

Prayer Devotions

March 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.

Niger

Persecution Type: Islamic & Clan Oppression, Organized Corruption & Crime

Main Religion: Islam

Government: Semi-Presidential Republic

Leader: President Mohamed Bazoum

Morocco

Persecution Type: Islamic Oppression, Dictatorial Paranoia

Main Religion: Islam

Government: Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy

Leader: King Mohammed VI

Bangladesh

Persecution Type: Dictatorial Paranoia, Islamic Oppression, Religious Nationalism, Ethno-religious Hostility

Main Religion: Islam

Government: Parliamentary Republic

Leader: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed

Daily Prayers for March:

"Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain. What was once foolishness to us—a crucified God—must become our wisdom and our power and our only boast in this world." - John Piper

Friday, March 1st, 2024:

Different Kingdoms

Someone recently shared in a prayer group about the importance of “staying on the right side of the white line” as an analogy of preserving Biblical integrity. It made me think about some time spent in the UK and needing to be aware of different rules of the road when you’re in a different country, or in this case, a different kingdom. We need to understand that it’s a spiritual guideline for us, and there are two kingdoms, each with its own set of rules.

As Christ followers, we should all be aware of where the white line is and which side we’re supposed to stay on. However, those who are of a different kingdom can’t really be expected to abide by or even probably know what all the principles for navigation on the road of life are in the kingdom of the one who is the Master Architect, Secretary of Transportation, and ultimately the Supreme Commander in Chief of every kingdom on earth. We have a responsibility for the wellbeing of everyone concerned to lovingly point out to them how dangerous it is for everyone when not everyone is operating in compliance to the same owner’s manual. Consider how many fatal accidents have occurred on our roads due to wrong way drivers!

Unfortunately, there are always going to be those who insist on retaining their original citizenship and abiding by the dictates of that kingdom. That would be the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan. God gives everyone the choice, but there’s no such thing as a dual citizenship in the spiritual realm. All we can do is maintain our adherence to the “rules of the road” as they pertain to His kingdom, be mindful that we need to always be aware of the dangers inherent to those operating under an opposing set of rules, and be ready to both demonstrate and explain the advantages to be found in following His statutes for navigating safely and avoiding certain death. He is, after all, the Creator of all things (including which lane to be in) and He is the *only* way, the *only* truth, and His way leads to eternal life.

John 14:6; Proverbs 14:12

Saturday, March 2nd, 2024:

The Blue Square

With the ongoing war in Palestine, we've seen a disturbing rise in false and hateful rhetoric against the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. To add to my frustration over the growing bias and the push by people who should know better than to fuel the prejudice, I saw a brief ad on my TV screen with a blue square and the slogan - Stand Up to Jewish Hate. I wasn't sure what the message was implying, but because of the typical leftist bent of the media, I feared the worst.

However, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the blue square is an emoji that represents a campaign founded by Robert Kraft, an American businessman who is the CEO of the Kraft Group and owner of NFL's New England Patriots. The intent is to bring awareness to antisemitism and hatred against the Jewish people, and one of the first high profile places it appeared was on *The Voice*. My first reaction was, really? *The Voice*? But then it sank in that the God of creation will often choose unlikely venues to make His purposes known. He can use any "voice" He wants.

The host of the program, Carson Daly, explained that interestingly the emoji takes up a mere 2.4% of the TV screen (which is the size of the Jewish population in the US), and yet the Jewish people are the victims of 55% of all religious hate crimes in this country. Does that shock you? One would have thought that other religions are far more persecuted based on media coverage. That's because Satan has always been opposed to God's chosen people and any who would choose to stand with them and with Him. One of his tactics is to keep our focus elsewhere.

Our response to the positive message of the blue square should be one of praise and thanksgiving that there are still those who are willing to take a bold stand for the nation of Israel. God made it very clear to Abraham that He would make him a great nation (the future nation of Israel) and promised him, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." **Genesis 12:3** And in **Psalms 122:6** David writes, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they be secure who love you!"

We have to remember that Israel is still the apple of His eye, the Jewish people are still His chosen, and we are blessed to be those who have been graciously grafted in and adopted into His family. The campaign is called #StandUptoJewishHate. May we always remember to stand with Israel and pray for the peace of Jerusalem that we might all be secure in You, Lord, and You alone. The ultimate battle is Yours, and we choose to stand with You.

Sunday, March 3rd, 2024:

Decision-Making Wisdom

How often do we make a snap decision or say something hurtful based solely on our emotions? And how often do we regret the outcome resulting from that action or those words when we've had time to reflect?

Through intentional prayer and preparation, we can discover ways to navigate the decision-making process that help us prevent the mistakes we make when we're in an emotionally charged state of mind.

In Psalm 37, David shares valuable insights that teach us what steps to take so we can make wise decisions when facing difficult situations.

Trust in the Lord and do good. God sees the whole picture; we don't. So, we need to do what's right according to Scripture no matter what others are doing.

Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. As we slow down and stop rushing our decisions, we can dwell in God's faithfulness where he keeps us safe from harmful consequences.

Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. When we go to God first and keep our eyes on Jesus and follow His example in our decision-making, He will reward us.

Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him. He knows what we need far better than we know what we need! It's important for us to know the difference between our wants and our needs. A child might think he needs candy for breakfast but as a wise parent, we know it's what he wants and definitely not what he needs.

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. This is a tough one in our fast-paced, instant-everything world. As we settle our minds and become quiet before the Lord, He will give us the perspective we need to make good decisions.

Do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. God doesn't want us to compare ourselves to others. This will only lead to anxiety and doubt. It may look as those who are following the worldly ways are winning but God tells us that is a lie.

Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. David is referring to sinful anger, not God-oriented righteous anger. He is encouraging us not to compare and become envious that "they" have what we want. Anger will never lead us to the outcome we desire.

For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. As we fix our hearts on the promises of God, we can rest knowing that we will receive the

ultimate reward – eternity with Him! **Psalm 37:3-5, 7-9**

Monday, March 4th, 2024:

A Broken Heart

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. (John 14;1)

Jesus warned us ahead of time that we would face many hard circumstances in life.

Sometimes we are totally overwhelmed, and our heart is crushed. God is sovereign and He already knows all the events of our lives before they even take place. Here is what the Lord would say to you according to His word. I am here for you when life becomes too much, too difficult, and agonizing pain fills your soul. Your heart is fragile and breaks easily but I will be your strength in times of sorrow when you feel you can't go on. If you lean on me with total abandon, I will bring rest to your broken heart. Do not give up but instead look up. I made the stars and named them, and I know your name. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you...” (Jeremiah 1:5) My love for you has no boundary. “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end”. (Lamentations 3:22 ESV) I know the end from the beginning. You must trust me and leave your burden firmly in my hands. I will guide you and be with you as you walk through “the fire.” I know it seems hard, but this is why my word says to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5) Give your broken heart to me and let me heal you. “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) “...My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness...” (2 Corinthians 12:9a) “But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31 NLT)

Psalms 139:6, Psalm 119:28, Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 147:4, Isaiah 43:2, Psalm 147:3

Tuesday, March 5th, 2024:

Spinach Is Not Enough!

For I hold you by your right hand— I, the Lord your God.
And I say to you, ‘Don’t be afraid. I am here to help you.

Isaiah 41:13

While growing up I loved to watch Popeye the Sailor Man cartoons. As in many stories there is a hero and a nemesis. Popeye was in love with Olive Oil and Brutus was a constant taunting and bullying presence in Popeye’s and Olive oil’s life. In every episode Popeye would get to a point of frustration with Brutus and pull out his trusty can of spinach, swallow it in one gulp and suddenly his muscles would pop out and he had the strength to battle Brutus, who has now become defenseless to Popeye’s strength.

I think most of us can relate to the frustration and challenges that Popeye faced with a constant source of struggle in life. Like Popeye the enemy attacks us and we face what seems to be an unending battle for peace. We too need to draw from a source of strength, though spinach is strength for the body it has no power over the enemy that we face. We need to pull out and swallow the Word of God and let it nourish our soul and spirit. We need to take a stand against the enemy and say, “Enough is enough!”

What are you facing today? Are you overworked, financially stressed, missing out on the important things of life? Are you battling addiction and can’t find your way out? Are you putting off a hard conversation, hoping the problem will go away? Are you making excuses to why you can’t ____ (fill in the blank)?

Maybe it’s time to stop making excuses and living out of a defeated mind set. Embracing our identity in Christ and standing strong against the enemy. (Reminder: The enemy has already been defeated through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.) The Good News of Jesus comes in Word and in Power. To have that power you must consume His Word and nourish your spirit and soul. The power of Christ is inside of you but without nourishing His presence we lack the strength to overcome the hits of the enemy. God’s power is available to you. His strength dwells in you. His spirit will help you do what you can’t do on your own. So, let’s grab some spinach for the body and the sweet honey of God’s Word for your soul. And you will have the strength of God to stand strong!

Ezekiel 3:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 1 Corinthians 2:16

Wednesday, March 6th, 2024:

As We Forgive Those...

Choosing to forgive others can often be one the most bitter pills to swallow, but once we do it our healing can begin. So, if we understand that it's actually to our benefit to extend forgiveness, why do we find it so hard? It's because we've been offended or injured in some way, and we want to see the offender at the very least acknowledge the damage they've done. And if we're honest, we'd probably like to see them pay for it. The way Mike Donehey puts it in his book *Grace in the Gray* is "Yes, we'll let go of it to make amends but only after the other person apologizes first. The only thing that feels better than stroking our hurt is extending the ring to our offenders to kiss once they've adequately groveled at our feet."

Understandably, there are different levels of offense, and some are almost unthinkable. I'm reminded of a story about Corrie ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place* which recounts how her family hid many Jewish people to help them escape from the Nazis during the Holocaust in World War II. They were eventually caught and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp where her sister Betsie died. After being freed by the Allies in 1945, she was moved to travel the world telling people her story of God's forgiveness and the need for people to forgive those who had harmed them.

Her resolve was put to the test in 1947 while speaking in a church in Munich. At the end of the service a balding man approached her to thank her for the wonderful message, and she immediately recognized him as one of the cruelest of guards from the camp. She froze, unable to shake the feeling of horror and anger as he stretched out his hand. He didn't, of course, remember her, but he told her how he remembered Ravensbrück and how terrible he had been. And then he told how he had become a Christian and was so thankful for God's forgiveness that she had spoken of. She remembered that forgiveness is an act of the will, and she prayed for Jesus to help her.

And then something amazing happened. As she clasped his hand it was as if an electric current raced down her arm filling her entire being with warmth and bringing tears to her eyes. She recounts that she had never known God's love so intensely and realized that it was only in the power of His Spirit that she had been able to forgive. This is what happens when we forgive - it sets *us* free and enables us to more deeply understand and receive the extravagant love and forgiveness of our heavenly Father. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." **Ephesians 4:31-32**

Thursday, March 7th, 2024:

Find Your Place

I used to become upset or disappointed when people would leave the church. I'm not speaking of "the Church" but of our own body of believers. Was there some theological error being taught that I was unaware of? Had someone offended them? Just what had caused them to decide to leave? Then I realized that "the body of Christ" is made up of different parts, each with its own particular function, and all are necessary but not all are alike. (**1 Corinthians 12:14-15**)

There can be a litany of reasons that people switch their place of worship, but that decision is solely between them and the Lord. If we know that there was a valid and resolvable reason that caused them to feel they needed to leave and that need to be addressed, we should do so. However, it isn't our place to judge if there's no such evidence. When I was recently faced with such a situation, I felt the Lord impress upon me that every place is not for every person, but God is for every person and every place.

We can't allow our personal decisions to be driven by nonessential preferences, but we also need to be in a place where we feel the Presence of God and where we believe He is calling us to utilize His giftings in the most effective means. If God has given you a burden for the next generation, Sun City would probably not be the first place to look for a home church. However, we also can't sit comfortably back and treat our place of worship as a weekend retreat or a social gathering that fulfills our "Christian duties" for the week.

Each of us is on this planet at this particular time and in this particular place because He has a plan for us. It's a good plan, and it should be our primary goal to discover what that plan is. Remember He formed us, and He has ordained the days of our lives. He created us for good works, and there is nothing greater than discovering what His plans are for us and then partnering with Him to walk out our destinies. (**Ephesians 2:10**) Each one of us is here "for such a time as this." He has a plan and a place designed just for you - find your place and then don't just go with it - grow with it.

Friday, March 8th, 2024

Focus My Eyes, Lord.

I have a fidgety and squirrel type personality. I can become easily distracted, especially during weekend services. My attention can be drawn away from the human in front of me to the humans around me and all that needs to be addressed. The Lord brought this to my attention several years ago and I have learned to keep my eyes and mind engaged with the individual in front of me, the beautiful soul that needs to feel and know that I am fully engaged, concerned about their need, and want to hear their story.

Most days I went through life on autopilot and barely noticed anyone else or retained what was said. Cruising through the day with scripted responses to the people around me while my mind spun in a hundred different directions. Multitasking is the lie I assigned to it, but truth be known it was a lack of love and care.

It took a lot of practice to turn off the distractions and fully engage on the one before me, and this does include Jesus. Taking time to breathe and be in the moment is the best way that I can minister and pray. Compassionately, listening to what they're telling me instead of thinking about what I must do next. What are they feeling, how does God want me to love them in this moment? Is my task list more important than loving like Jesus? And today, the answer is a solid "NO!" My task is minor compared to the call to love and minister to others. I promise it didn't come easy, but I feel that I am getting better at it every day, Thank you, Jesus.

So, I ask you now, what are the distractions that steal you from truly engaging with others and with Father? Reaching out and checking in on a friend. Sending a quick text of encouragement. Turning off the noise and showing someone, you really care. Being engaged in the world around you versus your inner circle.

Proverbs 4:25-27

Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.

²⁶ Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path.

²⁷ Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil.

Saturday, March 9th, 2024:

Our True Identity

While scrolling through social media or various news apps, have you noticed the headlines that try to shame us into believing that we've been doing something wrong all along? It's the old clickbait trick to get us to watch their video or read their article so they get paid for each ad we have to endure as we watch or scroll through to find out what we've been doing wrong and how to start doing it right.

Essentially, we're allowing someone we don't even know to tell us what we should be doing, what we should be thinking, what products we should be using and ultimately whether or not we measure up. Insecurity and confusion are at an all-time high as countless people chase the latest and greatest and allow the influencers to define them.

It's a very slippery and dangerous slope any time we find ourselves caught up in the worldly definition of who we are (or aren't). These doubts and insecurities aren't limited to the internet or TV. We often allow the opinions of family, friends, teachers, leaders and co-workers to penetrate our souls and cause us to question who we are.

Any time we find ourselves confused or feeling insecure about who we are, we should pause and remember that our true identity is in Christ.

According to the Bible, we are:

- God's children
- Jesus's friend
- Justified by His grace through redemption
- God's heir and co-heirs with Christ
- A temple of the Holy Spirit
- Members of the body of Christ
- A new creation
- Ambassadors for Christ
- The righteousness of God through Christ
- Blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ
- Adopted through Jesus Christ
- Redeemed and forgiven

- Chosen
- Sealed with the Holy Spirit
- Made alive with Christ and saved by grace
- God's handiwork
- Raised and seated with Him in the heavenly realms
- Citizens of heaven

And this isn't even a complete list!

Whenever we feel ourselves believing the world's definition of who we are and we're filled with doubts about our worth, we should immediately turn to God's Word and stand firm in His promises that we are who He says we are.

John 1:12; John 15:15; Romans 3:24; Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Corinthians 12:27; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 20-21; Ephesians 1:3, 5, 7, 11, 13; Ephesians 2:5, 6, 10; Philippians 3:20

Sunday, March 10th, 2024:

Extreme Makeover

I always like watching shows that take an existing property and totally transform it. The process typically involves tearing down some walls, identifying areas that could pose a safety threat, and replacing anything old that needs to go with something new, improved, and more functional. Isn't this just what God does for us when we become part of His family? The initial transformation is the equivalent of replacing a camping tent on a dirt lot with a sanctuary built on bedrock and surrounded with living beauty. But it goes beyond that.

There isn't anyone who couldn't benefit from a periodic inspection and at least some remodeling if a complete overhaul isn't needed. Most of us have walls that enclose certain parts of our hearts, and in some cases, they could pose a danger to our ability to function as we were intended. Maybe it's a wall of bitterness, or shame, or maybe it's jealousy or anger. These need to be torn down so the Spirit can move freely about in us without hindrance. And sometimes we've held onto a belief that is rooted in tradition rather than revelation. It's important for us to always be open to new things that God wants to introduce to us and in us, and those things will become evident to us as we examine intently the blueprint, He's given us.

We know that there is not one of us who is perfect; we all fall short. That's why Paul urges us to present ourselves as living and holy sacrifices which are acceptable to God. This is our spiritual service of worship. And we should guard against being conformed to the world and its design for how and where we live, but rather we are to renew our minds through His word that we might know His will for us. **Romans 12:1-2** The more we know about His word, the better we'll be able to see where improvements are needed. Timothy tells us, "Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful in one way or another - showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us." **2 Timothy 3:26-27 The Message** That's how, when we continue to cooperate with the Master Builder, He can shape us into His masterpiece! **Ephesians 2:10** And we can rest assured that when we allow Him to do the makeover, the results will be beyond our wildest hopes and dreams!

Monday, March 11th, 2024:

What Did That Say?

I typically am intentional about mentally preparing myself before I begin my quiet time in the morning, but I evidently failed to do so one particular morning because I began reading in Matthew 20:1 “The kingdom of heaven is like a lawnmower...” (the actual word was landowner) In my own defense, it was around 5:30 am and the font was miniscule. However, it reminded me of the importance of approaching our Bible with a mind prepared to *really hear* from God rather than to simply check off a box. In this case the error was quite obvious, but it made me question how easily one could be led astray by a simple careless misreading.

Dwight L. Moody said, “Merely reading the Bible is no use at all without we study it thoroughly, and hunt it through, as it were, for some great truth.” A casual, distracted skimming through will give us little benefit because, if we’re really honest with ourselves, we aren’t looking for it. We are also running the risk of mindlessly extracting a distortion of the truth or even something that doesn’t even resemble the Word...like the kingdom being like a lawnmower! If we then take that false idea and try to apply it to how we live out our faith, we’re not only getting off track ourselves but we may be leading others astray as well. Better a millstone be hung around our neck!

We need to carefully examine and consider the point of what we read in God’s Word. If it doesn’t give us a deeper understanding of His character and lead us into the desire to know Him more intimately, then maybe we need to go back and reread it. Dig into it. And if it still doesn’t make sense, ask someone you know is a strong believer and listen with an open mind and heart. His Word really is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, and He is not a God of confusion. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal something new and exciting about your Father that will encourage you, challenge you, and help you grow in your relationship with Him and your determination to follow Him with greater resolve and boldness. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (**John 14:26**)

Tuesday, March 12th, 2024:

Abba Father

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

The book of Genesis teaches us that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Thus, in my opinion, we should pray to the one who created all things, who knows all things, who sees all things, who can be in Africa and Alabama at the same time. We should pray to God the Father who has the power of life and death in His hands. We should pray to the one who is gracious, kind, beautiful, merciful, and loving. We should pray to the one who knows what we need even before we ask Him.

When we pray to God the Father, we acknowledge that we are dependent on the Lord. We say to God, and to those who may hear our prayer that God is the source of our supply. We humbly submit ourselves to the sovereignty, rule, and reign of the God who created us in His image and likeness. When we pray to God the Father, we say, "Abba" or "Daddy." We prostrate ourselves before the throne of grace as a child does when she sheepishly comes into the presence of her earthy father and sits at the feet of his easy chair making her requests known unto him. When we pray to God the Father, we come into the presence of the one who loves us, knows us, and has our best interests at heart.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I honor You as the One who created the heavens and earth, and all that is in them! You have the power of life and death in Your hands, and You are compassionate and loving towards all You have made. I can do nothing apart from You. May I always remember that when I pray, I am entering Your throne room; the place where Your hand of grace rests upon my head, for I am Your child.*

- Harvest Prayer Ministry Dec. 2nd, 2023

Wednesday, March 13th, 2024:

Jesus, the Light in the Darkness

John 8:12 (NIV) - "When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'"

In a world often covered in darkness, with trials and uncertainties casting shadows on our path, Jesus stands as the eternal Light. In the Gospel of John, He declares, "I am the light of the world." This proclamation is not a mere metaphor but a profound truth that resonates through the ages.

Consider the nature of light; it dispels darkness, reveals truth, and guides our way. In the same way, Jesus, the Light of the world, overcomes the darkness in our lives. His presence dispels the shadows of doubt, fear, and despair, offering a beacon of hope and reassurance.

The Power of Light Over Darkness:

Clarity in Confusion: In moments of confusion and uncertainty, Jesus' light provides clarity. It illuminates the path we should tread, revealing the steps we need to take. When life's circumstances seem obscure, turn to the Light that brings understanding.

Healing in Brokenness: Darkness often symbolizes brokenness, pain, and sin. Yet, Jesus' light brings healing to the brokenhearted. Just as light exposes what is hidden in the shadows, His love reveals the depths of our hearts, bringing restoration and renewal.

Hope in Despair: When despair threatens to engulf us, Jesus' light pierces through the gloom. It reminds us that no darkness is too great for His overcoming radiance. As followers of Christ, we carry this light within us, becoming beacons of hope in a world yearning for a glimmer of something better.

Reflection: Take a moment to reflect on the areas in your life where you may be encountering darkness. Whether it's a personal struggle, a difficult circumstance, or a world filled with challenges, invite Jesus, the Light of the world, into those spaces. Let His light shine, dispelling the shadows and bringing forth His transformative power.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You are the Light that overcomes darkness. In times of confusion, be our clarity. In moments of brokenness, be our healing. When despair surrounds us, be our hope. May Your light shine brightly in every corner of our lives, dispelling the shadows and guiding us in the path of righteousness. Amen.

Remember, as you walk with Jesus, you walk in His light, and darkness cannot overcome it.

Thursday, March 14th, 2024:

Cast Your Worries

There's a lot of unrest in our world today, and that can trigger worry and anxiety. It's a natural response when we're facing uncertainty.

When we worry, it's not about things happening in the present, it's always about the possibility of a negative outcome in the future. We might have irrational thoughts like "What if something bad happens?" or "What if I get sick?" These outcomes are not things we can control. In fact, according to researchers at Penn State University, only about 8% of the things people worry about come true.

Worry provides us with a false sense of control – as if our constant dwelling on the situation can guarantee a favorable outcome. Even though that's not true, worrying can become our habitual response to uncertainty if we don't intentionally do something about it. In the Bible, both David and Peter tell us to cast our anxiety and our cares on the Lord and He will sustain us because He cares for us. They don't tell us to just "let it go" like many well-meaning folks will tell us.

Imagine you're holding a heavy bowling ball that represents the weight of your worries and you just let it go. Gravity ensures that it will land on your feet. You'll continue to feel the pain of your worries and you certainly won't be free of them. Now imagine you're at the lake fishing and you have a casting rod. As you cast the line into the water, it takes on a trajectory that moves it far from you. In fact, the world record for casting is over 900 feet – the height of a 95-story building! God tells us to cast our anxieties, worries and cares on Him and He will sustain us because He loves us. He doesn't want us to hold on to them. Jesus said we can't add a single hour to our lives by worrying. Each day has enough trouble of its own to include worrying about something that may or may not happen tomorrow.

When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray just before His death, He was well aware of the pain and torture that was coming. He told the disciples who were with him that His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He was even sweating blood! But His prayer to His Father is how we should handle our overwhelming anxiety and worry: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Cast your worries on Him. Pray that His will be done.

Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7; Matthew 6:34; Matthew 26:38-39

Friday, March 15th, 2024:

A-Musing

Did you know that there's a battle for your joy? Jesus wants us to have joy. He demonstrated this when He explained to His disciples why it was so important for them to abide in Him. "These things I have spoken to you, that *My joy* may be in you, and that *your joy* may be full." (**John 15:11** emphasis added) The enemy, however, would like to dupe you into thinking that pleasure, as an end in itself, will bring you satisfaction and joy - but he's a liar.

C. S. Lewis once said that we are far too easily pleased. It's not that our desires are too strong, but rather they are too weak because we seek amusement rather than true joy. Amusement comes from the word muse, which as a noun means a source of inspiration and as a verb means to reflect deeply. However, when you add the prefix "a" it means not or without. We settle for less than inspiration or serious reflection. This is not to say that any form of pleasure or fun is ungodly. It just means that we shouldn't expect it to fulfill our deeper needs.

Solomon is a good example of the futility of seeking pleasure – he refers to it as chasing after the wind! Amusement is easy and enticing, yet we live in a culture of unsatisfied people who have access to a wealth of entertainment. The enemy's objective is to steal and destroy; God's is to satisfy and restore! We are meant to enjoy Him through His creation, but when our focus is centered on what is created rather than the Creator, we're just striving after the wind. He promises if we seek Him first, all these things will be added (**Matthew 6:33**), and He also promises that He will make known to us the path of life, and in His presence is fullness of joy; in His right hand are pleasures forever! (**Psalms 16:11**) Don't lose this battle. Enjoy creation, but pursue the Presence of the Creator.

Saturday, March 16th, 2024:

Where's the Easy Button?

You might remember when an office supply store had a campaign centered around the “easy button.” It was launched in 2005 and was an almost instant success. Why, you might ask? Because people inherently want things to be simple - neither stressful nor demanding - easy.

Unfortunately, that mentality is often reflected in the Church. Someone raises their hand or walks the aisle to accept Jesus and we all rejoice, as well we should. But we have to keep in mind that this is only the entry point. New Christians are baby Christians, and they are expected to grow and learn. That not only requires others who are willing to help them mature, but it demands an awareness, desire and effort on their part to cooperate and learn what that entails. It will involve some growing pains along the way.

Paul wrote to the young church in Philippi, “Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.” (**Philippians 2:12-13** New Living Translation) Paul had birthed this church and had disciplined them, but now it was their responsibility to continue the work, and it would be *work*. But he went on to encourage them that as they cooperated with God in obedience, He would continue to supply them with a growing desire and power to do those things that please Him.

As children grow, the challenges they face become more complex. First, they simply need to learn to crawl and to feed themselves, and then they begin learning the benefits of obeying their parents. Later come the challenges of decision making and problem solving. Each stage requires more self-discipline and a greater understanding of factual information coupled with cause-and-effect probabilities. It all hinges on the level of confidence they have in where they've gotten their information. We can have rock-solid confidence when our source is the author of everything. God the Father - God the Creator - God the Redeemer and Savior - the Alpha and the Omega.

“And since we are His children, we are His heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share His glory, we must also share His suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to us later.” (**Romans 8:18-17** New Living Translation) God never said it would be easy, but He does promise to be with us and to guide and grow us through the hard times. “This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (**Joshua 1:9**)

Sunday, March 17th, 2024:

Celebrating God Through Prayer

“I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together” (Psalm 34:1-3).

To celebrate means “to honor or praise publicly.” God deserves honor and praise more than anyone or anything else. The great Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte used to counsel his hearers to “think magnificently of God.” People who think magnificently of God, calling to mind His greatness and goodness, cannot help but celebrate God and declare His praise.

To celebrate God means at least three things:

First, it means recognizing God for who He is. God’s glory is His majestic splendor shining out so it can be seen and known. When we glorify God, we don’t give Him anything. We don’t add luster to Him. That’s as impossible as it is to add splendor to a sunset by viewing it. But we can gaze in wonder at a sunset, and similarly we can behold in awe the beauty and glory of the Lord.

Second, it means loving God for who He is. This means laying aside our concerns, our demands, and our prayer lists to focus on God and to enjoy Him. Nothing does more to quell pride, self-centeredness, and selfish desires than to focus beyond ourselves on God alone.

Third, celebrating God means giving God the only thing we can offer Him – our loving, praising hearts. He already has everything else. He is totally self-sufficient and needs nothing from us. But God does ask us to give to Him our hearts, our love and our adoration. When we do, He is pleased and blessed.

Prayer: *Praiseworthy God, I honor You for all that You are. Thank You for revealing Your glory and for giving Your people reasons to boast about You. Help me to see Your majestic splendor more fully so that I may enjoy and love You more with each day that passes.*

- Harvest Prayer Ministry Nov. 25, 2023

Monday, March 18th, 2024:

Don't Be a Deserter

Apostasy in the dictionary is defined as a desertion of/or departure from one's religion, principles, cause, etc. In his book *The Josiah Manifest* Jonathan Cahn writes, "An apostate civilization will depart from the Word. The righteous must do the opposite and *hold* to the Word all the more strongly. An apostate culture bends the Word or the truth to conform to its ways. The righteous must bend their ways to conform to the Word." (p226) "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." **1 Timothy 4:1-2**

This is not meant to indict any particular person, political party or organization. Instead, it is intended to be a wake-up call to the people of God. We need to be wary of what and whom we choose to listen to and to weigh our belief system against what God's word says. Peter warns us, "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves." **2 Peter 2:1** This is happening today even in some churches, so we have to be especially watchful in what is being taught. We are blessed to have pastors who diligently study God's word and listen to the Holy Spirit for guidance in presenting His truth in love. Not everyone is so fortunate.

Sadly, there are many who would much rather be fed a sugar-coated message that doesn't threaten the status-quo. "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." **2 Timothy 4:3-4** "The farther a culture departs from God, the more it must redefine or undermine His word." (*The Josiah Manifest* p.226) That would explain a lot about what we see taking place in our country today. Rather than bending the truth to conform to the world view and the desires of the flesh, we need to be persistently bending our ways more and more to conform to the Word.

Lord, forgive us for any lack of attention we have given to Your word. Help us to be watchful and aware of any ways we have wandered from You, and when convicted, strengthen us to turn back to You with our whole being.

Tuesday, March 19th, 2024:

Precious Gems

“Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.” (Psalm 68:19 NIV)

By my spirit I will lead you. I am your shield. I will strengthen you as you turn to my word. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) Speak my word over every situation. I have an answer for your cares, concerns, trouble and even joy. My word is more precious than gold. You can daily glean an abundance of wisdom as you dig into my word and mine the precious gems waiting for you to discover. The word of God is like a moral compass that will point you in the right direction. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105) The Lord is calling you to know Him and hear his voice through His word. When Jesus was in the desert, after 40 days he became hungry and he was tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread and Jesus answered, “It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Psalm 143:10, Psalm 28:7, Psalm 19:10

Wednesday, March 20th, 2024:

Come Boldly

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

I will guide you as you surrender your plans to me. I am your rock, and you can depend upon me to lead you “... in the paths of righteousness... (Psalm 23:3) My word declares: “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.” (Proverbs 18:10) You are covered by my feathers. Put all your trust in me and let me guide your decisions and when you do, I will give you wise counsel. For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.” (Isaiah 41:13) Go ahead and surrender your will to me and give your cares to me. Don’t hang on to your troubles because that will give the enemy a foothold. Give your troubles to me so that I can work out the plans I have for you. I love you. So, just “...come boldly to the throne of grace...”

Thursday, March 21st, 2024:

Who are Your Companions?

When our children were young, I remember a friend of the family mildly rebuking us for having the audacity to tell our kids who they could and could not hang out with. Part of his reasoning was that we would make those whom we deemed “inappropriate” seem all the more enticing to our kids. He also implied that we were being “helicopter” parents and weren’t giving our kids the latitude to find some things out for themselves.

While there may be a modicum of truth to that, we also have a mandate to raise up our own children in the way they should go so when they get older, they won’t depart from it. I especially like the way The Message puts this verse. “Point your kids in the right direction - when they’re old they won’t be lost.” (**Proverbs 22:6**) When we depart from the right path, we wind up getting lost. As parents we need to be mindful as to what sort of companions our children are choosing, and we need to be honest with them about why we may not approve of certain choices they make without villainizing someone else’s child.

Proverbs 13:20 tells us, “Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall apart.” (The Message) That’s good advice for our children, but it’s also very sound advice for us! There’s an old saying that goes: you’re known by the company you keep. There’s also a study that was done that supports the premise that we tend to become like those we spend the most time with - both good and bad. According to **Proverbs 14:7**, if we fail to leave the presence of a fool, we won’t even be able to discern words of knowledge; and Paul warns us quite sternly not to be deceived - bad company corrupts good morals. **1 Corinthians 15:33**

We need to be willing to interact with the unsaved. How else could we ever hope to expose them to the good news of the gospel? But it’s imperative that we spend more time in the company of those who will build our faith and whom we can trust to hold us accountable to a life of righteousness that honors the Lord. And a final few words from Proverbs: “Don’t make friends with people who have hot, violent tempers. You might learn their habits and not be able to change. (**Proverbs 22:24-25** Good News Translation) You might substitute “violent tempers” with people who are liars, immoral, given to slander, alcoholics, addicts... We are called to befriend these people, but they should not belong to our inner circle. "The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray." **Proverbs 12:26** Who are your companions?

Friday, March 22nd, 2024:

A Lesson from Naaman

The story of Naaman has some interesting lessons for all of us. Naaman, a captain of the Syrian army, was a victorious leader, a valiant warrior, and was highly respected. However, he was also a leper and as such would have been an outcast unless he could be healed. Enter into the picture a Jewish servant girl who had been taken captive on one of the raids of the Syrian army and was in the employ of Naaman's wife. The girl told her mistress that if only Naaman could go to the prophet Elisha in her country of Samaria, he could be cured!

Naaman went, but initially he went, laden with a great deal of money, to the king of Israel. Naturally, the king was distraught because he saw the request as a set up. When Elisha heard of it, he sent word to the king to send Naaman to him. When Naaman showed up, Elisha simply sent his servant to the door with the directive for Naaman to go to the Jordan River and dip himself seven times. Naaman was furious! He was a highly respected man, and Elisha sent his servant?! Besides, the Jordan was a dirty river and the task was beneath him. But his servants asked him, "Had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?" **2 Kings 5:13**

We know that Naaman *humbled himself, went* to the Jordan, dipped *seven* times and was healed. The first takeaway is that Naaman hadn't been sent to the king, and he was never told that he would have to buy his healing. How often do we go to other seemingly logical sources to solve our problems rather than directly to God? The next is his expectation was for something grand - something befitting his status. We need to be willing to do whatever God asks of us, both magnificent and menial. Finally, what would the outcome have been if Naaman had become discouraged after six plunges into the dirty water, only to have emerged still covered with leprosy? How often do we give up on something God has asked of us because it seems to be taking too long to see any results?

Galatians 6:9 reminds us, "And let us not lose heart and grow weary and faint in acting nobly and doing right, for in due time and at the appointed season we shall reap, if we do not loosen and relax our courage and faint." (Amplified) Whatever He asks of us, we can rest assured that He is always faithful. Paul reminds us that there will be times for all of us when the task just seems more than we can handle...and on our own it probably is! The good news is, as Paul encouraged the church in Corinth, God's grace and power are always available to us, and He will strengthen us to accomplish whatever He has asked us to do as long as we admit our own weakness and depend on Him to equip us. **2 Corinthians 12:9** Without Him we're mediocre at best, but with Him, nothing is impossible! Admit your need, follow His lead, and never stop short of miracles.

Saturday, March 23rd, 2024:

Our Inheritance

Have you noticed that when an adult is around a young child or a puppy or kitten, the pitch of their voice goes up when they speak? There's no way we could speak to a young child or animal in a harsh or loud tone. They are so adorable, innocent, and precious that we just want to embrace them and care for them. They depend on us completely, and their faith in us doesn't waver.

Don't you think that's what Jesus was referring to when he told the disciples, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." It's quite evident that we should be paying attention to this Scripture because the same message was recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Jesus isn't suggesting that we should act childish and immature in the traditional sense to enter the kingdom of God. He's referring to developing child-like faith, the I'm-all-in kind of faith as we depend on Him.

But that's not all. There's another trait He refers to when He said, "Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." In other words, the meek and humble will be holding the greatest position in heaven!

Jesus referred to Himself as meek and lowly in heart, and when He tells us to take His yoke and learn from Him, we will find rest in our souls. Jesus also told us that the meek shall inherit the earth. That means the Kingdom of Heaven will belong to us when we have child-like faith, and the meek will inherit the earth as well as hold the greatest position in heaven!

So how do we acquire this faith and meekness? How do we overcome the heartbreak, losses, grudges, guilt, shame, and other challenges we've faced and accumulated since childhood? These trials can cause us to become prideful and jaded, and as a result, our faith and dependency on Christ wavers. The answer is always to first turn to Christ. He promises to give us a new heart, and a new spirit that He will put inside us. All we have to do is ask. The apostle Paul said that we aren't controlled by our sinful nature but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in us.

We receive this inheritance from our Heavenly Father as a free gift given to us through Christ's work on the cross. It's up to us to mature in our relationship with Him while maintaining child-like faith and dependency.

Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:16; Matthew 18:4; Matthew 11:29 (KJV); Matthew 5:5; Ezekiel 36:26; Romans 8:9

Sunday, March 24th, 2024:

Don't Sell the Truth

Proverbs 23:23 instructs us to, “Buy the truth, and don't sell it. Get wisdom, discipline, and understanding.” We don't usually think of truth as something that's for sale, and if we're told to purchase it, that means that there's a cost connected to it. In other words, it has value. But the unfortunate “truth” is that we've become a nation where putting a spin on how information is presented or using outright deception is commonplace. It's all a marketing ploy to get us to accept whatever idea is being “sold” at any given moment. That's what makes it all the more crucial to know what is really true and then to hold it in highest regard.

If we're told to buy truth, then how will truth benefit us? For one thing, Jesus says the truth will set us free. (**John 8:32**) And Solomon told us it would bring us wisdom, discipline and understanding. Wisdom is more than just accumulating a plethora of facts and being able to spew them out to impress others. It's about having a knowledge of what is true or right coupled with good judgment. You might call that an accurate handling of the word of God. Next is discipline. Discipline has to do with constantly engaging in something that will bring about a desired outcome. You might notice that another similar word would be disciple. The disciples of Jesus learned from sitting humbly at His feet and replacing their own ideas and desires with those of their Master, both when they were physically in His Presence and later through the power and gift of the Holy Spirit who, as they had been promised, would lead them into all truth. (**John 16:33**) And finally, there is understanding. It's the “aha” moment when we grasp the magnitude of His gift of truth - our eternal salvation and the power of His Spirit dwelling in us to supernaturally walk in His footsteps and share this gift with others.

So how and why are we supposed to “buy” this? We know that our salvation is a free gift, and there's nothing we could ever do to earn it. I think it has more to do with the value we place on the truth - His truth - and what we're willing to invest in possessing it and holding it fast. We have to be so assured of its value that nothing could replace it. Not popular opinion, not new ideas that contradict it, and not our own personal preferences when the truth might be uncomfortable. If we see a sign that says “Bridge out ahead” we'll be wise to find a different route to take. God's truth is more reliable - “Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another - showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way.” (**2 Timothy 3:16** The Message) That should be something we're all willing to invest in and determine to hang on to - don't ever put it up for sale!

Monday, March 25th, 2024:

Free Donuts

We all like to get things for free. Often the ValuePak mailer has a coupon for a free Bosa donut, and a free apple fritter is pretty hard to pass up! However, the marketing objective is for people to discover how delicious the donuts are and to become regular *paying* customers. Unfortunately, there are those who will take advantage of the free offer every time the mailer arrives and never actually support the business. They may toss some coins in the tip jar as a gesture of appreciation, but that will never be sufficient to keep Bosa in business.

This reminded me of how our heavenly Father sometimes gets treated. His love and blessings are free to everyone, but we need to remember that free actually comes at a cost. The owner of Bosa Donuts doesn't wake up every morning and find the cases magically filled with pastries. Someone had to buy the ingredients, mix and bake them, print and distribute the coupons, and wait for the customers to show up in the hopes that they'll appreciate and value the gift enough to be willing to come back and make an investment (as in purchase a donut) to honor the generosity of the proprietor.

A picture of this is in **Matthew 18** in the parable of the king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. One of the slaves owed him an incomprehensible amount - such that the king knew the slave could never hope to repay. Yet when the slave begged for mercy, the king was moved with compassion and forgave the entire debt. Most of us know the rest of the story - how this same slave met another who owed him a small amount, and rather than show the same mercy, he had him thrown in prison until he could settle the score. But back up for a minute. What moved the king was the fact that the first slave begged for mercy, undoubtedly knowing in his heart that there was no way he could ever pay what he owed. Unfortunately, the magnitude of that gift didn't resonate in his soul.

It's when we come to truly understand the audacious generosity of our God in offering us His grace and promise of eternal life, and when we understand how totally incapable we are of ever being able to earn or purchase such a gift and beg His forgiveness, that's when we see His mercy. And that's when we become aware of our need to honor Him by modeling His heart to those around us. Such a small "price to pay" for such an extravagant "free" gift. He will continue to make the free offer available to everyone, but when it's time to close up shop, only those who have recognized and honored the source of generosity will receive His eternal blessings.

Tuesday, March 26th, 2024:

The Perfect Plan

God has a perfect plan for all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives. His plan is complete in great detail, and it will lead all who follow Him to an abundant life. But only a few ever enjoy the fulfillment of God's plan because many don't know how to listen to God's leading and follow Him. Instead, they chose (either willfully or foolishly) to go their own way.

You can walk in the perfect will of God if you will learn to hear from Him and follow His instructions.

There is a simple acronym to help us develop the spiritual muscles for abundant life in God's will and fulfill His perfect plan for you.

G: Good morning God, invite Him into your day before your feet hit the floor each morning.

R: Read and meditate on scripture each day.

O: Open your heart to daily and continuous prayer.

W: Worship Him with your whole being. Submit to Him your heart, your words, your thoughts, and your actions.

By having an attitude to grow and putting into practice the words and wisdom of scripture you will begin to hear and understand His perfect plan for you.

Listening to Him is your decision. God won't force you to choose His will. However, He will do everything He can to encourage you to say yes to His direction.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and hope.

Wednesday, March 27th, 2024:

Transaction vs Transformation

Sometimes our approach to faith is more transactional than it is transformational. It's seen more as a "get out of Hell free" card, and salvation becomes a safeguard rather than anything that would require something from us. What's it going to cost me? Can't I just fill out a membership card and attend services most of the time? We mentally run a cost analysis in our minds - benefits versus required investment.

We need to understand that salvation is not a "let's make a deal" moment with God; it's a lifetime investment reaping benefits which reflect the degree of how vested we are. If we listen to our advisor (aka Holy Spirit) who tells us we need to be **all in** and trust Him to do so much more than we could ever do without Him, He can transform us! Whatever we hold onto will only minimize how beautiful that transformation can be. And He wants to take us from glory to glory.

"All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into His likeness in an ever-greater degree of glory." (2 **Corinthians 3:18** Good News Translation)

No matter how gifted, good, or financially secure we are when we come to Him, we're all still woefully bankrupt in the spiritual realm. When the rich young man came to Jesus asking what he needed to do to obtain eternal life, Jesus had compassion for him but also knew the young man was not seeing salvation as the highest blessing he could ever hope for. The young man was too dependent on his financial assets or identity. Jesus doesn't ask us to live as paupers, but He does want us to trust Him enough that if that were what it would take to live our most fulfilling life both personally and for the kingdom, we would be willing to do so. Look at what He gave up!

It is by His grace that we are saved *through faith* rather than any kind of transaction depending on our own resources, lest we might boast and think we somehow can earn salvation. The whole idea of salvation is a new life - a transformed life that is becoming more and more like Jesus. I love the lyrics from "Touch the Sky": "... I found my life when I laid it down." The only exchange is our life for His. A surrendered life is a transformed life, from glory to glory. **Ephesians 2:1-10**

Thursday, March 28th, 2024:

“It Is Finished “

“All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.” **(Isaiah 53:6 NLT)**

Jesus died like a common criminal. He was condemned to die by being nailed to a cross. Jesus died for you, for me, for all of mankind. He was led by the Roman soldiers like a sheep being led to slaughter. He never opened his mouth.

The cross is God’s revelation of his love. God’s plan to rescue man from the penalty of sin. Without the cross we would all be doomed eternally to live separated from God. Jesus paid the price for sin on the cross. He was God’s sinless sacrifice for humanity’s sin. Therefore, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **(Hebrews 12:2 Berean Standard Bible)** All of the cruelty, the pain, the agony, and shame Jesus endured was done out of love for us. “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” **(Romans 5:8 NLT)** Before Jesus died, He spoke his last words from the cross: “...It is finished...” **(John 19:30)** Jesus died, was buried and He rose on the 3rd day, just as He said He would. One man died for all, so we don’t have to die. He died so our sins could be forgiven. He died so we could be reconciled to God. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **(John 3:16)**

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your sacrifice of dying on the cross. I believe you are the Son of God and this day I surrender my life to you as Lord and Savior. I ask you to forgive me for my sins this day and make me a brand-new creation. Amen

Luke 23:24, Isaiah 53:7, 1 John 2:2.

Proverbs 3:6, Psalm 18:2, Psalm 91:4, Proverbs 3:5-6, Ephesians 4:28

Friday, March 29th, 2024:

The Oil Press

In the Bible we know that oil represents the Presence of the Holy Spirit. Olive oil was a prime article of food for dipping bread, for cooking, for lighting, and of course for anointing both in healing and in consecrating. In Hebrew, the word for olive oil is *shemen*. In order to produce the oil, the olives are placed on a large stone where another wheel-like stone rolls over them, crushing the olives to release the oil. This is an oil press - the Hebrew word for press is *gat*, so the word for oil press is *gatshemen* or *gatshmanim*. Naturally, one would expect an oil press to be located in a place where there was an abundance of olives. Perhaps the Mount of Olives where we happen to find a garden called Gethsemane - oil press.

It was the night of the Passover meal - the night Jesus knew He would be betrayed by one of His own - the night He would demonstrate to His disciples the fuller significance of the Passover meal - the night that marked the beginning of His crushing. And so, after He had washed their feet and shared the bread and the cup with them - a picture of His body and blood that would be offered up - we read that "as was His custom" He went to the Mount of Olives. (**Luke 22:39**)

This was a familiar place where He was used to spending intimate time with His Father. It was a place He knew He could go for answers. A place where He could be reassured by the Father that the crushing was necessary.

In His agony, He asked the Father if there was any other way, yet He concluded with, "...yet, not My will, but Yours be done." (**Luke 22:42**) John recounts the words of Jesus prior to the Last Supper when He explained that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He even recalls the words of Jesus, "Now my soul has become troubled, and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour.'" (**John 12:24-28**) He was crushed for us that the oil of healing, the oil of consecration might be released that the Presence of His Spirit would be with us forever!

Saturday, March 30th, 2024:

Firstfruits

We are first introduced to the concept of firstfruits in the fourth chapter of Genesis when God had regard for Able's offering, which was the firstling of his flock, but Cain's offering was simply an offering of the fruit of the ground, and God had no regard for it. There's a sacredness in the first fruit. It represents all that will be harvested in the future, and to offer it reflects the faith that there will indeed be a good harvest. Through that offering, the entire harvest was consecrated. It was marking the end of winter and the beginning of new life - a promise of harvest.

First came the Passover Seder and then the feast of Unleavened Bread. The day after the Sabbath following the first day of Unleavened Bread is called Yom HaBikkurim, the "Day of First Fruits," or Reshit Ha'Katzir the "first of the harvest." On that day the priest would wave a sheaf of green barley before the Lord as a symbolic gesture of offering it to Him. Following this a male lamb was sacrificed along with unleavened bread mixed with oil and wine. Are you beginning to get the picture? This would all happen on the day following Passover and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was also High Sabbath. So, the offering that sealed the end of the deadness of winter and the beginning of new life - all of this corresponded exactly with the last days that Jesus physically spent on earth.

He died on Passover after He had broken bread and shared the cup with His disciples. The same time the sacrificial lamb was being slain to commemorate the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. He was in the tomb on the Sabbath - the High Sabbath of Passover. And then He conquered death on Reshit Ha'Katzir and became the first fruit of new life, the promise of a great harvest for those who would follow!

This all had to take place when the three observances were in exact succession - when Passover (Nisan 16) began the day right before the Sabbath and thus making the offering of first fruit to take place the very next day. Such is the perfect plan of the Father; such is His perfect plan of redemption for every one of us. We have been delivered. We are the promised harvest if we will simply accept the undeniable truth of His death and resurrection. He has given us power over the curse of the deadness of our winter. What a promise! What a Savior! Wake up and live.

"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."

1 Corinthians 15:20

Sunday, March 31st, 2024:

Death to Glory

Before the Resurrection of Christ:

As we reflect on the meaning of the cross before the resurrection of Christ, we are drawn to a symbol of sacrifice, suffering, and redemption. The cross, a once-feared instrument of death, became a profound symbol of God's love for humanity. Before Christ's triumphant victory over death, the cross represented the weight of our sins and the brokenness of this world. It was a harsh reminder of the separation between humanity and God, a consequence of our disobedience.

In those moments before the resurrection, the cross stood as a testament to the depths of God's love and the extent to which He was willing to go to reconcile us to Himself. It was a symbol of our need for a Savior and the extraordinary sacrifice that was about to unfold.

After the Resurrection of Christ:

With the resurrection of Christ, the meaning of the cross underwent a transformative metamorphosis. The cross, once a symbol of suffering and death, now radiates with the glory of victory and eternal life. Through His resurrection, Christ conquered sin and death, bridging the gap between humanity and God. The cross no longer solely represents sacrifice and suffering; it symbolizes the triumph of love, grace, and redemption.

In the light of the resurrection, the cross becomes a beacon of hope and an assurance of God's faithfulness. It is a reminder that, through faith in Christ, we share in His victory over sin and death. The empty tomb echoes with the promise of new life and the power of God to transform even the darkest moments into avenues of grace.

Waiting with Faith and Perseverance:

As we navigate the waiting periods in our lives, whether it be waiting for answers to prayers, for healing, or for the fulfillment of promises, we are called to follow the disciples waiting between the crucifixion and the resurrection. It is a time that requires faith and perseverance.

Our faith reminds us that just as the cross was not the end of the story, our current circumstances are not the final chapter. We wait with the assurance that God is at work, even in the silence and uncertainty. Perseverance becomes our response, trusting that the One who conquered the grave is faithful to fulfill His promises.

In our waiting, let us draw strength from the transformative power of the cross, understanding that just as Christ's crucifixion was followed by resurrection, our trials and challenges can lead to new beginnings and unexpected blessings. May we wait with unwavering faith and perseverance, confident that the God who raised Jesus from the dead is the same God who holds our futures in His hands.