us to seek His truth. God conceals the revelation of His Word in the hiding place of His glory. But the honor of kings is revealed by how they thoroughly search out the deeper meaning of all that God says. He delights when we seek Him with all our hearts. His Word is full of the Spirit and life.

God is our refuge and strength. He tells us not to fear though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. The LORD Almighty is with us.

We don't need to avoid reading Revelation because of fear-based misinterpretations and speculations about when and how Jesus is returning and if we will suffer or be spared. Revelation is powerful and dynamic and allows us the opportunity to encounter Christ and His glory in our current circumstances.

The same Spirit who inspired the book will unveil its rich mysteries to those who trust Him.

**Revelation; Proverbs 25:2; John 6:63; Psalm 46:1-2, 7**

**Wednesday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

### **Time for a Fill-up**

We read in **Acts 13:52** that the disciples were *continually* filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

If something is continual versus continuous it means that it's repeated rather than uninterrupted. So why did they have to be *continually* filled? In **1 Corinthians 6:17-19** Paul reminds us that the one who joins himself with Christ is one spirit with Him. He goes on to say that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in us. So why do we need continual filling? Wasn't once enough?

It's true that if we've accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit in us, but Paul also warned the Thessalonians that it is possible to quench the Spirit. Quench - to subdue or extinguish. That would be the equivalent of having a roaring campfire that is keeping the wild animals at bay and is also protecting you from hypothermia, and you decide to throw buckets of water on it. Why would anyone ever knowingly do anything so foolish?

A logical question, then, would be how do we quench the Spirit. **1 Thessalonians 5:20** tells us not to despise prophetic utterances or treat them with contempt. In other words, don't treat lightly, ignore, or mock words from God. Don't be gullible and believe everything you hear, but be like the Bereans who "were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." **Acts 17:11** If we aren't being intentional and mindful about what we take in, we could wind up diluting the Spirit's power in us.

We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and our spiritual life requires intention, cultivating, and regular replenishment the same way our physical body does. If we are going to affect positive change in our own lives and in what's going on around us, it's going to require more than an occasional appetizer and a 30 minute workout once a week. You can tell a healthy tree by the fruit it produces, and you can ascertain the health of the Spirit within you by the evidence of its fruit. If you feel your spiritual life is lacking power, it might be time for a fill-up.

**Thursday, February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

**Right where I Am**

Do you ever feel like everything around you seems to be crumbling and your own resources are miserably inadequate? What we need to come to grips with is the fact that in our own strength, we **are** inadequate! It is in those moments that we realize the magnitude of the gift of faith we have been given in Jesus. He is the author and perfecter of our faith, and as such we need to understand that sometimes greater faith is not in starting something new but rather in staying right where God has placed us. He didn't mess up when He decided when and where we would be born, what our particular abilities would be, and how He wanted to use us to build His kingdom.

Remember Paul told the men on a sinking ship to stay on board or they would not be saved. The disciples were told after the trauma of the crucifixion to stay in Jerusalem until they received power through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was mocked and told to come down from the cross and do something great; instead He stayed where He was and did the greatest miracle of all time.

No matter how much we may desire change when the circumstances are not what we expected, not what we asked for, or seemingly hopeless; these are the times when we need more than ever to lean into our faith in Him and diligently seek direction from Him before we do anything. Then listen in faith – also defined as confidence, trust, assurance, reliance, belief, conviction, loyalty, devotion. You can most assuredly have faith in Him because great is His faithfulness!

**Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 11:6, 12:1-3; 1 John. 5:4**