

Prayer Devotions

May 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.

Colombia

Persecution Type: Organized Corruption & Crime, Clan Oppression, Secular Intolerance

Main Religion: Christianity

Government: Presidential Republic

Leader: President Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego

Vietnam

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

Main Religion: Buddhism

Government: Communist State

Leader: President Vo Van Thuong

Bhutan

Persecution Type: Religious nationalism

Main Religion: Buddhism

Government: Constitutional Monarchy

Leader: King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck

Daily Prayers for May: “The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice.”

— Francis Chan

Wednesday, May 1st, 2024:

To God Be the Glory

We all have different giftings, different opportunities, different spheres of influence, and different assignments. The one thing we all have in common is the intended outcome for all of these “differences.” It is to bring glory to God. **First Corinthians 6:20** reminds us, “You were bought with a price [you were actually purchased with the precious blood of Jesus and made His own]. So then, honor *and* glorify God with your body.” (Amplified Bible)

The implication and application of that should be clear. We can’t leave our bodies in bed if we expect to get anything accomplished for the day. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (**1 Corinthians 10:31**) Remember to thank Him, to acknowledge Him, and to remind yourself as you go about your daily business that He is *with* you, *in* you, and His desire is for others to get a glimpse of Him *through* you. “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (**Matthew 5:16**)

Father, we choose to submit to You and Your purpose for our lives. We know that when we do that we are giving You free rein to work through us, and we thank You and praise You for what you desire to accomplish as a result. “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (**Ephesians 3:20-21**)

Thursday, May 2nd, 2024:

Organization vs Organism

An organization is a body of people structured to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. It has a management structure that determines how the various parts interact and has a hierarchy of roles, responsibilities, and authority. There is typically an underlying objective involving profit margins and managerial strategies. This is not a bad thing, but it can't ever be the *only* thing when you're talking about a living body, and the Church is described as a living body of believers.

An organism, on the other hand, is a life form! It also is composed of mutually interdependent parts that maintain various vital processes, but it is a living, breathing entity that relies on every part being connected and contributing. Individual members are responsible for figuring out ways they can contribute to the overall health of this organism. The Body then can thrive and grow as the blood (of Jesus) flows through its veins, it is daily nourished (with the Word), and it seeks to maintain a body temperature which doesn't drop too low. It has to depend on the fire of the Holy Spirit to keep it from becoming just another corporate corpse.

Too many skeptics see the church as just another part of corporate America. Lord, help us to never substitute programs for Your abiding, life-giving Presence. "He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." (**Ephesians 4:16**) May Pure Heart Church and the whole of Your Church mirror what it is to be truly alive in You.

Friday, May 3rd, 2024

Godly Perspective

After leaving Egypt, God promised the nation of Israel a land flowing with milk and honey. As they reached the border of Canaan, God instructed Moses to send out a group of men (spies) to explore the land and bring back a report.

After their 40-day exploration, all 12 men agreed that the land was exactly as God said it would be, flowing with milk and honey. There was an abundance of large fruit and lush grain, and there were giants in the land.

They all agreed on the facts but their perspectives were quite different.

Ten of the spies witnessed the land with a worldly perspective. Their focus was on the giants assuming they would overpower the Israelites. They completely disregarded God's promise to give them this land. Their perspective centered around their own abilities even referring to themselves as grasshoppers. They assumed the giants would also view them as grasshoppers and devour them.

Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, held a godly perspective. They noted the large people but they fully believed in God's ability, not their own. "Do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us."

Unfortunately, the Israelites allowed the worldly perspective to persuade them to the point they wanted to go back to Egypt and even wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb. Their lack of faith resulted in 40 years of wandering through the wilderness although our merciful God still provided for them.

As a result of their godly perspective and steadfast faith in God, Joshua and Caleb were the only adult Israelites in that first generation who were permitted to enter the Promised Land.

They teach us that we are to stand firm for God even when others do not.

Numbers 13 & 14; 1 Corinthians 15:58

Saturday, May 4th, 2024:

His Delight

“Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.” (**Isaiah 12:5 NIV**)

Every day the Holy Spirit is working in you and through you to bring about many “glorious things”. The word declares he “...daily loads us with benefits.” (**Psalm 68:18**) You have his benefits because you are no longer walking in darkness. So, now you see things in a new way. Sometimes you are awe struck when you consider the wonders of God’s glorious creation.

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord!” (**Psalm 85:1a**) Tell of the great things that he has done for you. His riches are unsearchable. You are his delight, and the “King” wants to reveal more of his love and matchless character to you. You have an invitation to worship him and spend time in his presence. When you sit in his presence day by day, your heart is transformed, and you will begin to reflect more of the likeness of Jesus. The more time you spend in his presence, the more your heart becomes soft and pliable. Let the Holy Spirit guide you into a new revelation of the depth of Christ’s love, as he hung there on the cross for all humanity. Spending time in his presence is precious. His presence will change you.

John 8:12, Psalm 19:1, Romans 11:33, 1 Peter 2:9

Sunday, May 5th, 2024:

Make Prayer a Lifestyle

The parable of the widow in **Luke 18:1-8** should be a reminder to us that persistence in prayer is something that is sometimes required to not only bring about the desired results, but also to strengthen our faith. Jesus in fact emphasizes that even an unrighteous judge can be swayed by continual appealing. He goes on to say that certainly our righteous Father will bring about justice to those who cry out to Him day and night.

I think the underlying message here, however, is not merely repetitiveness in prayer, but rather what motivates us to continue to call out, even when we aren’t seeing the desired results. He concludes the parable with the statement, “...when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” When we doggedly persevere in prayer, expecting answers, it shows we truly believe He hears and He will answer. Lack of expectant persistence reveals lack of faith, and without faith it’s impossible to please Him, but He rewards those who diligently seek Him. (**Hebrews 11:6**)

Lord Jesus, help us to be persistent in coming to You, knowing You hear our cries and promise to reward those who diligently seek You.

Monday, May 6th, 2024:

Don't Worry; Don't Be Afraid

Because God is all-knowing, He understands that in our humanity we are prone to have anxiety, doubts and fears. And because His love and compassion are boundless, He repeatedly assures us that we can trust in Him to take care of us. When we have placed our faith in Him, we are deemed righteous (in right standing with Him) and we are assured in **Psalm 34:17**, “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles.” The psalmist makes it a personal testimony when he assures the reader in the fourth verse of the same psalm, “I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.”

There are absolutely situations which may cause concern: a broken relationship, a loss of employment, an unfavorable diagnosis, but there's a difference between concern and anxiety. A concern is easier to manage and share with the Lord. Anxiety suggests an out-of-control fear or distress. We need to keep reminding ourselves who has our back. God Himself tells us, “Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand” (**Isaiah 41:10**).

When we truly believe and trust Him, we can follow Peter's advice when he paraphrases **Psalm 55:22** in **1 Peter 5:7** - “...casting *all* your cares [*all* your anxieties, *all* your worries, and *all* your concerns, *once and for all*] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully].” (Amplified Bible, emphasis added) That's our God; that's His promise!

Tuesday, May 7th ,2024:

A Simple Act of Love

In our ultra-busy lives, we sometimes forget to do those simple acts of love. We are often rushed and oblivious to the people around us. When was the last time you smiled at your cashier and gave them a word of encouragement, “You are doing a great job!”? When was the last time you opened the door for an elderly person struggling to walk? When was the last time you did a simple act of service for another person? Are your neighbors' weeds overgrown? Do you see it and complain of the eyesore it is? Have you thought an illness or troubled times have prevented the maintenance? Sneak over and give them a hand. Scripture tells us to love and serve each other, even our Savior did small acts of kindness for people - washing of the feet (**John 13:1-5**) – aside from His Grand Sacrificial Act of Love.

Are you the Good Samaritan or the Priest & Levite? (**Luke 10:29-37**)

Is your agenda too important to stop and show love? Do you need to evaluate your schedule, so you have more time to be the hands and feet of Jesus? I don't bring these things up to condemn you but to help you remember we are called to love and for one to know they are loved they must feel seen. Do you see the sick, the homeless, the broken? Does your spouse - do your children - do your friends – do your coworkers feel seen by you? It doesn't need to be a grand gesture, just a simple act of love – a note to your spouse – a favorite treat in your child's lunchbox/backpack - a quick encouraging text to a friend (better yet a phone call). Can you carry a small cooler in your car with cold water & granola bars to share with the hungry person on the street corner?

How can you be creative in a simple act of love today?

Wednesday, May 8th, 2024:

God's Riches

The apostle Paul opens the book of Ephesians with a blessing from God.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our lord Jesus, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” **Ephesians 1:3**

What a powerful word, through Christ we have access to the blessings of heaven. Not only have we been redeemed, brought back into relationship with God the Father. We have been given full access to His power and riches. These spiritual blessings are provided to help us navigate this world and live out His Kingdom purposes. You may be thinking “If these gifts are for me how do I gain access to them.” The answer to this question is of course in the word of God.

We should first claim God's riches: **1 John 5:14-15; Matthew 7:7-8.**

Claim these riches: **Matthew 7:11; Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 4:16; James 1:5.**

A few conditions in claiming God's riches: **Psalm 37:4; Psalm 91:14-15; John 15:7; 1 John 3:21-22; James 1:5-6.**

In **2 Chronicles 1:10-12** we see an example of King Solomon claiming God's riches.

- Steps provided by “7 Habits of Effective Prayer Life” Alvin j. Vander Griend (2016)

God is the giver of all gifts and gives as He sees fit. He desires to bestow spiritual gifts on us but also knows the right time and place. Start asking and seeking but remember. He understands that putting meat in the hands of an infant is dangerous and impractical. But as that infant matures and has the understanding and the capacity to consume meat, heartier meals are given. Continue to drink your spiritual milk, work on the practical (**1 Corinthians 3:2**) and as you master those be ready for an outpouring of spiritual blessings.

Thursday, May 9th, 2024:

Spiritual Milk

“Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation.” **2 Peter 2:2**

Yesterday, we talked about the spiritual blessings God has for us in the heavenlies. As we grow in intimacy and maturity, He releases increasingly more to us, as we seek and ask. To grow in spiritual maturity, we must first engage in the elementary practices, spiritual 101 if you will. Think of a baby’s need for milk - they cry out for nourishment; and it strengthens them and provides for their growth. Without nourishment, they cease to thrive. This is true for Christians, if we are not crying out for the nourishment of His Word and Holy Spirit, we at the very least become stagnant at its worst we die (spiritually) – failure to thrive.

It is crucial to develop spiritual habits that create spiritual muscles moving you away from infancy into maturity, as the book of **Hebrews 6:1-3** instructs “So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don’t need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. ²You don’t need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding.”

In **1 Corinthians 15:46** (CSB) we read “However, the natural is not first, but the natural, then the spiritual.” Essentially, this passage tells us physical obedience brings spiritual release. What do your spiritual habits or practices look like? Are you devoted to reading & meditating on scripture? Are you asking for revelation from His Word? Praying “Father, what truth are You revealing to me here, how do you want me to apply it in my life? (-Stop & Listen-) Thank You, Father for this revelation give me the discipline and power to make this change/step out in faith and action in obedience to Your revelation.”

In the beginning, hearing His voice can be challenging, we are like lambs learning to hear and recognize His voice. But as we continue in these practices we grow into sheep who hear their master’s voice (**John 10:27**). And step out in obedience to His will for that moment. In anything in life practice makes perfect, the more we practice the better we will become and the more He will release spiritual riches within us to fulfill Kingdom purposes. Cry out for Your nourishment, it is worth it!

Friday, May 10th, 2024:

Why Should I Go to Church? Part 1

(Inspired by a message from Pastor Robert Morris)

We can come up with all kinds of reasons not to go to church - some valid and some not so much. Granted, there are sometimes legitimate reasons: sickness, lack of transportation, being out of town. But there are also “excuses” such as: I don’t feel like it, it’s easier to just watch online, I don’t want to miss the game. We need to understand that besides being told “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do...” (**Hebrews 10:25a**), there are certain benefits that are available when we actually get up and go.

The first of these is the Presence of God. Yes, He is omnipresent, but having a location for His people to gather was His idea. When Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle, the Lord said, “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them...there I will meet with you.” (**Exodus 25:8, 22**) And in the words of Jesus, “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (**Matthew 18:20**) There is a beautiful awareness of His presence when His children are gathered together in worship. And we need His presence. As David expressed in **Psalms 16:11**, “You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” That is a benefit worth pursuing.

Saturday, May 11th, 2024:

Why Should I Go to Church? Part 2

The next reason for actually going to church is the power of God. In **Matthew 18:19** Jesus is recorded as telling His disciples, “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.” This is the verse right before He tells them that when they have gathered together, He will be in their midst. Whenever we are in His presence there is great power.

When Jesus asked His disciples who the people were saying He was, Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (**Matthew 16:13**) Jesus answered that upon that reality, a revelation from the Father in heaven, He would build His church, and the not even gates of Hell would prevail against it! The church is powerful because it serves a powerful God, and when we gather together, He is in our midst. “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, ***according to His power*** that is at work within us, to Him be glory ***in the church*** and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (**Ephesians 3:20-21**, emphasis added)

Sunday, May 12th, 2024:

Why Should I Go to Church? Part 3

A third reason we should actually be going to church is the people. From the very beginning, God determined that it isn't good to be alone. When God blessed Adam and Eve, He told them to be fruitful and multiply. That takes more than one. He created us to be in community. That's why we're called the body of Christ.

Romans 12:4-5 & 15 state, "Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other...so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." When parts are missing or aren't operating the way they're intended, there's always the possibility of a malfunction or at the very least a less-than-optimal outcome. When we're all working together and functioning the way we were created, it's like a well-oiled machine, and the Holy Spirit is the oil.

We're in a spiritual battle, and we need the encouragement and support of one another. It certainly feels like the Lord's return is imminent, so we should be encouraging our brothers and sisters - that suggests a need for community. And back to our anchor verse - **Hebrews 10:25**: "Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching." (The Message)

Monday, May 13th, 2024:

Spiritual Truth

During the time of the Old Covenant, God spoke to our ancestors through outside sources. He spoke through prophets at many times and in various ways.

Now we have the New Covenant where God Himself speaks directly to each of us, His children, through His indwelling presence.

In the Old Covenant, God's words were given to guide His people through external means. But in the New Covenant, God's Word is inside each of us transforming us directly.

Scripture describes humans as a three-in-one being made in the image of our three-in-one God. We have a physical body. We have a soul that includes our minds, will and emotions. And we have spirit, God's dwelling place.

In our spirit, God expresses Himself through our soul – through our minds, will and emotions. And it's through our bodies that our spirit and soul are expressed in the world.

If God indwells you – Father, Son and Spirit – then that means Truth indwells you. That doesn't mean that you comprehend all Truth though. Our minds don't have all the Truth.

Scripture tells us that a veil lies over our minds that is only removed by Jesus Christ. That means the Truth that indwells our spirit is increasingly being unveiled in our minds by Jesus. He is continually lifting the veil that hides deep truth so we can understand more of His Word each day.

God is the only One who can bring understanding of Spiritual Truth to our minds. As we seek Him, He will give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so we will know Him better. It is a process. The more we seek, the more He reveals.

All we have to do is ask for understanding of His Truth and He will provide.

Hebrews 8:6-11; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:16; Luke 24:45; Ephesians 3:17-19

Tuesday, May 14th, 2024:

A Mother's Love

As we pay tribute to mothers, let us remember that there are no perfect mothers, and God didn't say to honor them only if they're worthy. The fifth Commandment tells us (*commands us*) to honor our parents "...so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." (**Exodus 20:12**, emphasis added) I think most of us, given the choice, would choose to do something that had the potential to extend our lives.

There's an old Jewish saying, "God couldn't be everywhere, so He made mothers." This may not be theologically accurate, but God did create women to be nurturers, and the tender love of a mother is how Paul described his love for the church. "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." (**1 Thessalonians 2:7**) "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you;" is how God expresses His love for Israel and how He would comfort them. (**Isaiah 66:13**)

Obviously, God looks on the role of motherhood as being very valuable. In fact, the last chapter of His famous book of wisdom is expounding the virtues of an excellent wife and mother. (**Proverbs 31:10-31**) So even if your relationship with your own mother is not what you would like, remember that she did give you life and one of His "big ten" instructs you to honor her. Being a mother is both inexplicably demanding and rewarding. So, if it's possible to do so, thank your mother. And if you're a mother, know that God has given you a sacred trust for which He has also equipped you. "Only God Himself fully appreciates the influence of a Christian mother in the molding of character in her children." ~ Billy Graham

Wednesday, May 15th, 2024:

Seeking Comfort

It's been said that the Western Church seeks to worship at the altar of comfort and convenience. It may surprise you that this idea is as old as the Old Testament. Jeroboam, like many leaders today, sought to avoid the risk of losing some of his tribe by giving them an alternative to going to the temple in Jerusalem as God had commanded. Hence, he set up a temple in Tel Dan that was far more luxurious than the temple in Jerusalem. It was also a lot more convenient. They even substituted the priests, the feasts, and basically every other part of sacrifice that God had ordained. They wanted to rely on their own ideas.

One of the ways the modern church has accommodated this mentality is by minimizing, if not altogether ignoring, the need for the Holy Spirit. In His book *The Forgotten God*, Francis Chan wrote "...Why would we need to experience the Comforter if our lives are already comfortable? It is those who put their lives at risk and suffer for the gospel who will most often experience His being with you always, even to the end of the age.'" (**Matthew 28:20**)

We're looking for the wrong kind of comfort. We want the convenient kind; what we really want could better be described as self-indulging laziness. We want a Burger King religion rather than a servant's heart in relationship with our King. God in His mercy offers us a life that will have challenges (and every life has them no matter what). But what every other life doesn't have is His Presence living in us. He is the Paraklētos; He comes alongside us to encourage, enlighten, and to give us a supernatural peace and power to navigate those challenges and to come out victorious. That's true comfort.

Thursday, May 16th, 2024:

Spiritual Inheritance

“He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of His grace, with which He favored us in the Beloved.” (Ephesians 1:5-6 New American Standard Bible)

Seeking God was not just some random thought on our part. You were predestined. It is not by accident, you were chosen. “For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight in love. (Ephesians 1:4 NIV) When the time was right, your eyes were opened, and Jesus Christ was revealed to you by the Spirit of God. This was His will for you. You are “accepted in the beloved...” (Ephesians 1:6) Since you have been adopted as a child of God; you have an inheritance. The Holy Spirit has sealed you with a promise. “Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:14) Your eyes have been opened to the glorious riches of your spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus! Your old life has died. “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone: a new life has begun. (2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT) You have new life in Christ. As a child of the King, you have favor. You are blessed beyond measure. “Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3 NIV)

Friday, May 17th, 2024:

How Do You Identify?

Our country is becoming increasingly liberal in “personal freedoms” at an unprecedented rate. We now have the “freedom” to decide what gender we choose to “identify” as, and our tax dollars can even be used to surgically alter the physical attributes of a minor to more closely resemble the gender of choice. The bottom line is, we can choose all sorts of things that don’t align with God’s choices, but they don’t change who we were actually created to be. Their DNA will still identify them as male or female.

We have a spiritual identity as well, and we do have absolute free will in how we choose to identify in that area. In fact, God’s desire is that we make the choice to identify as He created us and to reflect that choice in every other choice we make. That’s easy in theory, but much more difficult to live out on a consistent basis. We are new creations. As Paul says, “**I have been crucified with Christ** and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” (**Galatians 2:20**)

To be crucified means that we have sacrificed our old way of life. **Romans 12:1** says to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. It’s referring to our carnal nature - that has to die! You never saw a sacrifice jumping off the altar. We’ll never get it perfect. Only Jesus was able to do that. It’s why He had to die in our place, but it means that He has given us the power to choose rightly. When we do, it will be evident in how we conduct ourselves. It will be our identity. How do YOU identify?

Saturday, May 18th, 2024:

God is Watching

In the 90's there was a song by Bette Midler that gave what seemed to be a hopeful outlook. The opening lyrics were - "From a distance, we all have enough and no one is in need; and there are no guns, no bombs, and no disease. No hungry mouths to feed. From a distance, there is harmony and it echoes through the land. And it's the hope of hopes; it's the love of love; it's the heart of every man." And then the chorus says God is watching us "from a distance."

The writer expressed that she believed there is a God who is good and who is near, but there's a difference between a belief *of* God and belief *in* God. Even Satan believes - knows - there is a God. He isn't threatened by people believing God exists or even that they affirm He's kind. In fact, he delights in that half-hearted pseudo-faith kind of belief. What worries him is when belief is taken a step further; when we come to realize He's Emmanuel - *immanu el* which means: with us - God. For us He isn't merely a distant observer; He's a present help in time of need. He's living in us!

How many are convinced that because they believe there is a God, they're good to go? The song is correct when it says that He's watching us. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we must answer." (**Hebrews 4:13**) He knows the very thoughts of our hearts, and He knows the difference between those who profess to believe and those who place their faith and confidence in Him. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever *believes in Him* shall not perish but have eternal life." (**John 3:16** emphasis added)

Sunday, May 19th, 2024:

Give God Glory Pt 1

To give God glory is to give Him what He deserves. He deserves to be praised for who He is. He has shown Himself to us so that we may acknowledge His greatness, goodness, and glory. Glorifying God does more than honor Him. It has a personal benefit for us. Praise brings joy to our hearts, shifts the atmosphere of our souls, and fosters holiness within us. Our inclination toward self-centeredness is reversed. It takes the focus off us and places Him as the central focus of our lives. Pride turns into humility, fear turns into calmness, and the power of the enemy is shut down in his tracks. Giving God glory is one of the most effective weapons we have against the enemy.

Praising God is not something we do at the weekend services. Praising God should be as natural and automatic as breathing. It is meant to permeate our lives morning, noon, and night. “from the rising to the setting sun, let the name of the Lord be praised” Psalm 113:3. Hebrews 13:15 instructs us, through Jesus, to “continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise” calling praise the fruit of our lips.

Nothing deepens our awareness of His power and presence as a constant song and call of praise. The more you praise Him the more you learn about Him. As you praise Him in all circumstances, you will produce the fruits of His blessings.

Monday, May 20th, 2024:

Give God Glory Pt 2

Praising God ought to naturally flow through our hearts but that is not always the case for those who are just coming into a relationship with Him or one who is drowning in unforeseen circumstances. Giving God glory is a prayer habit; habits must be practiced and cultivated to become fruit in our lives. Here are a few tips to develop the habit of giving God the glory He deserves. First, ask God to give you a praising heart and open your eyes to His movement in your life. The big moments and the little moments. Next, immerse yourself in the Word of God (John 15:4-5) specifically the Psalms His word is saturated with praise passages, dig into the Word of God, and memorize these treasures of praise. Finally, speak these passages aloud, personalize these passages as if these passages were intended for Him and you alone. A love conversation between Father and child. As you continually practice these steps the habit of giving God glory will flow from your heart as organic and unique celebration of God's glory and whether you are having a mountaintop or a valley experience you will celebrate God's faithful presence in your life. - Science tells us on average, it takes more than 2 months before a new behavior becomes automatic — 66 days to be exact. And how long it takes a new habit to form can vary widely depending on the behavior, the person, and the circumstances. In Lally's study, it took anywhere from 18 days to 254 days for people to form a new habit (James Clear-Behavioral Psychology).

Every day that you practice this the closer you are to continually producing the fruit of praise on your lips and in your life.

Tuesday, May 21st, 2024:

Keep Asking

When you were young, did you ever hear a parent or authority figure say, “If you ask one more time, you will go in time out (or be spanked, or be grounded, or whatever form of punishment you received as a youngster)?

That was a common theme when I grew up. I made a request, and if it was denied, I wasn’t allowed to ask again without consequences.

Because I was raised that way, I brought that mindset into my Christian life. When I prayed for God to show me His will in a certain situation, if He didn’t provide an immediate answer, I wouldn’t ask again for fear of punishment. As a result, I lacked confidence because I didn’t really know what God’s will was and I ended up making many foolish decisions.

Imagine my surprise and delight when I learned that Paul teaches us to keep asking!

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.”

When Paul prayed for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, he didn’t ask just once. This was a continual and constant prayer. This demonstrates a daily discipline rich with devotion and dedication. It teaches us to humbly admit our dependence on God every day and to continually seek His will.

Notice that Paul didn’t just ask God to give the Ephesians wisdom and revelation. He asked for God to give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. And we should also pray for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so our every thought, word, and deed are infused with the wisdom of God as He continues to reveal Himself to us.

Keep asking!

Ephesians 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Wednesday, May 22nd, 2024:

All Will Bow

The first reference we have to bowing is in **Genesis 18:2** when the Lord and two angels appeared to Abraham, and Abraham seems to recognize Him because he addresses Him as “My Lord” and prostrates himself. The Hebrew word *shachah* actually meant to prostrate oneself before a superior. Bowing was an act of showing honor to one of greater eminence. It was an act of worship.

However, there were also times when that act was forced rather than voluntary. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were exiled in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree that at the sound of a trumpet *everyone* was to fall down (bow) before an image of gold or they would be put to death. Those three Jewish boys refused to obey because they knew there was only One deserving of worship, and it wasn't the king.

We all face this same tension. We can either choose to worship the Godhead only and place all of our trust in Him, or we can place our hope in economic prosperity, our own intellectual capabilities, love of friends and family, mother nature, or any other “idol” we put before God. Whichever we choose, ultimately the time will come when we all must bow before Him. We will either bow in humble worship and recognition of His deity, or we will be compelled to bow, knowing that He holds the power of life and death.

Matthew 4:10 tells us, “It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.” When we choose wisely, we can look forward to that day when “...at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” (**Philippians 2:10** emphasis added) “Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker,” (**Psalms 95:6**) He and He alone is worthy.

Thursday, May 23rd, 2024:

Devoted To

It's amazing that Scripture uses so many superlative words when it talks about prayer: always, all occasions, day & night, earnest, bold, wrestling, devoted, constantly, and persistent. These are the ways that God wants His people to think about the habit of prayer.

Prayer is first of all God's way of communicating. He commands it, he expects it, and he works in response to it. Devotion to prayer is devotion to God. It's a way of relating to God and honoring His way of working in the world.

As you move your heart into devotion to prayer; prayer is more than knowledge of prayer or commitment to prayer. Prayer is an activity. Elijah, Jesus, Paul and the early church believers had good habits of prayer. Their devotion to prayer took the form of habitually doing it. They actually did pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests ... and always kept on praying for all God's people. There is no other way to be devoted to prayer.

Let's open the word of God and see the devotion to prayer that has been spelled out for us.

Jesus Devotion to Prayer: (Our most perfect example of.)

Mark 1:35; Mark 6:46; Luke 5:15-16; Luke 6:12; Luke 22:44; John 17:1.

Believers Devoted to Prayer:

Acts 1:14; Acts 2:42; Acts 4:23-24; Acts 6:4; Acts 12:5.

Commands to Prayer:

Matthew 5:44; Matthew 26:41; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Examples of Devotion to Prayer:

Nehemiah 1:4-6; James 5:17-18; 2 Timothy 1:3.

Prayer for Today:

In utter dependence upon Jesus Christ as my ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord and prayer partner, I will devote myself to prayer and will faithfully support Kingdom purposes until my last breath. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, May 24th, 2024:

The Heart of the Good Samaritan

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus illustrates the essence of loving others through selfless service. The Samaritan, despised by the cultural standards of the time, demonstrated compassion without reservation. He not only helped the wounded traveler but also went above and beyond, putting the needs of a stranger above his own comfort and safety. As followers of Christ, we are called to embody the spirit of the Good Samaritan in our daily lives. We are challenged to love our neighbors sacrificially, extending compassion and assistance to those in need, regardless of their background or circumstance.

Luke 10:33-34 (NIV): "But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him." This passage vividly portrays the actions of the Good Samaritan, highlighting his immediate response to help the injured man and his willingness to sacrifice his own resources for the stranger's well-being.

Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV): "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Paul's exhortation to the Philippians echoes the selfless attitude demonstrated by the Good Samaritan. We are urged to prioritize the needs of others above our own desires, practicing humility and genuine concern for those around us.

Matthew 22:39 (NIV): "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Jesus affirms the principle of loving others as ourselves, encapsulating the essence of the Good Samaritan's actions. This commandment challenges us to extend the same care and compassion to others that we would desire for ourselves.

Reflection:

May we be inspired by the example of the Good Samaritan, seeking opportunities to love, serve, and uplift those around us. Let us cultivate hearts of compassion and generosity, putting the needs of others before our own, and thereby reflecting the transformative love of Christ in our communities.

Saturday, May 25th, 2024:

Water from the Well

Living in the desert, we know what it is to be thirsty. Typically a person can only survive 2-4 days without water, with the effects of dehydration being: dizziness, confusion, a loss of the ability to focus, restlessness, agitation, weakness, an elevated heart rate and breathlessness, low blood pressure, fever...not a pretty picture. The people who lived in Bible times understood the importance of water, and God used it to teach important spiritual lessons. In fact, water is mentioned 722 times in the Bible! It's essential for life.

Of the 722 times water is mentioned, only 7 of those refer to "living" water. In the Old Testament the Lord speaks through the prophet Jeremiah saying His people have forsaken Him the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves broken cisterns that can't hold water. **(Jeremiah 2:13, 7:13)** In the New Testament it's John who is recording the words of Jesus identifying Himself as the source of "living" water.

This water isn't a stagnant pool; it's flowing, literally alive and life-giving. And when we drink from that source, the living water flows *through* us! It's from a source that will never run dry, and it can protect us from becoming confused, restless, weak, anxious...it can save our lives for eternity. This water cleanses us from all impurities, quenches our every thirst, and fills us up to overflowing that we never need thirst again. That is, as long as we continue to satisfy our thirst from the right source. "The LORD says, "Come, everyone who is thirsty--here is water!" **(Isaiah 55:1 Good News Translation)**

Sunday, May 26th, 2024:

Fulfilled Prophecy

We can be so impatient when it comes to receiving answers to our prayers and to God's prophecies. This isn't new. In the Old Testament it was sometimes years and even centuries before His word came to pass...but it did, and it still does! What we need to come to grips with is the fact that it all depends on His timing, and often that is influenced by the obedience of His people - or a lack thereof.

There have been a number of prophecies over the state of Arizona: in 2008, Chuck Pierce had a vision of the United States and Arizona was the only state that was fully engulfed and ablaze with glory; Cindy Jacobs saw Arizona as the alpha and omega (AZ), with Arizona being the "alpha" in taking point in a prayer movement for the nation that would determine its "omega" destiny. For these and other prophecies to come to fruition, we as the Church need to be a people of prayer! God could easily accomplish His purposes alone, but He chooses to partner with us. God-of-the-Angel-Armies wants to fight the battle **with us** as His wingman.

We depend on His power, but often He depends on our participation. The famous passage in **2 Chronicles 7:13-14** reads that if He should shut up the heavens and there's no rain, or if He sends some sort of pestilence or devourer among His people, **if** they will humble themselves and pray and seek His face and turn from their wicked ways, **then** He will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land. Get the point? Take the point! May we become a people of prayer who fervently and faithfully call on His name until we see the breakthrough. His word will not return void without accomplishing His what He desires. (**Isaiah 55:11**) Let's pray and hasten the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Monday, May 27th, 2024

Yielding to the Holy Spirit's Leadership

In Ephesians 1, we are presented with a rich tapestry of spiritual truths. Amidst this wealth of wisdom lies a reminder of our responsibility to yield to the Holy Spirit's leadership. As believers, we are called not only to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit but also to surrender to His guidance in every aspect of our lives.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in sealing us as God's own and empowering us for Christian living. In **verse 13**, Paul writes, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." Here, we see that the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives is not passive but transformative. He marks us as belonging to God, guiding us into truth and righteousness.

However, our yielding to the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event but a continual process. In **Ephesians 4:30**, Paul admonishes believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit, suggesting that our actions and attitudes can hinder His work in our lives. Therefore, our responsibility lies in actively aligning our thoughts, words, and deeds with the leading of the Spirit.

Furthermore, **Galatians 5:16-18** provides additional insight into our responsibility to yield to the Holy Spirit's leadership: "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Here, Paul highlights the ongoing battle between the flesh and the Spirit and encourages believers to walk in step with the Spirit, thereby overcoming the desires of the flesh.

In conclusion, Ephesians 1 underscores the vital importance of yielding to the Holy Spirit's leadership in our lives. Through His presence and guidance, we are sealed as God's own and empowered to live out our faith. Let us, therefore, embrace our responsibility to walk in step with the Spirit, aligning our hearts and minds with His will each day.

Ephesians 1

Tuesday, May 28th, 2024

Rejoice Always

In Paul's first letter to the church of Thessalonica, one of the things he instructed them to do was to "Rejoice always."

Always? We're supposed to rejoice even when we get bad news or face the death of a loved one or lose our job? How can we rejoice under those circumstances?

Rejoicing is a decision, not an emotion.

God isn't telling us to pretend that we are happy during difficult times. He is telling us to genuinely rejoice that He is with us in our struggles and our pain. We can rejoice that He is our Lord and Savior and in recognizing that the joy of the LORD is our strength.

For the believer, the fruit of the Spirit, including joy, is always in abundant supply. Even in the darkest days, when sadness, grief, and loss threatens to overwhelm us, God's joy is there.

Always rejoicing in the Lord is not just a suggestion; it is a command, and it is commanded always. We can always choose to praise the Lord no matter what circumstances we face.

"Because his heart was focused on the joy of knowing that you would be his, he endured the agony of the cross and conquered its humiliation, and now sits exalted at the right hand of the throne of God!" (**Hebrews 12:2** The Passion Translation)

We rejoice because of what the Lord has done, continues to do, and will do in the future. Regardless of our circumstances and emotions, our hope is in the Lord. He is our rock and our salvation; He is our fortress and we will not be shaken.

This alone is reason enough to *rejoice. Always!*

1 Thessalonians 5:16; Nehemiah 8:10; John 15:10–11; Philipians 4:4; Psalm 62:6

Wednesday, May 29th, 2024

“Go Your Way”

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (**Romans 10:17**) Your faith grows the more you hear the word. You have faith. Everyone has been given a measure of faith. Jesus told his disciples that even if they had faith as tiny as a mustard seed, that was enough faith to move mountains. The God of Heaven says, “I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.” (**Jeremiah 1:12b**) “Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven.” (**Psalms 119:89**) What is faith? The Bible answers the question. “Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. (**Hebrews 11:1**) NLT Put your faith in God’s word. Believe in the word, not your emotions. By faith, submit your prayers according to his word. In Matthew 8, a Roman soldier came to Jesus and was telling him about his servant being very sick. “And Jesus said to him, ‘I will come and heal him.’” (**Matthew 8:7**) The soldier said, oh no you don’t need to come to my house, “...speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.” (**Matthew 8:8**) Jesus said he had not seen that kind of faith. “And Jesus said unto the Centurion, go your way, and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.’ And his servant was healed that very same hour.” (Matthew 8:10) “SPEAK THE WORD ONLY.” Your faith can move a mountain.

Romans 12:3, Matthew 17:20

Thursday, May 30th, 2024

You Took My Parking Place

This should wake us up. One day, a man went to visit a church. He got there early, parked his car and got out. Another car pulled up near the driver, got out and said, "I always park there! You took my place!"

The visitor went inside for Sunday School, found an empty seat and sat down. A young lady from the church approached him and stated, "That's my seat! You took my place!" The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome, but said nothing.

After Sunday School, the visitor went into the sanctuary and sat down. Another member walked up to him and said, "That's where I always sit! You took my place!" The visitor was even more troubled by this treatment, but still he said nothing.

Later as the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them, the visitor stood up, and his appearance began to change. Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandaled feet. Someone from the congregation noticed him and called out, "What happened to you?" The visitor replied, as his hat became a crown of thorns, and a tear fell from his eye, "I took your place." (author unknown)

May we never forget "who took our place" and honor Him in how we live. Thank You, Jesus.

Friday, May 31st, 2024

What Defines Your Future?

Not one of us could boast about our sterling reputation, because we all have skeletons of varying sizes lurking somewhere in the closet. Some of them would scare even the most hardened sinners and others may appear to be little more than a cartoon character, but they're all skeletons none-the-less. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (**Romans 3:23**) You notice it says *all*. The only exclusion from that is Jesus; all of the rest of us fall into the sinner category from Osama Bin Laden to Billy Graham.

The bad news is, the wages of sin is death - everything from telling your best friend those jeans really don't make them look fat to the most heinous crimes you can imagine. Sin is sin. But there's good news - the price for every one of those sins has already been paid. As the hymn goes, "Jesus paid it all!" And He offers it to us for free! (**Romans 6:23**) **Psalm 103:12** assures us, "He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west." (NLT)

What all this means is, no matter how many times we've fallen short, when we confess our sin and truly repent and receive His grace and forgiveness, He washes the slate clean. The enemy will try to take you back into the closet where he's hidden those skeletons, but remember - they're just a lifeless pile of bones, and Jesus cleaned the closet out for us! We have been made brand new, and that's what defines our future. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**) Now **that's** good news!