

Prayer Devotions

April 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.

Oman

Persecution Type: Islamic & Clan Oppression, Dictatorial Paranoia

Main Religion: Islam

Government: Absolute Monarchy

Leader: Sultan Haytham bin Tariq Al Said

Ethiopia

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

Main Religion: Christianity

Government: Federal Parliamentary Republic

Leader: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali

Tunisia

Persecution Type: Dictatorial Paranoia, Islamic Oppression

Main Religion: Islam

Government: Parliamentary Republic

Leader: President Kais Saied

Daily Prayers for April: Don't be a fool. "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." Martin Luther King Jr.

Monday, April 1st, 2024:

The Power of the Tongue

Words. They can glide off the tongue so effortlessly. Sometimes they may be spewed, and other times they might be like a scalpel that is cleverly slipped into a comment. Too often they are spoken before their effect is even considered. However, once spoken, they can't be unheard.

This is why James cautions us to be so mindful of what comes out of our mouths. That one careless remark could be the spark that leads to the destruction of a friendship, a reputation, a person's sense of value, or even a ministry. He refers to the tongue as a fire which can defile our bodies and set on fire the course of our lives! (**James 3:5-10**) With it we can curse men who are made in the image of God, but we can also choose to use our words to bless our Lord and Father. This happens when we determine to listen first to the promptings of His Spirit within us and then speak only what and when He tells us to.

We'll never fully tame the tongue, but we can certainly train ourselves to be more mindful and intentional with our words. Remember, "A gentle response defuses anger, but a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire...Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim." (**Proverbs 15:1, 4**) May the words of my mouth...be pleasing to You, O Lord. (**Psalm 19:14**)

Tuesday, April 2nd, 2024:

Start Where You Are

Arthur Ashe quite succinctly described a good philosophy for taking on challenges when he said, "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." This is an excellent piece of advice for anyone - teachers, missionaries, and followers of Jesus.

In academia a good teacher uses techniques referred to as scaffolding and differentiation. Simply put, information is presented in "chunks" geared to the level of understanding and the learning styles and needs of the students. An assessment is first taken to determine where their starting point should be. Then as their grasp of the information progresses, the level of difficulty and need for more independent application of what they already know increases. Assignments and class discussions/lectures are designed to expand their competency and to equip them for a productive and fulfilling life outside the classroom.

This sounds a lot like Jesus telling parables. You know, they always say a picture is worth a thousand words. He put spiritual truths into language and imagery the people could relate to and understand. The Apostle Paul used a similar approach on Mars Hill when he explained what they were already familiar with (an unknown god) to broaden their understanding and to introduce them to the one true God - the culmination of any honest search for what will lead to a productive and fulfilling life. (**Acts 17:22-27**)

No matter where you are in your walk of faith, He has equipped you to be His ambassador, and He will continue to do so. If nothing else, you have a story to tell - your personal story - of how you came to faith. Start there. Then commit to being a life-long learner under His discipleship. As the writer of Hebrews encourages and directs us, don't keep repeating kindergarten; keep challenging yourself to go deeper, building on what you already know. (**Hebrews 5:12-14**) Even the most respected teachers are continually learning. We should all be both - teachers and learners. There will always be those who know less than we as well as those who know more. Start where you are; use what you know; do what you can. All to His glory.

Wednesday, April 3rd, 2024:

Matters of the Heart

Have you ever watched a movie multiple times and each time you watch it, you see something new that you hadn't noticed before? That's how reading the Bible is for me. I learn new things every time I read the Scriptures.

Lately, I was captivated by a story from the Old Testament that I've read many times, even as a child. It's a story about family drama including jealousy, lies, murder, and ultimately grace. It's a story about the first brothers in the history of humans. Cain and Abel.

We don't know a lot about these brothers other than they were Adam and Eve's first of many children, and Cain, who was the oldest, tended the soil while his brother Abel tended a flock. We don't know how old they were or what other factors, if any, led to this scandalous incident.

Here's what we do know. Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD, and Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. God approved of Abel's offering, but He did not approve of Cain's. That made Cain furious and resentful.

Whatever the reason God didn't approve of Cain's offering, as the story unfolds, it becomes quite clear that Cain's heart was not right and, of course, God knew this.

Yet God showed mercy and grace by sharing with Cain where he fell short and providing him with guidance on how he could improve. But Cain allowed his anger and jealousy to consume him so deeply that he killed his brother instead of repenting and changing his ways. And then he lied when God asked him where his brother was. God had no choice but to punish him.

Yet even the punishment Cain received was a reflection of God's infinite mercy. After Cain murdered Abel, God allowed him to start a new life in a different place and marked him to prevent him from being killed by others.

Through these acts of mercy, God reminds us that even in spite of our weakness, God is a God of grace and second chances. If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.

But our hearts must be sincere because God knows the secrets of the heart. Our earnest prayer should be "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Genesis 4:2-16; 1 John 1:9; Psalm 44:21; Psalm 51:10

Thursday, April 4th, 2024:

Glory to Glory

“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” Psalm37:4

There is a place in your heart where the spirit can commune with you. It is the surrendered heart that hears most clearly. By my spirit you can learn the ways that are pleasing to the Father. The Holy Spirit will guide you on a path of building a life of character, so you reflect the love of Jesus. “Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing.” (2 Corinthians 2:15) Your reflection of Christ’s love will draw others to the light. They sense something different about you. Spiritually, the light is dispelling the darkness. When your light is shining, you are bringing glory to God. Here a little, there a little the Holy Spirit is building in you the holy character of Jesus Christ. At times you will feel like you are on the “threshing floor” (Michah 4:12) being crushed as you die to self. As you journey on the “narrow road” (Matthew 7:14) your soul will be filled with a joy only possible as Christ fills your longing for more of him. You are a “chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15) and the Holy Spirit will fill you as you are being transformed from glory to glory. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2Corinthians 3:18 NASB) Would you be willing to let go and follow where the Lord leads? The Sovereign God, who made heaven and earth wants to commune with you. He is calling you to come up higher. Let your soul be filled with the joy of being in his presence as you go from glory to glory.

Philippians 1:6, Matthew 5:16

Friday, April 5th, 2024

Relation Over Request

Before I enter into my quiet time with the Lord one of my common spiritual habits is to participate in what I call pre-prayer prayer. If find a quiet spot to go before the Lord and release all that I am holding on to at the moment. It looks something like this:

Lord, it has been a tough day. I have so much on my heart that I need to release to You, I come before You to place all my emotions, worries, and challenges at Your throne - *and list all that I am carrying*. I leave these in Your hand Father and trust that You will speak to me regarding them in Your perfect timing. Amen.

I like my quiet time to be focused on Him and Him alone. I have given Him my heavy burdens and am ready to enter into our intimate time. Knowing that I have a Father who loves me, hears me, and is working for me. My spirit is now lighter, and I can fully embrace His presence. My needs have already been placed in His hands and now I can just soak in His presence giving Him the glory He deserves. Not seeking anything but His face.

Too often we mistakenly think prayer is to just share our needs with the God, do not hear me wrong we can always bring our needs to Him, but is that all we are bringing to Him. Relationships are all about time and commitment not a list of requests and needs.

When was the last time you simply brought your heart, made space to just linger in Father's presence sharing love and adoration for each other? No agenda. No requests. Just worship Him because He loves you. He is a God of answers, and it brings Him joy to guide and provide for our needs; but what He desires most is to simply sit with you. How can you make space for a deep intimate relationship with Father? These are the moments that will give you the confidence and strength to carry on.

Psalm 46:10; Matthew 11:28-30; Psalm 37:4; Matthew 6:21

Saturday, April 6th, 2024:

Be Prepared - Not Scared: Part 1

When things happen that disrupt our day-to-day, our initial responses vary from “Wow! Sure didn’t see that coming” to “Is God punishing me? Is He even really there?” to a host of other reactions. We become so accustomed to a particular mindset of routine and expectations that we don’t know how to respond to disturbances. In His infinite wisdom and compassion, Jesus did His best to prepare His disciples for what was coming and for what would ultimately and forever change their lives. He has done the same for us!

Jesus warned, “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (**John 16:33**) The Apostles passed the warnings on to us. “My dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering, as though something unusual were happening to you. Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may be full of joy when his glory is revealed.” (**1 Peter 4:12-13** Good News Translation) “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives you perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (**Romans 15:4-6**)

Sunday, April 7th, 2024:

Prepared - Not Scared: Part 2

God wouldn't warn us about something if there was nothing that could cause us to feel alarmed or threatened. But the purpose of the warning is to prepare us, to prompt us to ready ourselves for the inevitable battles we will face. He goes on to assure us that He has already secured the victory, that His Spirit will be with us in whatever we encounter, and all He asks of us is to stay close to Him and be willing to follow His battle plan.

So how do we prepare? Be so familiar with Him through His word that we'll recognize His voice. Follow all the training guidelines He has given us: practice self-discipline, recognize it's a spiritual battle, utilize the armor He has provided (breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit, readiness to share the gospel of peace, all held in place by His firm and unshakeable truth), and then know that we are strong in Him and stand firm. When we are well prepared, there's nothing to fear. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (**Isaiah 41:10**)

Monday, April 8th, 2024:

All In

Have you ever been offered an opportunity that was everything you've hoped and prayed for? Something so exciting, you couldn't believe it was real! Maybe it was a full scholarship at your top choice university. Or it was the exact job you've been wanting. Whatever the case, it's exactly what you've wanted and you are all in!

Now let's say we've been offered an opportunity to prove our faith and devotion to God as He prepares us for something great. That sounds exciting and I'm sure we'd all say, "Yes, I'm all in!"

But what if that opportunity came with challenges and tests. Would we still be all in?

It's easy to say yes when we're sitting in our comfortable home surrounded by our favorite electronics with food delivery just a click away. But what if the test was difficult and required patience and steadfast faith?

When I think of steadfast faith, Job comes to mind. It's hard to fathom the loss and pain he endured. Yet, he never faltered in his faith or blamed God. He continued to bless the name of the Lord and taught us a lot about true worship.

Another great example of this all-in kind of faith is found in Genesis. The story of Abraham and Sarah who waited for the fulfillment of God's promise of a son for 25 years! And then sometime later, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son as a burnt offering.

Abraham didn't hesitate. He, his son and their servants took off the next day for a three-day journey to the region of Moriah where God told him to go. Abraham's faith in God was so strong that he said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then **we** will come back to you."

Why didn't Abraham say I will come back to you if he was planning to sacrifice his son? His word choice shows his complete trust in God.

The faith and all-in obedience Abraham and Job portrayed is humbling. It should be a reminder to us that God really does love us and that our present challenges aren't worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Waiting and worshipping God during uncomfortable or downright painful circumstances isn't what the world teaches. But time does not empty God's promises of their power, even if waiting tests our patience and, sometimes, our faith.

Job 1:20–22; Genesis 11:27-25:11; Romans 8:18; Hebrews 11:6

Tuesday, April 9th, 2024:

The 3rd Day

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1Peter 1:3 NIV)

These are the words of Peter who saw the risen Christ along with the disciples and many others. Jesus rose on the 3rd day just as he said he would. Jesus is our hope. When you “look” at his nail pierced hands they tell the story of the Savior’s love. He was beaten with whips, almost to the point of death, then his hands were nailed to a cross, and yet in his agony, from the cross, Jesus cried out “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing...” (Luke 23:34) Jesus fulfilled his purpose here on earth. He died a cruel death “...for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2b “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah, death is defeated. The 3rd day is the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. God’s free gift paid for by the pain Jesus suffered for our sake. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13 NIV)

Mark 9:31, John 19:1, Matthew 27:35

Wednesday, April 10th, 2024:

Murmuring and Complaining

We tend to look at the Israelites with a bit of disdain for all their complaining in the wilderness. In **Numbers 21:5** they grumble that their “souls loathe this worthless bread” (the manna that literally dropped out of the sky to feed them)! I have visited some third world countries and I’ve witnessed their thankfulness for what little they have. Upon returning home, it saddens me to listen to complaints about such trivial things as having to drive (over paved roads) 5-10 miles to shop at Whole Foods or Trader Joe’s for some specialty item.

I wonder what God thinks of our lack of gratitude! In the wilderness, He answered their complaints with a plague that wiped out over 14,000 people! Moses and Aaron had to intercede on their behalf and stood between the living and the dead to halt the curse. That attitude persisted in the early church as well. “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (**Romans 1:21**) So where are we? Are we intercessors who are praising and thanking Him for His unmerited, abundant favor; or are we whiners in need of a wake-up call? Lord, forgive us for taking for granted Your gracious provision. As You have blessed us, may we acknowledge Your ample supply and in thankfulness seek to share with others that they may come to know and depend on You. You are all sufficient.

Thursday, April 11th, 2024:

Little Foxes

I was recently reading in Song of Solomon about the little foxes that come to devour the fruit and destroy the vineyards *while they are in blossom*. You see, foxes are smart enough to know that the best time to raid the vineyard is when there’s fruit being produced. And they don’t just eat the fruit; they also dig under the arbor to separate the branches from the vine.

This is what the enemy would like to do to us when we’re fruitful – find ways to detach us from our Vine and rob us of our fruit. He’ll send his little foxes – distraction, disappointment, distress, discontent – anything that might deter us from producing the sweet fruit we were intended to bring forth according to our Master’s plan. That’s what we were created for.

(**Ephesians 2:10**) and that’s why it’s so important to abide in Him. we can’t bear any fruit without Him. (**John 15:4**)

It’s said that one of the best ways to keep foxes at bay is to have a big dog. We have a big dog! As long as we stay close to Him and depend on Him, we can be assured of being productive. Holy Spirit, guard us from the little foxes.

Friday, April 12th, 2024:

Stay on the Right Path

My daughter and I enjoy hiking together, and she is especially good at taking me on challenging trails that stretch me and ultimately give me greater confidence. Part of the reason I attempt these trails is because I trust her, I know she loves me, and she is always encouraging me to just keep my eyes on the trail and continue to put one foot carefully and intentionally in front of the other. She is also very diligent to point out to me prospective hazards along the way.

This is very much like Solomon as he is dispensing his wisdom in Proverbs to his son. He tells him, among other things, to fix his gaze straight in front of him and to watch the path of his feet. He then points out potential dangers; he tells him to watch over his heart with all diligence and to put devious speech far from him. This is all so that he may find health for his body, springs of life will flow from it, and his ways will be established. (**Proverbs 4:20-27**) It all hinges on loving and trusting the one giving instructions and then diligently and faithfully listening and following. Father, I know that You love me and I trust that everything You instruct me to do is to protect and guide me on a life-giving path. Help me to keep my eyes focused on You and my mind fixed on Your truth. (**Isaiah 30:21**)

Saturday, April 13th, 2024:

What Should We Do?

The only time we should ever let the words “I think you should...” come out of our mouths is when they are in response to the question, “What do you think I should do?” If another person is simply stating a need, a doubt, or a dilemma they’re facing, your first response ought to be, “Let’s pray about it.” You may actually have some good ideas on how to handle things, but you can be assured that our loving, all-knowing Father has the best solutions. Never settle for “good” when you have “perfect” at your disposal.

In addition to praying for guidance, you can always turn to the Word of God for direction. James reminds us that, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” (**James 1:5**) He has generously given us His word to introduce us to His heart for the whole of humanity and for each of us individually. And Solomon wisely instructed us to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.” (**Proverbs 3:5-6**)

God’s Word Translation of **Ephesians 4:29** reads, “Don’t say anything that would hurt [another person]. Instead, speak only what is good so that you can give help wherever it is needed. That way, what you say will help those who hear you.” So what should we do? We should respond with the love of the Father as expressed in **1 Corinthians 13**: with patience, kindness, humility, not self-serving, and rejoicing in God’s truth.

Sunday, April 14th, 2024:

What Are You Mirroring?

The forces of evil seem to be uncontrollable in the world. Media feeds violence, crime, and other cruel and remorseless behavior. In the midst of this trouble many people stand helpless and powerless, wondering what can be done to restore peace and stability.

There is only one way to triumph over evil and that is to follow Jesus. Not just confess you know Him or believe Him but stand for His righteousness and His truth. We follow Jesus' example He came to the world with love, mercy, grace, and truth. He did not let injustice and sin go unnoticed. But He also did not mimic it. He is known as the Good Shepherd and came with His staff to lead and guide His sheep not hit them over the head with. Violence is not the answer to violence, hate is not the response to hate, chaos only creates chaos.

Like the Good Shepherd we need to come with a strong identifiable voice. A voice that creates peace and directs people away from their current state of being, which is brokenness – in a variety of forms. An eye for an eye has historically made things worse. In Christ we can go against the world's way. Not engage in the negative words of this world and release heaven's love everywhere we go. When we look different people may not understand but they do notice, when we respond with integrity and honor a door can open for us to speak what the gospel has taught us - love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, righteousness, and peace.

How will we ever change this world if we respond how the world responds. As a Christian we always have a choice to release anger and outrage or release the Love of Heaven which brings freedom and peace. By releasing what is good, pleasing, and the perfect will of God. What have you been releasing into the world?

Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 13:4-5; 2 John 1:3

Monday, April 15th, 2024:

Faith and Love

1 Peter 1:8-9 You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.

There are many people who dismiss Christianity as a bunch of stories, while others believe in Christ, live through Him and are even willing to die for Him.

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christianity spread through the surrounding areas and eventually reached far away countries. Many countries adopted the religion and numerous people and cultures embraced it.

The impact Jesus made over 2,000 years ago lives on today. We submit to a man we have never physically encountered in flesh. We are attracted to His character we have never witnessed in the physical world. We come to faith by hearing the gospel, through personal experience of His love and power in their lives.

In today's verse we see Peter encouraging the people to be willing to die for a man they have never met and that is still the call for today. Believe in the living Christ, love Him, and if necessary, die for Him. If we do this, we will come to know Him better than many people who actually saw and knew Him personally. We will be able to live closer to Him, conform to His nature and model our lives according to His.

We can be among the people through whom Jesus lives again and when other's perceive His presence, more and more people will come to know Him, believe in Him and love Him passionately.

Prayer:

Holy Father, may the presence of the living Christ be so strong in me that other people will come to know Him, love Him, and believe in Him through how I live. Amen.

Tuesday, April 16th, 2024:

Joy and Hope

Psalm 146:5 *“But joyful are those who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the LORD their God.”*

According to the dictionary the meaning of the word joy is “reason for happiness.” On happiness the dictionary says: “situation of satisfaction.” This is something that most of us, if not all of us, greatly desire. Particularly in these fast-moving and uncertain times we live in, people are tired of the rush and confusion of the world, and their hearts are crying out for rest and the joy of peace. Many of us try to find these things through man-made methods but, as we so often find out at the cost of our own happiness, these methods are not at all adequate to meet the need of our hearts.

There is one certain way to live a life of joy and happiness and that is to live according to God’s plan for your life. You need to submit yourself to His authority in every aspect of your life. Whatever it is, open your life to His leading and influence so that He can guide you.

The Scriptures and history itself will prove to you that the person “whose hope is in the Lord his God” is also the one who comes to know joy and satisfaction in every aspect of life. Fix your hope in the living Christ and you will be able to live with the same joy and satisfaction.

Prayer:

Whatever You decide for me, Father God, it is for my good because You will never deceive me; You lead me on the paths of righteousness and will never leave or forsake me. I accept with joy and satisfaction what You give me from Your hand, and I hope patiently for Your grace. Amen

Wednesday, April 17th, 2024:

Peace Beyond Understanding

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." - **Philippians 4:7 (NIV)**

In life's thundering storms, when waves of uncertainty crash against our shores and the winds of adversity howl relentlessly, there exists a sanctuary—a sacred space within the depths of our souls where tranquility reigns supreme. It is a place where faith and surrender converge, birthing a melody of peace that echoes through our being.

"It is well with my soul," declares the resolute heart, not because circumstances bend to its will or trials cease their relentless march, but because it has anchored itself to the Rock that stands unwavering amidst the chaos. It is a declaration that transcends the temporal, reaching into eternity's embrace, where hope is eternal, and joy abounds unceasingly.

The hymn of surrender resounds through the valleys of despair and the peaks of joy alike, for it knows no bounds, no limitations. It is a melody woven with threads of trust and gratitude, harmonizing with the symphony of God's providence. In moments of triumph, it sings praises; in moments of anguish, it whispers solace; in moments of uncertainty, it proclaims assurance.

To say "it is well with my soul" is not to deny the existence of pain or the reality of suffering but to affirm the sovereignty of the One who holds all things in His hands. It is a proclamation of faith—a faith that transcends circumstances, defies logic, and finds its refuge in the unchanging character of God.

May we, like the Psalmist, declare with unwavering confidence, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1, ESV), and may the peace that surpasses all understanding guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore. Amen.

Thursday, April 18th, 2024:

Hallelujah!

We so often may shout out “hallelujah” when something noteworthy or to our benefit occurs without fully understanding the holiness of that word. It’s a combination of the Hebrew word *’hallel* (להלל), which means to praise or to glorify, and *Yah*, which is an abbreviated form of *Yahweh* - God’s name. And, quite interestingly, the first part of the word is actually *hallelu* (הללו), which is an imperative meaning you *must* praise, with the object of praise being God Himself.

It’s a compound word. It essentially means, when we use it, we must be giving praise to God and not using this holy declaration capriciously. The first three commandments are: He is the Lord our God, we are to make no idols to take His place, and “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” (**Exodus 20:7**)

Our words have power, and we will give an account for every word we speak and how our words are used. The enemy seeks to diminish and deflect our praise to God. Our response should be to raise our hallelujah to the only one worthy of receiving it! Praise God!

Friday, April 19th, 2024:

A New Reality

Prior to December 2019 there were probably few of us who had ever even heard of a place in China called Wuhan, despite the fact that it has a population of over 11 million people and is a major commercial and industrial city. And when news of a new virus strain was first reported, it was on the other side of the world and seemed to have little effect on us. Until it did - big time. Covid-19 radically changed how we would interact with others, how we shopped, and where we placed our priorities. Toilet paper became a treasured and highly soft-after commodity. Shocker!

It wasn't the least bit unsettling to God. In fact, it very well may have been a wake-up call for us to reevaluate where we put our priorities - where we invest our time and our resources. When our focus has shifted from Him and His priorities, His love for us prompts Him to cause some disruptions to get our attention and make some critically needed adjustments in how we conduct our daily lives. We can't try to "get back to normal" if that's what got us here in the first place.

He is our source and He is both steadfast and unchanging, yet doing new things all the time. All He asks of us is to trust Him and to participate in what He's doing. "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." (**Isaiah 43:19**) Seek Him first and let Him create a new and better reality.

Saturday, April 20th, 2024:

Antichrist: Part 1

There have been enough books and movies depicting the Antichrist as a menacing demonic presence that strikes abject fear into the hearts of those who encounter him that many have unwittingly fallen into the subtle and deceptive ploy of Satan. We should remember that he is known as the father of lies. That means he's a really good liar, and what constitutes a good liar is being one who can make the lie seem so believable that it goes undetected and is subsequently accepted as truth.

We've spent so much time and energy on interpreting the prefix "anti" as meaning opposite or against that we fail to understand what else it can mean. The Greek word is *ἀντί* which does, in fact, mean against or opposite, but it also means *instead of* or *in place of*. Jesus warns us in **Matthew 24** that preceding His return will be many false prophets (small "a" antichrists or the spirit of Antichrist) who arise, and their message will come in a time of unrest, uncertainty, marked division, lawlessness, and turmoil. Does that sound like a pretty apt description of our country? Because hearts will be hardened to the message of Jesus, the empty promises of these counterfeits will be convincing enough to mislead even the elect!

It's up to us to be so familiar with and grounded in the truth that first - we won't be deceived, and second - we will be equipped to help others come to a saving knowledge of Jesus - their true Savior. Lord, reveal the enemy's lies and arm us with Your words of truth. **1 Peter 3:15**

Sunday, April 21st, 2024:

Antichrist: Part 2

Antichrist is going to look and sound like the solution to the world's problems. He will be charismatic, a political powerhouse, and will most likely even appear to be quite spiritual. An apt description would be he will be captivating, because he will take captive many who are desperate for answers but refuse to seek God. Paul warned the church in Corinth that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. **(2 Corinthians 11:14)** He will also have an accomplice, if you will, who appears less forceful, but whose agenda is the same, and he is identified in **Revelation 16:13** as the false prophet. That will be the bait; once the hook is set, his true nature will be revealed - the one that more closely resembles *The Omen*.

Satan is not stupid enough to openly reveal himself, and he isn't creative - he can only mimic. His final deception will be to present a false trinity with himself in the place of God, the beast as the counterfeit Messiah, and the false prophet replacing the Holy Spirit. "Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness..." **(2 Corinthians 11:15)** What he could not get Jesus to do in the wilderness, he will attempt to get the Church to do. He wants to be worshiped as God. And it will be convincing! Don't be duped!

"See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many." **(Matthew 24:4-5)** "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God." **(1 John 4:1-3)** Know Him, know His word, dodge the enemy's bullet.

Monday, April 22nd, 2024:

What If?

It would be an understatement to say that the times in which we live are in a constant state of change and consequential uncertainty. The fact that this is an election year only adds to the angst. Our response can be a barrage of “what if’s” throwing us into a state of panic or despair. What if President Biden wins the election? What if President Trump wins? What then? What will change? Will it solve anything, or will things just continue to get more bleak? What if...

We can get so focused on the temporal that we forget who’s still on the throne and holds it all in His hands. He already knows the outcome and is neither surprised nor threatened by it. All He asks of us is to place our hope for the future in Him, trust that He is more than able, and align ourselves with His kingdom plans and purposes. We just need to adjust our inner dialogue.

What if we replaced “what if” with even if? Even if the candidate(s) we vote for aren’t elected, He is still the King of Kings and has not abdicated His throne. Even if the doctor’s report is not what we had hoped and even prayed for, He is still Jehovah-Rapha our healer and He is still sovereign. Even if we never see a promise come to fruition, He is still faithful and His grace sufficient. He is the Alpha and the Omega - the beginning and the end. If He can handle that, He surely can be trusted with what happens in between. “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” **(Isaiah 26:3)**

Tuesday, April 23rd, 2024:

Everlasting Mercy

“For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endures to all generations.” (Psalm 100:5)

Every morning God’s mercy is new. He extends his mercy to every living creature. He cares for the birds and so how much more than does he care about you? “Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matthew 6:26B) “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27) When mankind sinned the Bible tells us “For everyone has sinned, we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” (Romans 3:23 NLT) In God’s mercy for his beautiful creation, he planned a way for sinful man to escape the deserved punishment. He sent Jesus to die in our place for the penalty of sin, that we deserved. The mercy of God is so great that his invitation of salvation is for everyone no matter the sin. It is by God’s love and mercy that he forgives sin when we come to Him. When we receive Christ as our Savior, our sins are forgiven. “He has removed our sins as from as the east is from the west.” (Psalm 103:12 NLT) “Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds” (Psalm 36:5) Call on the Lord and his mercy will meet your need. He is faithful. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need:” (Hebrews 4:16) King David penned these words, “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:6)

Lamentations 3:22, Psalm 145:16, John 3:16 1 Corinthians 1:9

Wednesday, April 24th, 2024:

Fear of the LORD

We have Scriptures that tell us God doesn't want us to fear. He hasn't given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. He tells us not to fear or be afraid because He's our God, and He will strengthen us and help us.

Yet, we have Scriptures that tell us that we're supposed to fear the LORD. God asks us to fear Him, to walk in obedience to Him, to love Him, to serve Him with all our heart and with all our soul. He tells us His love remains forever with those who fear Him.

So how can we fear the LORD if He doesn't want us to fear?

The type of fear God does not want us to have is being afraid, scared or worried. It's the spirit of fear. That spirit does not come from God. Our enemy is the one who tries to trip us up with that kind of fear. When we feel the spirit of fear, God wants us to bring it to Him so He can give us peace that surpasses all understanding.

However, the type of fear God does want us to have comes from the Hebrew word Yirah. It means Awe. It often directly translates into fear, like "fear of the Lord," but it can also mean respect, reverence, and worship.

Fearing God means having a reverence for Him that greatly influences the way we live. The fear of God is respecting Him, obeying Him, submitting to His discipline, and worshiping Him in awe.

Now that makes more sense!

As believers, we have no reason to be afraid of Him. We have His promise that nothing can separate us from His love, and we have His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us.

But without the fear of the LORD, we can make some really bad decisions based on our own human understanding. It's our responsibility to understand what the LORD expects from us, and we learn that through His Word. He provided the ultimate guide to show us the way.

When we integrate the fear of the LORD into every moment of our lives, we make decisions that honor Him and show Him our respect and love. He knows us. He sees all. He's intimately involved in everything we do. So it's important that we maintain the sense of awe, respect and worship in our thoughts, words and deeds.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

2 Timothy 1:7; Isaiah 41:10; Deuteronomy 10:12; Psalm 103:17; Philippians 4:7; Romans 8:38-39; Hebrews 13:5; Proverbs 3:5-6; Proverbs 9:10

Thursday, April 25th, 2024:

Convicting the Criminal

We're born as criminals; all have sinned and fallen short - but there's a difference between being convicted and being condemned. To convict means to prove or declare guilty of an offense; to condemn means to pronounce adverse judgment. The person who has been declared guilty is sentenced, and depending on the crime, they could very well experience separation from those they love.

Imagine that you've committed a crime that could have some serious consequences. At the sentencing, you've been declared guilty and the judge gives you a choice: you've already been convicted, but if you accept counseling there's a chance of getting out of jail; however, if you refuse you will be condemned to incarceration and may ultimately receive a death sentence.

Now consider the fact that by nature we're all sinners - we're guilty and we all will have to stand before a judge. In fact, He's the eternal, sovereign, Creator of virtually everything...the Supreme Judge. It is well within His rights to condemn us, but He always prefers grace and mercy. So He gives us a choice: we can choose to acknowledge His supremacy and authority and follow His plan for rehabilitation and a new life OR we can choose to reject the offer and spend eternity separated from Him, from everyone we've ever loved, and from any semblance of comfort, rest, or peace. Don't fall for the lie that you'll be partying with your friends. The lake of fire doesn't have a beach front, and there's no mention of any personal interactions in Hell. Only torment.

BUT - "This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, His one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in Him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life." (**John 3:16** The Message) "God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." (**Ephesians 2:8-9** New Living Translation) You'll never get a deal like that from any other judge, but then that's because when you accept it, He becomes your Father. He willingly, lovingly adopts all of us former criminals and declares us no longer guilty for our sins. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God [that is, His remarkable, overwhelming gift of grace to believers] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (**Romans 6:23** Amplified Bible)

Convicted can also refer to a person being made aware of their own wrongdoing. It's by His grace and mercy that we're given a choice. "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" (**Romans 2:4**) Being convicted means having a healthy conscience, and here's the really good news. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (**1 John 1:9**) Don't be in contempt of court - accept His free and unmerited gift. It's not only "get out of jail" - it's live in Paradise forever!

Friday, April 26th, 2024:

You Do You

We are such an individualist-minded society. We're encouraged to be a rugged individual, be your own man (or woman), to thine own self be true, you do you. The problem with that premise is our flesh gives us a corrupted idea of who we are, and if that skewed version becomes our model, we are destined to become a cheap imitation of who God created us to be. And He created each one of us as a masterpiece! Just look at **Ephesians 2:10** - "For we are His workmanship [His own master work, a work of art], created in Christ Jesus [reborn from above—spiritually transformed, renewed, ready to be used] for good works, which God prepared [for us] beforehand [taking paths which He set], so that we would walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us]." (Amplified Bible) Why would anyone in their right mind want to forfeit that kind of identity and destiny?!

Second Corinthians 5:17 tells us that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a *new* person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! With that in mind, it would behoove us to put some effort into figuring out just who we are supposed to be and how we are to walk in that new identity. Our role model is Jesus Himself. We were created in Him, and that means that in Christ: you were redeemed and forgiven for all your sins (**Ephesians 1:7**), you are justified before God and the righteousness of God in Christ is imputed to you (**2 Corinthians 5:21**), and you are loved by God with an inseparable love. (**Romans 8:38–39**) The result of all that is we now are equipped to overcome anything we're facing or dealing with in the confidence that we are not alone in the struggle. The key rests in whether or not we choose to embrace our new identity.

Paul tells the believers in Ephesus to "throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes." (**Ephesians 4:22-23** - NLT) Are we going to choose who we were created to be or the corrupted version? The latter is our natural default in the flesh. That's the old you. If you're going to "do you" choose to do the new you!

Saturday, April 27th, 2024:

Priorities

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:24)

Life is so busy, busy like a roller coaster with ups and downs and how do you get off when it is going so fast? So many distractions to keep our minds occupied. We often find ourselves living a complicated life of our own making that we approved. But at some point, you find you don't have enough time to juggle everything you signed up for and you end up going down the alley of frustration. Sound familiar? When you are finally so exhausted living life in “the fast lane”, then it's time to lean on God. He has the answer for your frustration. It's time to let go and let God. Give your burdens to the Lord and ask for wisdom. When you listen to the world's advice you will be chasing after the elusive “fame and fortune”. The wisest man in the world, King Solomon called it “...chasing after the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 6:9): It's time to listen to the “still small voice” (1Kings 19:11) Come, rest in the presence of God. Jesus calls us to follow Him. Let your first priority be in seeking God and spending time in his presence. Here you will find rest for your soul. You will be blessed in His presence. “The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him.” (Lamentations 3:25) Beloved, when you seek my kingdom above all else, you will grow in righteousness. I will provide for your every need as you seek me. As you “draw near to God He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8) As you spend time in my presence you will grow closer to me, and the “things” of this world will lose their priority in your life. Let go of all that weighs you down. When you seek me first, you will find new joy and satisfaction when your priority is to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” (Matthew 6:33)

Matthew 11:28, Matthew 6:9, Philippians 4:19

Sunday, April 28th, 2024:

The Truth About Truth

“Live your truth!” It has become the battle cry of our times. Essentially, this means I can do what I want, be who I think I am, and live how I want. And I don’t have to feel any guilt or shame because it’s my truth.

Is this merely a rebellious phase that will eventually fizzle out? Or is this something more sinister?

When we drill down to the essence of this “live your truth” mantra, the danger becomes evident. Our individual “truth” is subjective and is often predicated on our emotions, our feelings and current fads.

This way of thinking accepts that we all live by a different truth, marching to the beat of our own drum, so to speak. But what if my truth contradicts your truth? Then whose truth is really the truth?

Essentially, these are just our opinions but by packaging “opinions” as “our truth,” it’s easier to justify and convince ourselves that we aren’t at fault. It’s just the way we are.

Living our truth is not what the Bible teaches us. Rather than being subjected to each person’s definition of their own truth, we must align our truth with the Source of Truth, Jesus Christ.

In John’s gospel, he reveals that the Word that’s been here since the beginning IS God. He also tells us that the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among them. They saw His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father. Jesus was full of grace and truth.

Jesus told His disciples, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” He didn’t say I am your truth or I am their truth. He said I am THE truth. Jesus also referred to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth and He lives inside each of us who belong to Christ.

To say that God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - is truth is to acknowledge that truth itself comes from the very nature of God.

Believers of Jesus Christ must stand firm in God’s truth. How does He reveal His truth to us? In His Word. Truth is rooted in the eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God. His promises cannot fail: “Every word of God proves true.”

He is the sovereign Creator. Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to Him and He makes the rules. All of His creation is accountable to Him. And we need to remind ourselves that we are who He says we are. It’s His truth that defines us, and it’s His truth that sustains us.

John 1:1 & 1:14; 14:6 & 14:17; 15:26, 16:13; Proverbs 30:5

Monday, April 29th, 2024

Vessels

A vessel is something to be filled. We are vessels - three part vessels. Our bodies hold our physical being, our brains hold our intellect and reasoning powers, and our hearts are what contain or are receptacles for our emotions. We have free will to choose what will fill these three. When we're indiscriminate in what fills them, the results are usually quite obvious.

You can usually tell when someone doesn't choose wisely with what fills their physical bodies. They're typically either sickly or overly fluffy. Likewise, what fills the mind typically determines how successful in life one might be from a career standpoint, and what fills the heart will significantly impact the quality of our relationships. When we fully grasp that we are merely vessels and what fills us is what really matters, it should cause us to be very intentional about how we are filled.

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is Paul's prayer in **Ephesians 3:14-21**. He begins in a posture of reverence, bowing before the Father, asking that according to His riches in glory we would be strengthened in the inner person so that Christ may dwell in our hearts. That would cause us to be firmly planted - rooted and grounded in His love. To really know that love, a love that surpasses any knowledge, we're ready to be *filled up to all the fullness of God!* And if that isn't enough, being filled with Him means that we have His power working in us. It's a power that can accomplish more than we could ever even think to ask for! And it's all to His glory, because our vessels are merely reflecting what we've filled them with.

That isn't to say that we'll never experience any problems, but if we're intentional in how we are filled, we needn't worry about being shattered. ["But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." \(2 Corinthians 4:7-10\)](#)

"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things* [which are dishonorable—disobedient, sinful], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified [set apart for a special purpose and], useful to the Master, prepared for every good work." **(2 Timothy 2:21)**
"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to [give] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." **(2 Corinthians 4:6)** How have you filled *your* vessel today?

Tuesday, April 30th, 2024

We Must Never Forget

As a whole, we've become so accustomed to sound bites and the proliferation of violence that it's easy to let yesterday's news become little more than something to file away or even dismiss. The horrific attack of October 7th is no longer a top news story, and other "breaking news" has overshadowed it. It's also on the other side of the world and sometimes a bit difficult for us to put into perspective. So, let's take a closer look.

When the attack on Israel took place, 1242 Jewish people were killed with a little over 100 of them from the kibbutz of Kfar Aza. When the United States was attacked in 2001 there were 2996 deaths. Remember that Israel is a small country. To understand the magnitude of this loss of life, by percentage it would be the equivalent of 35,372 on September 11! When you look at the devastation in Kfar Aza, it's even more staggering. If such an attack were to take place in Phoenix proper, not including the suburbs, it would result in the loss of 277,500 lives. And yet Israel is being depicted as inhumane because of the loss of civilians in Palestine. This is not to minimize or ignore the loss of Palestinian lives, but the fact cannot be ignored that Hamas uses their own citizens as human shields and part of their stated mandate is to wipe Israel off the map.

This is a holy war; this is a spiritual battle against God and all who are His. Never forget that we are grafted in, so that makes it an attack against us as well. The poignant message of one of those who escaped the carnage at the Nova Music Festival was for us to wake up, calling Gaza just the tip of the spear. We need to remember that God is on our side, and He is assuredly on the side of His chosen people and in defending the land He gave to them. "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. 'This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.'" (**Psalm 132:13-14**) And in **Isaiah 62:1** He says, "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet. Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness and her salvation like a torch that is burning."

Remember that God promised the land to Abraham, and He also promised that He would bless those who bless Israel and would curse those who curse her. We can't ignore the assault on His people because they are our heritage in Him. Pray for their peace and protection, and pray that His name would be not only remembered but exalted. He's more than a sound bite - He and His purposes are eternal.