

Day 1 of 70 Daily Devotionals for You

Encouragement is the balm of the soul. As we all know, we are prone to isolation and discouragement. The Adversary knows this. He has had millennia to work on folks just like us.

Psalm 34, my favorite, has blessed me and, no doubt, you many times over the years. Sometimes I've been so low, I could barely lift my chin off my desk. Other times, I was filled with joy and all seemed promising.

Verses 4 and 11 seem to be first cousins:

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears." v4

"Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." v11 (NIV)

Wherever you are today, take this moment and quietly seek Jesus. He will answer you. He will deliver you from or through this hour you are facing. Come to Him...right now...just for a minute, or two. Bend the ear of your soul to listen to the Master. He will teach you with comfort and compassion. He will hold you in silence.

Dear Lord, help us to find you today. Help us to seek you with all our hearts. Help us to rest in what you think of us according to your eternal and mighty Word. Help us to be men and women of God and not those of the world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 2

When was the last time you strolled through a meadow or pasture? When was the last time you walked through a farmer's field? I want to encourage you today. The Lord has me in Psalm 23. Most of us have spent much time here.

The comfort in the first verse alone is dear to each of us.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want." v.1 (Old NIV)

Notice whose shepherd the Lord Jesus is? -Yours and mine. Other versions of the Bible render the last half of this verse:

"I lack nothing." (New NIV)

"[to feed, guide, and shield me], I shall not lack." (AMPC)

"I have everything I need." (ICB)

"nothing shall fail to me." (WYC)

"He gives me everything I need." (NIRV) by the way...for all of eternity!!

Our first step onto the Lord's pasture today begins with embracing these two wonderful truths:

1. You and I belong completely to Someone: The Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd of our souls. We are His now and for all eternity. We belong to Him, His plan, and His care.
2. There is nothing from this point forward unto all of glorious eternity that we will lack. All of our needs (relationship, lasting forgiveness, holiness, friendship, provision, love, peace, hope, and joy...etc) are already met and being met as we live and breathe today.

So friends, I think we can rejoice right now. I am sitting at my desk getting older by the second, but I choose to give thanks with you to our Good and Great Shepherd who loves us, saved us, and called us to simply trust and follow Him. We are blessed indeed.

Day 3

I remember Wednesdays at West Point when I was a cadet from 1970 to 74. Midweek was like being midway across the English Channel during a relentless storm. The mental, physical, emotional pressures were constant. But then we had Steak Night (including Lobster...sometimes!) Also I remember that iced, cold Coke they gave us during Wednesday evening devotionals during our first summer, Beast Barracks. I lived for that Coke!

Verse 2 and the beginning of 3 of Psalm 23 remind me a little bit of those cadet experiences. I need a Shepherd to help me through. Don't we all?

*“He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside still waters,
he restores my soul.” (ESV)*

What image or thought comes into your mind when pondering these words? “Makes” and “leads” gives the strong idea that we, the sheep, are simply not in charge. Our Good Shepherd, Jesus, the Lover and Keeper of our souls, is. He is our Shepherd and, fortunately, we are His sheep.

May God comfort us today as we are reminded that He is calling the shots and directing our feet. Yes, our job is to trust and yield especially when we do not have a clue where He is leading us...which, for me, is rather frequently.

Ah...but my favorite action verb in this passage is “restores”. The Hebrew word “*shuwb*” means to turn back, return, to refresh, to bring back to the original condition, to reverse, (and my favorite...) to repent.

Wow! It is my Good Shepherd, Jesus, who loves me so much that when I am wayward, wandering, and self-focused, He repents me! Sometimes our Good Shepherd may even twist an ankle of a foolish sheep of His. Then He carries him back to the safety of the sheep fold.

Amazing thought: When I choose to repent of sin, He is actually repenting me!

Friends, our Shepherd is with us and He is very Good indeed!

Dear Lord, help us to know what your heart's desire is for us today. Help us to simply trust and follow. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 4

Three and one half years ago, while spending some away time in Sedona, AZ with my wife, Barbara, we went for a long hike on one of the many trails. The mistake I made was not packing enough water. You guessed it. The last quarter of that 3 mile hike through woods, streams, and wilderness was ten times worse than any of the forced march we did as cadets or in the Army!

Lack of salt and dehydration in the hot sun provided a miserable combination of thirst, panic, and torment. I was on a relentless path and I was thirsty. I almost passed out. Barbara was not as bad off as me.

When I finally saw our car, I thought I had died and gone to Heaven! We dove in and sped down the mountain road to the nearest gas station. I burst into the shop, ripped open the glass doors where the DRINKS were and just started grabbing and drinking. The cashier behind the counter looked at me and chuckled to herself. She has seen this before. I finally paid for 3 or 4 beverages, the best of which was the Perrier Water.

I only had one thing on my mind. Water!

The second half of Psalm 23:3 reminds me of that path in Arizona.

"He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." (NASB)

I am learning, that as I surrender fully this hour and this day to the Shepherding of Jesus, my Lord and Guide, I won't be thirsting for water that quenches for a short while. I will be thirsting for Him and consequently the holy, loving, and truth-bearing things of His Word and eternity.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:6:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (NIV)

Friends, join me right now. Let's seek our Shepherd, Jesus. Let us desire only Him and His Spirit's work in us not for our glory, but for His. He is waiting.

Day 5

Last night we had several inches of rain. It was dark, stormy, and gloomy. The truth is we actually needed the rain. How are you doing today? How are your loved ones? Today's verse – Psalm 23:4 gives us much hope and encouragement through the storms of life including death itself.

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (ESV)*

According to Ellicott's Commentary, the meaning could include dying, a dark dungeon of gloom, the drought of a pathless desert, the blinding darkness of a sandstorm, or the 'dull, heavy look' that grief wears.

Benson, in his Commentary, says regarding the second line of the verse: 'I will not give way to my fears, but will confidently rely upon the word and promise of God, persuaded that his grace shall be sufficient for me, and that he will make even death itself work for my good.' Jesus, our Protecting and Comforting Shepherd, is with you right now. He is also with me.

1. **The Shepherd's Rod:** a short piece of sturdy root-based hard wood.
= Represents God's Written, Living Word: Provides continuous comfort, strength, and protection. It is an offensive weapon against enemies, and used for discipline.
2. **The Shepherd's Staff:** a long stick or carved piece of wood with a curved "crook" on the end. = Represents the Holy Spirit in our lives:
-The Shepherd would often walk with his sheep and his staff would gently touch the side of one to remind it of his protective closeness and that he is there to protect, comfort, console, counsel, guide, lead, and provide gentle correction.

Today's encouragement is this: God is with you and me all day long instructing, guiding, protecting, and comforting. Remember in the difficult valleys of today, the 'shadow' of the snake cannot bite (Matthew Henry).

He is with us. Fear not. Be of good cheer!

¹Inspired by [A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23](#), W. Phillip Keller, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2007, Chapter 5

Day 6

Along time ago, in a field far, far away...I spent time with a friend's flock of sheep...in a real sheep pasture! They are amazing animals. Like horses, if you have a bucket of oats, they are your best friend. If you don't, they might look for someone else who has some oats.

Being a warm, sunny day, I laid down on the grass and fell asleep. After 20 minutes, I awoke with a start! I looked up and the 15 sheep were all together about 10 feet away just staring at me. One of them, my friend's beloved, tame pet, took the lead. She slowly walked over to me. Her eyes communicated, "Are you OK?"

I know this sounds strange, but I actually felt cared for by sheep!!! 😊

Much better than sheep, Our Good Shepherd, Jesus, cares for our souls.

Verse 5 of psalm 23 reads:

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." (ESV)

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) in his Commentary states that "The Lord's people feast at his table, upon the provisions of his love." His Mercy and His Truth fed to us through the blessed nourishment of His Word are far better than oats. He is our life. Quite frankly, whether we are with friend or foe, the Lord feeds and cares for us.

When the sheep come to the Fold at night, one by one they come to their shepherd for loving inspection. The shepherd looks especially at the mouth, nose, eyes, and ears. Often flies and other bugs bite and torment the sheep during the day. At night, the shepherd examines and then applies a healing, protective, soothing salve on these bitten, enflamed parts. The sheep is loved.¹

Our Good Shepherd loves us even more. When we come to Him (if we would just come to Him!), He anoints our 'wounds with goop'...with His loving comfort.

Let each of us come to Him right now.

¹Inspired by [A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23](#), W. Phillip Keller, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2007, Chapter 5

Day 7

None of us can forget the evil assault on our nation and our people that took place September 11th, 2001. Some of you may have been near the towers or even in the Pentagon when the attack came. Our hearts, our prayers, and our continued vigilance go out to all who were directly affected by these acts of war and criminal atrocities.

In light of the very dangerous world we live in where evil seems to abound, let us take comfort today in the last verse of Psalm 23...Verse 6.

*“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (NIV)*

“Goodness” here means kindness and that which is pleasant and agreeable.

“Love” here is the Hebrew word “**Checed**” which is God's unconditional, steadfast, loyal love and commitment that is never based on our performance and cannot be lost. It is favored care filled with hope and blessing. This is how our Good Shepherd loves His sheep.

Our Good Shepherd's care for us will follow (hunt, pursue, run after, attend closely upon) us. He is relentless. He will never let us stray far. It is this kind of value He has assigned to each of us. As His sheep, we are the glad recipients of amazing grace and mercy!

Day 8

1 Samuel 2:30b *“But now the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor,’” (NIV)*

God has put it on my heart to share a few thoughts from some life verses He is burning into my heart. I am doing this, no doubt, for my benefit as well as yours. I struggle as you do and I need the Lord's strength, courage, and help in every way possible. Like you, I am weak. But weakness is not sin. It draws us to cry out to Jesus. He is God and Savior. We are not.

Ever since I saw the movie, Chariots of Fire, I have been struck by the above verse. The middle word in our West Point Corps Motto is honor. Have you ever thought about what it means?

Dictionary.com defines honor as “honesty, fairness, or integrity in one's belief's and actions: a man of honor.; a source of credit or distinction.”

I know each of us could add many additional words and phrases to describe or define it.

Honoring our country carries with it gravity. Honoring God must as well. In both cases, the word honor means to render or esteem glorious. (gotquestions.org) In essence, if we

honor God, country, wife, husband, child, etc, I believe it carries with it the idea of praising, protecting, and assigning worth to the object of honor. I am willing to die to defend it.

I have no doubt that each of you blessed Friends would give your life in order to honor any of these and probably more.

In the days ahead, we may find that honoring our God of the Bible may conflict with honoring our country and the laws that are being passed. Let's pray that we will choose to honor God above all at whatever cost is required.

Day 9

Psalm 37:8 *“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”* (ESV)

A few years back, I got bent out of shape. Someone at church was spreading false teaching and it really irked me. Yes, false teaching needs loving confrontation but my anger was smoldering. I went home and fumed and strutted around the room like a wet rooster.

Barbara, my wife, turned to me and gently asked, “Jim...Why don't you choose to no longer be offended?” Her soft spoken words pierced me. I thought to myself, “If I do that, I won't have anything to stew about.” And of course, she was right.

The word fret means “a slow burn” as in a pile of leaves that is burning. As more leaves, some wet, are dumped on top of the fire, what forms is an internal smoldering. Often a white smoke seeps up through the top. There now is no open flame because there is not enough oxygen inside the leaf pile.

If you take a rake or pitch fork and stir up the pile, oxygen rushes in and vooosh! The leaves burst into flames.

This is exactly what I was doing with my ‘slow burn’ anger. I was smoldering. Later, someone or some event would enter my life and my anger would ‘get oxygen’.

Can you relate? Let us pray for one another today that we would choose, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to not fret. When we do, it will lead to goodness.

Day 10

Psalm 86:1-2 *“Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am godly; save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God. This verse seems to go hand in hand with Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (ESV)*

Our greatest enemy is pride. We’ve each done battle against it. One good way to see if pride has a grip is ask yourself, “Are you grateful right now or stressed?” Unfortunately, I find myself more stressed, frustrated, and anxious about so many stupid things.

When I humble myself and look unto Jesus, who is my Life, my Friend, and my Hope, I begin to once again realize that He will take care of everything. Choosing to be stressed, frustrated, impatient, and anxious is choosing pride. Choosing these reveals my carnal, sinful heart. Pride never walks by faith. Father, help us to quickly recognize when we have stepped out of your will. A grateful heart IS your will. Help each of us to trust you not just this day but also this hour. Right now.

“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6 ESV)

“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.” (Psalm 9:1 ESV)

Day 11

My Favorite Psalm is 34. I am sure some of you love it as well. Verse 8 says, *“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” (ESV)*

I find that when I drift into taking refuge in anything other than the Lord Jesus, His Word, and His precious, abiding fellowship, life takes on an unbearable, dead-like quality...sort of like chewing saw dust.

When I stop my rat race, slow down, and seek Him...really seek Him, I finally am able to taste the sweetness and goodness of our amazing Redeemer and Friend. He is humble and lowly of heart. He is kind and is a great listener. He knows what it is like to be sorely tempted. He does not forsake us when, quite frankly, we deserve to be forsaken.

Today I challenge you. Take 5 minutes alone with God. I mean really alone with Him. Perhaps take a flashlight or use the wondrous glow of your cell phone and rest quietly in His presence. Perhaps read a verse or two. Take refuge in Him. Taste the goodness of God.

Day 12

Isaiah 43:18-19 *“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”* (ESV)

If you watch the news, the trends, and the rapidly declining moral values in our blessed land, it is easy to become discouraged. Without our fellowship with Jesus and our firm faith in His Word, I think we'd all fall rapidly into the saw dust pit of despair. Life is hard.

Someone once stated, “Life is what happens to you when you are trying to live it!” ☺

The devil works overtime to get us to either wallow in the past or worry about the future. When we do either or both of these, we cannot be filled, controlled, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Our carnal flesh rules to the wicked one's delight. And, yes, then our family, friends, and co-workers suffer from our eyes being off the Lord.

Our Risen Lord wants us to simply rest in Him. He wants us to experience Him right now in this moment. Let us, this day, choose to forget our former sins and failures, as well as those of others. May we also choose to stop worrying about the future as well. When we look unto Jesus right now, not only are His mercies fresh, blessed, and new, but He has joy and purpose for us today and tomorrow.

Can you imagine He is making a beautiful stream in what you and I would call a dessert? Let's perceive it.

Day 13

John 1:12-13 *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”* (ESV)

Years ago, I was on the phone with a religious man from a main line denomination. We did not know each other. He basically said, “We are all God's children. We will all be going to Heaven.” I paused for a second and said, “Well Bob that is simply not true.” I then read John 1:12-13 over the phone to him.

He stated that he had never heard that verse before. Not only was Bob not grounded in the Word, most likely He had not yet made the life changing decision to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior. He, up until this phone conversation, had not known that Christianity is

not a religion but rather it is a relationship with the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that His Word, the Holy Bible, is our life's guide for all of eternity.

He was stunned that the Bible said that only those people who receive Jesus will be given the right (privilege) to become God's adopted child forever...forgiven, made holy, and eternally saved for Heaven. I pray he made this decision.

We all have family and friends that have not yet "received" Christ. They have not yet called on the name of the Lord to save them. (Joel 2:32) Let's pray for the Lord to pursue them relentlessly and that He would draw them and convict them of their need for rescue, new life, and forgiveness. Pray the Lord would save each of them.

Day 14

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* (ESV)

Twelve years after I prayed at age 18 to receive Christ and my Savior, He had me pinned to the mat. Not only did I do lousy in wrestling at the United States Military Academy, I also found that wrestling with God is a futile and humbling endeavor. I am sure you can relate.

I had been an up and down worldly Christian for those 12 years. Yes I went to Bible studies and church but there was one big problem: I was on the front burner of my life and Jesus was on the back burner. I wanted God, wife, kids, and job to revolve around me and my own selfish desires. I craved the respect of people primarily those at work. I was your 'dyed in the wool' people pleaser. I lived for notice and a pat on the back.

Having one foot in the world and another in the Lord's camp does not work. I was miserable. My mind and heart were always on work. My family got the leftovers. One night near Christmas, 1980, the Lord confronted me with John 15:5. I was brought low, humbled, and broken like never before. I realized that all of my external church attendance, teaching, and Bible studies were just wood, hay, and stubble. I was doing all that to look good, to get and maintain respect.

That night I realized I had been leaning my ladder up against the wrong wall of success. I wept and repented. I told Jesus I did not even know the first thing about how to hunger and thirst after Him (Matthew 5:6). I pleaded with Him, "Lord, please help me hunger and thirst after you!"

Since that night, God has continued to school me. I am learning now as I learned that night, "Take this world, but give me Jesus!"

Day 15

Have you ever asked yourself, “What kind of person am I?” or “What kind of person is God forging me into?” I have been asking these questions lately. At age 66, God is not finished with me yet. He is not finished with you either.

You are familiar with Jesus and His Sermon on the Mount as found in Matthew Chapter 5. Let’s look closer at this Declaration of the Kingdom.

He was not only teaching them what the heart of a repentant, teachable Jewish person was to be like, but He was profoundly declaring to His listeners and to all the world the ethical, moral, and spiritual characteristics of the soul captured by Messiah, the promised One, the Savior of the world! His listeners weren’t looking for this. They were looking for a leader who would get them out from under the cruel Roman yoke and they wanted more prosperity. Sound familiar?

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3 ESV)

This is the first rung on the ladder because it says “Happy right now are the souls who realize they are undone, bankrupt spiritually, and have nothing to offer God. These souls realizes that they are “sinful and rebellious and utterly without moral virtues adequate to commend (themselves) to God...no spiritual assets.” This is, indeed, the humbling work of the Holy Spirit. Men and women cannot do this on their own.

This is where Jesus says we are to start with God. In fact, it is where we are to stay with Him as well. Everyone can start here. Begging God for help and mercy must come from the heart that is broken and destitute. If we want God's joy right now, this is what we must cry.

When was the last time you or I cried out to God for His mercy? Happiness belongs to those who do. ‘They cry for mercy and they alone are heard.’ (Carson) ¹

¹Commentaries, David Guzik Study guide, www.blueletterbible.org

Day 16

When I first read the 2nd Be-Attitude, initially it did not make sense!

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4 ESV)

How can someone who is mourning be happy? The truth here is this refers to a deep mourning and grief like when a loved one dies. It is gripping! They are gut-wrenchingly sorry for their sin, its consequences, and the general evil permeating society. They know this offends their loving, redeeming, merciful, and holy God. He brings joy to their soul because this is the sorrow that produces repentance to salvation without regret that the Apostle Paul described in 2 Corinthians 7:10.

This mourning is not just deep guttural sorrow for acts and thoughts of sin, but as Spurgeon says, “we repent of the sin of our nature...we bemoan sin within us and without us.” (True Repentance)

We shall be comforted. God promises soon comfort. He “allows this grief into our lives as a path, not as a destination.”

We are first undone. Then we are redone from the bottom up and from the inside out by His loving Spirit. Zechariah 4:6b rings true here. *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.* (ESV) ¹

¹Commentaries, David Guzik Study guide, www.blueletterbible.org

Day 17

Mousy, weak, submissive, doormattish, push over, milk toast...When our culture hears the work meek, this is what often comes to mind.

This is not what the 3rd Be-Attitude means.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5 ESV)

In Kingdom Living Here and Now, John McArthur says ‘meekness’ as used here means to endure injury with patience and without resentment. It is power only used under the gentle control of the Holy Spirit.

It is “like a strong stallion that was trained to do the job instead of running wild.”

Those who are made meek by God “suffer wrong without bitterness or desire for revenge.” (Bruce) The meek will submit to imperfect authority and they will “show a willingness to disregard one’s own rights and privileges. The meek surrender to the direction and guidance of God’s Word.

Those believers who possess a servant's heart are on the road to meekness. Someone once said, "You'll know you are a servant when people start treating you like one." The meek, in God's care, are ok with this. Amazing!

They SHALL inherit the earth. Our greedy, me first, power hungry culture seems like it will swallow up the meek but not so! They have entrusted their past, present, and temporal and eternal future unto the care of God. He will do best for them. The wicked will get their comeuppance. The children of God will be abundantly provided for. Just remember those people of Christian faith that fled the persecution of Europe and sailed to the New World! Although difficult, God's blessing of the new land was worth it. Getting to Heaven will be as well. ¹

¹Commentaries, David Guzik Study guide, www.blueletterbible.org

Day 18

The 4th Be-Attitude builds off the first three. David Guzik writes, "We see Christians hungering for many things: power, authority, success, comfort, happiness – but how many hunger and thirst for righteousness?" Is this convicting or what?

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."
Matthew 5:6 (ESV)

What do I hunger and thirst for? Well, I confess I want my latter years filled with a sense of financial stability. Maintaining my marriage and devotional life is important. Growing memories with my adult children and my grandchildren is central. Although I am no exercise enthusiast, I guess I should be at least somewhat interested in diet, health, and exercise. ☹ I really do not thirst for exercise. I do love a really nice nap. How's that for true confessions!

Just this morning, God spoke to me in the quietness of my often clouded and tired heart that I need to desire holiness, purity, and uprightness more than health, security, and entertainment. I have decided to get rid of my war / combat movies. The violence and the language, although real, are not God-honoring nor are they profitable for anyone who is visiting my home. I love good war movies. The devotional I read is:

http://info.truthforlife.org/devo-jan5-2017?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook

I need to love my Lord and His righteousness more.

We are getting rid of them today. That is hard for me. Maybe not for you. I come from a long line of military and patriotic family members. I love to see the good guys win. But

not at the expense of bringing vile language and graphic violence in this home. It is God's home. Right?

As the Commentary says, this righteousness is a “longing that endures and is never completely satisfied on this side of eternity.

- This passion is real. Just like hunger and thirst are real.
- This passion is natural.
- This passion is intense.
- This passion can be painful.
- This passion is a driving force.
- This passion is a sign of health.”¹

You know, after I've had a nice slice of really good blue berry pie, I'm deeply satisfied...but not for long. I want more! ☺

¹Commentaries, David Guzik Study guide, www.blueletterbible.org

Day 19

Mercy is withholding punishment or judgement of that which is due. The on-line dictionary defines mercy as: “compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. It comes from a desire to relieve suffering and show kindness toward those who, quite frankly, don't deserve it. Hmmmmm...

Do you deserve God's mercy that He demonstrated for you in Romans 5:8? Do I? “*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (ESV) The answer is, of course, we don't. We know we deserve the eternal, damning fires and torment of Hell.

The 5th Be-Attitude demonstrates the chiseling, grinding work of the Holy Spirit within us as He burrows the first four into our character.

“*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*” (Matthew 5:7 ESV)

We deserve Hell. God freely gives us Heaven. We deserve wrath. He gives us grace. He wants and expects us to do likewise with one another. What would happen in our homes if husbands and wives took this seriously?

The reason the saved sinner (Saint) is now able to joyfully and gladly show mercy to others is because he or she has experienced from the Lord His demonstrated mercy. Therefore, the degree I pour out mercy on those who do not deserve it reveals my level of gratitude for what Jesus has done for me. It is that simple.

- “The merciful one will show it to those who are weaker and poorer.
- The merciful one will always look for those who weep and mourn.
- The merciful one will be forgiving to others, and always looking to restore broken relationships.
- The merciful one will not expect too much from others.
- The merciful one will be compassionate to those who are outwardly sinful.
- The merciful one will have a care for the souls of all men and women.”¹

¹Commentaries, David Guzik Study guide, www.blueletterbible.org

Day 20

Inner purity of heart is not so much dealing with do's and don'ts, saying the right things, or looking really religious. Rather it deals with inside matters of your heart. Yours and mine. King David, as you remember, struggled with purity of heart just as we do. In Psalm 86:11, he puts it all on the table as he cries out to his God,

*“Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth;
unite my heart to fear your name.” (ESV)*

Another way to say this might be, “Dear God, I beg you! Please give me undivided devotion, reverence, and loyalty to You because I want intimacy with You as my next and every breath!”

Those who pursue and insist on God through His Word, prayer, and meditation will reap their reward. They will experience a fellowship with Him quite foreign to the Christian who only dabbles in devotion. I confess there have been many times in my Christian life where I have settled for dabbling.

Have you every gone through the motions of the faith? You go to church, hear a sermon, and dust off your Bible once in a blue moon... You find yourself in the misery of luke-warm complacency and the rotten stench of religion emanates from you. You gradually find the temptations and troubles of this world occupying much of your time.

This 6th Be-Attitude is the heart of the Spirit-Directed Christian:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8 ESV)

May I invite you to join me in pursuing our Lord Jesus in Bible study, prayer, praise, and quietness of soul this week. Every word of this amazing verse is true. Wise men and women still seek Him.

If you want Jesus more than anything, please listen to Fernando Ortega “Give Me Jesus”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rZ8k9m2hwo>

¹Commentaries, David Guzik Study guide, www.blueletterbible.org

Day 21

This 7th Be-Attitude should be the heart beat of every follower of the Lord Jesus.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9 ESV)

Charles Spurgeon said, “And he sometimes putteth himself between the two, when they are very angry, and taketh the blows from both sides, for he knows that so Jesus did, who took the blows from his Father and from us also, that so by suffering in our stead, peace might be made between God and man.”

Did you catch that? Jesus modeled for us what the peacemaker looks like and is. It is often an uncomfortable place of suffering, pain, directed anger, and accusation. Have you ever shared your personal faith story or the pure Gospel with someone either in person or, say, online? Have you ever had pot shots taken and insults cast at you? Jesus knows all about this. He was nailed to a cross because He wanted there to be peace and reconciliation between you and His Heavenly Father. He wanted it so bad, He went to the cross for us.

He hung there between you and His Father and paid the price for there to be relationship and, indeed, a growing, intimate fellowship. We are to do the same in that we are to work toward reconciliation between lost, hell-bent souls and a heavenly Father who, on one hand, must punish sin and, on the other hand, wishes that none should perish.

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”
(2Corinthians 5:18-20 ESV)

You would not think the Christian reconciling ambassador would experience happiness when hateful words, name calling, and mocking befall him or her now and then. “You’re judgmental! You’re bigoted. What right do you have, you arrogant _____?!” Yes, these do hurt just as the injuries hurt Jesus,

“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2b ESV)

You may have family and friends that have been offended by your witness and God's Word. Of course, we are always to share in love with respect and kindness. No one was kinder than Jesus and look what they did to Him? Prayer, timing, and Holy Spirit prompting are essential, but our assignment on earth here is not to just help warring parties find friendship, but that God would use us to rob hell of souls normally defaulted to going there and to fill Heaven. This joy will likely not come apart from pain. Expect it.

When we act on that which was entrusted to us, the world will know we are the sons and daughters of God. Let's become hell robbing, Heaven fillers for His joy and glory!

¹Commentaries, David Guzik Study guide, www.blueletterbible.org

Day 22

C. S. Lewis said, "The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says, 'Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you thing innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.'" ¹

After C. S. Lewis became a Christian...a follower of the Lord Jesus, I wonder how long it took for him to come to this rather deep and gut wrenching truth. Yes, we can rather quickly find Scriptures that reveal these truths, but it is quite another thing to digest and own them.

I confess some days I think I'm getting closer to embracing this truth and then another day splashes into my life and I wonder if I've grown much at all. Let's pray for each other that He would bring on that unwanted death of self. The life, His Life... that replaces ours brings peace. Here, the joy of Living begins.

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20 ESV)

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21 ESV)

¹ Devotional Classics, edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, Copyright 1990-93, Harper San Francisco of Harper Collins Publishers, p. 8.

Day 23

Dr. Dallas Willard, distinguished Professor of Philosophy and humble Christian disciple in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, wrote, “So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship clearly is optional...Churches are filled with “undisciplined disciples.” Only about 2% of churches today in America actually, systematically, and caringly mentor or disciple their members.

Dr. Willard goes on to say, “The disciple of Christ desires above all else to be like him...” Most often, the best environment for mentoring is the 1:1 (same gender) relationship, couple to couple, or the small group. The larger the grouping, the more diffused and watered down the effect. Just ask any home school teacher. Smaller numbers tend to provide an atmosphere where there is more authentic sharing and transmission of values and truths.

Dr. Willard says, “The disciple is one who, intent on becoming Christ like and so dwelling in his faith and practice, systematically and progressively rearranges his affairs to that end.” The disciple and his or her mentor knows that he or she is entering into a ‘life on life’ beloved, trusting relationship where kindness, the truth of God Word and the Holy Spirit work in the mix of real, flawed individuals. ¹

Dear Lord, may You help each of us to enter into at least one mentoring / discipling relationship (same gender) so that we will bring honor through our loving obedience.

‘And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”’
(Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)

¹ Devotional Classics, edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, Copyright 1990-93, Harper San Francisco of Harper Collins Publishers, pages 13-17.

Day 24

Have our hearts been deeply affected? Have we decided that, by God's grace, we will not be that “same person” we used to be in the past? You know the one that nursed that private sin or lived for the praise of others. Once we make that decision, which, by the way, is a daily, hourly decision, then the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with God's holy, eternal, infallible Word, will affect change and growth. And thank God we will not be the same person we were, say, yesterday. Richard Foster, editor of Devotional Classics, writes that “Jonathan Edwards teaches us that intellectual life and the passionate life should be friends, not enemies.” This could not be more true.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was an influential colonial pastor that God used mightily during the Great Awakening. One of the verses he loved is Romans 12:11: *“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”* (ESV)

He wrote, “I am bold in saying this, but I believe that no one is ever changed, either by doctrine, by hearing the Word, or by preaching or teaching of another, unless the affections are moved by these things. No one ever seeks salvation, no one ever cries for wisdom, no one ever wrestles with God, no one ever kneels in prayer or flees from sin, with a heart that remains unaffected. In a word, there is never any great achievement by the things of religion without a heart deeply affected by those things.”¹

Have we chosen by His power and grace to be deeply affected today? Friends, let us pray for one another today that we will choose this.

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,” (Deuteronomy 10:12 ESV)

¹ Devotional Classics, edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, Copyright 1990-93, Harper San Francisco of Harper Collins Publishers, pages 19-24.

Day 25

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) born of a noble family attended a Jesuit school in Paris where he learned the classics, Hebrew, Greek, and the life of discipline. He also studied law and the humanities. After being ordained a priest, in 1602 he became bishop of Geneva. He became known as one of “the doctors of the Western Church”.

He warned his humble readers of the danger of becoming a Phantom of Devotion. (i.e.) “A person thinks himself devout because he daily recites a vast number of prayers, but after saying them he utters the most disagreeable, arrogant and harmful words at home and among the neighbors.” When Barbara and I train / mentor individuals or couples, we call this being Incongruent: When a person is the opposite at home of when he or she is in public. God desires that we become congruent Saints; someone that family, others, and God, Himself, can count on....Dependable.

Friends, I know how difficult this is. I, like you, struggle with inconsistency, doubt, fatigue, discouragement, and frustration. However, with the Lord’s help and our humbled, hungering, penitent, and searching heart, He can and will develop in us a steadfast love, a robust kindness, and a yearning for Truth. Let’s pray this for each other today.¹

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32 ESV)

¹ Devotional Classics, edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, Copyright 1990-93, Harper San Francisco of Harper Collins Publishers, pages 26-32.

Day 26

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) helps us with a great use of metaphor. He writes, “Look at the bees amid the banks of thyme. They find there a very bitter juice, but when they suck it out, they change it into honey because they have the ability to do so.

O worldly people! It is true that devout souls encounter great bitterness in their works of mortification, but by performing them they change them into something more sweet and delicious.”

The faces of these Saints “are beautiful and joyous because they accept all things meekly and mildly. Their legs, arms, and heads, are uncovered because their thoughts, affections, and deeds they have no purpose or motive but that of pleasing God.” (Bold added)

Please pray for each other reading this today that our motive will be to always please and revere God and that He would help us to balance truth of Scripture and the mercy of lovingkindness as we deal with people all the time. ¹ We will either fear God or fear man. Fearing man leads to destruction.

“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:” (Proverbs 3:3 KJV)

¹ Devotional Classics, edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, Copyright 1990-93, Harper San Francisco of Harper Collins Publishers, pages 26-32.

Day 27

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) once again, surprises me! He believes, as I do, that this Christian journey was never meant to be travelled alone. He writes, “When commanded to go to Rages, young Tobias answered, ‘I do not know the way,’ and his father replied, ‘Go then and find someone to lead you.’ Do you seriously wish to travel the road to devotion? If so, look for a good person to guide and lead you.”

I would add, “Find also someone to go ‘with’ you on this journey called the Christian life.”

I've been writing about, teaching, and modeling 1:1 same gender accountability (there are only two genders by the way: male and female – Genesis 1:26-27), confession, prayer, and encouragement for almost 30 years now. Many reject it. The few, wise men and women embrace it.

We call it entering into a FoxHole Buddy relationship with another person of your gender. You meet weekly or every two weeks (I try to meet weekly with my FoxHole Buddy). We laugh, share, confess, listen, bear our souls, read Scripture, encourage, hold affirmingly accountable, and pray. ¹

Our key FoxHole Buddy verses we try to incorporate are:

Galatians 6:2 *“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* (ESV)

James 5:16 *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”* (ESV)

Hebrews 3:13 *“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”* (ESV)

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹² And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”* (ESV)

Please pray that each reader will find a brother or sister in the Lord, a kindred spirit, to walk the road of this Christian life together...someone in addition to their mate, if married.

¹ Devotional Classics, edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, Copyright 1990-93, Harper San Francisco of Harper Collins Publishers, pages 26-32.

Day 28

I've been leading a Bible Study on the book of Acts, verse by verse. What a blessed learning experience! I just finished preparing for this week's study on Acts 11:19-26. I was moved by two key elements in this study. One was that God used an older man named Barnabas which is a nickname. It means 'Son of Encouragement'. His real name was Joseph. This guy was not a big degreed scholar, a prolific writer, or a captivating speaker.

He was content to be behind the scenes. He possessed a humble passion and love for Jesus. God used this affirming guy in places like Antioch to share the Gospel and see the spread of the church. This was amazing considering Antioch, at that time, was the 3rd largest city in the Roman world. Alexandria was larger and Rome was the largest. Antioch was a cesspool of Gentile pagan immorality and corruption. From human sacrifices to prostitution as a part of pagan worship, Antioch had all the vices you can imagine. This city was the first time a messianic Jewish person evangelized and discipled in a totally Gentile community! It was here that the term ‘Christian’ was coined.

Barnabas never wrote Scripture and was never a big name character like Paul, Peter, James, and John but God loved him and used him mightily to help root and ground the faith and mobilize the Apostle Paul to be the greatest missionary that ever lived.

The second key element in this passage is found in verse 21. *“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.”* (ESV)

If the Lord was with them and for them, who could be against them? Let us pray for each other today that first, our hearts would be humbly and utterly surrendered unto Christ. Finally, let us ask Him that His hand would not just guide us this day but that He would be with us that ‘many would believe and turn to the Lord.’ ¹

¹ <https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AGeYBILGwPyS29o&id=B2F21871FA52864C%21779&cid=B2F21871FA52864C>
Pastor Paul Vawter

Day 29

Think about the week leading up to Easter, or Resurrection Sunday, as I’ve come to call it. This can be a time for us all to prepare our hearts to submit to our Lord through prayer and repentance, I want to look to **7 Stepping Stones** that lead us through the **Last Supper**, on the night he was betrayed.

1st Stepping Stone

After Jesus washed the disciple’s feet, and shared that one of the twelve would betray Him, instead of moaning with lament or flashing anger, amazingly, He gives them a new commandment.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35 ESV)

What He is saying is that far more important than teaching biblical truth and discipling with God’s Holy Word, is choosing sacrificially to love people unconditionally with deep care and lasting compassion. This, of course, may mean sharing the truth with someone

who is living in sin and darkness. One's heart attitude will give eternal credibility to one's actions if "love", God's love, reigns.

Let us then choose to love those in our path today no matter what.

Day 30

2nd Stepping Stone

After Jesus commands His disciples to love, He tells them emphatically that there is no other way to forgiveness, new life, and Heaven except through Him.

“Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”” (John 14:5-6 ESV)

Many liberal faiths and world religions pride themselves in how open-minded, tolerant, and inclusive they are. This, of course, attracts many itching ears.

Jesus says it is His Way or no way! His way is not inclusive at all! It is utterly exclusive! For centuries, this has angered and unnerved people. “How dare Jesus make this arrogant claim! He makes it here because He who is telling the disciples the truth, is the Truth. The few hours he has left with them are vital to securing and instilling key doctrines that will be attacked throughout history.

Are we afraid of sharing with others that the way of Jesus is exclusive? No other way will work. All who refuse, ignore, or reject the truth of this passage will receive the full, deserved wrath of God in Hell. Let's think on this today as we pray.

Day 31

3rd Stepping Stone

After Jesus hammers home the exclusivity of following Him by faith because of grace, He encourages his disciples with good news! The Helper will be with them how long? Forever! He is the 3rd Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ‘I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.’”
(John 14:15-18 ESV)

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is **with** them now, but when Pentecost comes in about 53 days (according to their time table), He, the Comforter, Guide, and Helper will be **in** them.

Love, faith, obedience, and yoking up with the Holy Spirit are inexorably linked. Jesus was telling them this shortly before He was arrested and eventually crucified. It was important for them to hear. It is, likewise, important for us. Let us pray.

Day 32

4th Stepping Stone

Jesus now continues His message of encouragement as courage will be needed soon for all. He tells them,

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:27 ESV)

In essence, He is comforting them by saying, “Because I am leaving my peaceful presence with you via the Holy Spirit, you will never have to be troubled or afraid again.”

Sheep are wonderful creatures but they can spook easily. I guess one could say they quickly forget that their shepherd is committed to watching over them, protecting them, and guiding them. I think we, as followers of Christ, our Good Shepherd, can also forget His promise to never leave nor forsake us. Today, let us take Him at His word.

Day 33

5th Stepping Stone

In John 15:1, Jesus says He is “*the true vine*”. Truth is He is the only vine as well. Jesus now takes His disciples from the comfort of His abiding presence and peace to sharing their greatest need: **To abide in Him.**

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5 ESV)

The word “abide” means to remain, stay, rest in, dwell, continue, stand, and endure. I think of it also as drawing one’s life from something as geranium’s roots draw their

nourishment and sustenance from the soil. He is telling His brothers in the faith to cling to Him, and to depend utterly, moment by moment, on His caring and assured presence.

He desires that they so yearn for and lean of Him that if He were to move, they would fall hopelessly flat on their faces. He is teaching them that faith in and love toward Him along with a full embrace of all of God's Holy Word is essential to following, growing in, and honoring Him. This is the denied life. In essence, "I am to embrace the death of my life, my hopes, my fears, my dreams, and my plans and now cling vigorously to Christ's life, His hopes, His will, His plans, His guidance, His provision, for His glory."

Nothing else will do. Nothing. Lord, please capture our hearts and mind this very day!

Day 34

6th Stepping Stone

Jesus further develops this 'never to end' relationship between saved man and Saving God by returning to the culmination of all of His commands and desires for His children: Love God and love your neighbor.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:9-12 ESV)

This, of course, comes from two great pillar verses from the Old Testament.

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:5 ESV)

"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." (Leviticus 19:18 ESV)

Lord, please direct and empower us to obey these commands today and every day!

Day 35

7th Stepping Stone

Finally, the Lord seems to sum things up a bit for the disciples.

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 ESV)

Amazing! In just a few hours Jesus will be arrested, tried, mocked, beaten, flogged, and finally crucified with criminals. Instead of being self-absorbed, He is comforting and encouraging His brothers in the faith.

Jesus promises them His presence, His guidance, His encouragement, and His peace. They will eventually learn that, as Jesus told them repeatedly, peace, joy, worth, and mission in life do not come from the things of this world but from Him and only Him.

Lord Jesus, may You assist us this day, Resurrection Sunday, to focus not on ourselves or our troubles. Rather, help us to forget about ourselves, and look only to You for our life, our hope, and our vision.

Day 36

1 Samuel 2:30b *“But now the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor,’”* (NIV)

God has put it on my heart to share a few thoughts from some life verses He is burning into my heart. I am doing this, no doubt, for my benefit as well as yours. I struggle as you do and I need the Lord’s strength, courage, and help in every way possible. Like you, I am weak. But weakness is not sin. It draws us to cry out to Jesus. He is God and Savior. I am not.

Ever since I saw the movie, **Chariots of Fire**, I have been struck by the above verse. The middle word in our Corps Motto is honor. Have you ever thought about what it means?

“Honor” in www.dictionary.com is defined as “honesty, fairness, or integrity in one’s belief’s and actions: a man of honor; a source of credit or distinction.”

I know each of us could add many additional words and phrases to describe or define it.

Honoring our country carries with it great gravity. Honoring God must as well. In both cases, the word honor means to render or esteem glorious. (gotquestions.org) In essence, if we honor God, country, wife, etc, I believe it carries with it the idea of praising, protecting, and assigning worth to the object of honor. I am willing to die to defend it.

I have no doubt that you would consider giving your life in order to honor each of these and probably more.

In the days ahead, we may find that honoring our God of the Bible may conflict with honoring our country and the laws that are being passed. This has already occurred at our beloved cadet chapel with a number of LGBTQ weddings being held there. Let's pray that we will choose to honor God above all at whatever cost is required.

Day 37

Psalm 37:8 *“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”* (NIV)

A few years back, I got bent out of shape. Someone at church was spreading false teaching and it really irked me. Yes, false teaching needs loving confrontation but my anger was smoldering. I went home and fumed and strutted around the room like a wet rooster.

Barbara, my wife, turned to me and gently asked, “Jim...Why don't you choose to no longer be offended?” Her soft spoken words pierced me. I thought to myself, “If I do that, I won't have anything to stew about.” And of course, she was right.

The word fret means “a slow burn” as in a pile of leaves that is burning. As more leaves, some wet, are dumped on top of the fire, what forms is an internal smoldering. Often a white smoke seeps up through the top. There now is no open flame because there is not enough oxygen inside the leaf pile.

If you take a rake or pitch fork and stir up the pile, oxygen rushes in and vooosh! The leaves burst into flames.

This is exactly what I was doing with my ‘slow burn’ anger. I was smoldering. Later, someone or some event would enter my life and my anger would ‘get oxygen’.

Can you relate? Let us pray for one another today that we would choose, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to not fret. When we do, it will lead to goodness.

Day 38

Psalm 86:1-2 *“Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am godly; save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God. This verse seems to go hand in hand with Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* (ESV)

Our greatest enemy is pride. We've each done battle against it. One good way to see if pride has a grip is ask yourself, "Are you grateful right now or stressed?" Unfortunately, I find myself more stressed, frustrated, and anxious about so many stupid things.

When I humble myself and look unto Jesus, who is my Life, my Friend, and my Hope, I begin to once again realize that He will take care of everything. Choosing to be stressed, frustrated, impatient, and anxious is choosing pride. Choosing these reveals my carnal, sinful heart. Pride never walks by faith. Father, help us to quickly recognize when we have stepped out of Your will. A grateful heart **IS** Your will. Help each of us to trust You not just this day but also this hour. Right now.

"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6 ESV)

"I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds." (Psalm 9:1 ESV)

Day 39

My Favorite Psalm is 34. I am sure some of you love it as well. Verse 8, *"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"* (ESV)

I find that when I drift into taking refuge in anything other than the Lord Jesus, His Word, and His precious, abiding fellowship, life takes on an unbearable, dead-like quality...sort of like chewing saw dust.

When I stop my rat race, slow down, and seek Him...really seek Him, I finally am able to taste the sweetness and goodness of our amazing Redeemer and Friend. He is humble and lowly of heart. He is kind and is a great listener. He knows what it is like to be sorely tempted. He does not forsake us when, quite frankly, we deserve to be forsaken.

Today I challenge you. Take 5 minutes alone with God. I mean really alone with Him. Perhaps take a flashlight or use the wondrous glow of your cell phone and rest quietly in His presence. Perhaps read a verse or two. Take refuge in Him. Taste the goodness of God.

Day 40

Isaiah 43:18-19 *"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."* (ESV)

If you watch the news, the trends, and the rapidly declining moral values in our blessed land, it is easy to become discouraged. Without our fellowship with Jesus and our firm faith in His Word, I think we'd all fall rapidly into the saw dust pit of despair. Life is hard.

Someone once stated, "Life is what happens to you when you are trying to live it!" ☺

The devil works overtime to get us to either **wallow** in the past or **worry** about the future. When we do either or both of these, we cannot be filled, controlled, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Our carnal flesh rules to the wicked one's delight. And, yes, then our family, friends, and co-workers suffer from our eyes being off the Lord.

Our Risen Lord wants us to simply rest in Him. He wants us to experience Him right now in this moment. Let us, this day, choose to forget our former sins and failures, as well as those of others. May we also choose to stop worrying about the future as well. When we look unto Jesus right now, not only are His mercies fresh, blessed, and new, but He has joy and purpose for us today and tomorrow.

Can you imagine He is making a beautiful stream in what you and I would call a dessert? Let's perceive it.

Day 41

John 1:12-13 *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* (ESV)

Years ago, I was on the phone with a religious man from a main line denomination. We did not know each other. He basically said, "We are all God's children. We will all be going to Heaven." I paused for a second and said, "Well Bob that is simply not true." I then read John 1:12-13 over the phone to him.

He stated that he had never heard that verse before. Not only was Bob not grounded in the Word, most likely He had not yet made the life changing decision to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior. He, up until this phone conversation, knew Christianity as a religion rather than a relationship with the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps for the first time he was learning that His Word, the Holy Bible, is our life's guide for all of eternity.

He was stunned that the Bible said that only those people who receive Jesus will be given the right (privilege) to become God's adopted child forever...forgiven, made holy, and eternally saved for Heaven. I pray he made this decision.

We all have family and friends that have not yet "received" Christ. They have not yet called on the name of the Lord to save them. (Joel 2:32) Let's pray for the Lord to pursue

them relentlessly and that He would convict them of their need for rescue, new life, and forgiveness and that He would save each of them.

Day 42

John 15:5 *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* (ESV)

Twelve years after I prayed at age 18 to receive Christ and my Savior, He had me pinned to the mat. Not only did I do lousy in wrestling at the Academy, I also found that wrestling with God is a futile and humbling endeavor. I am sure you can relate.

I had been an up and down worldly Christian for those 12 years. Yes I went to Bible studies and church but there was one big problem: I was on the front burner of my life and Jesus was on the back burner. I wanted God, wife, kids, and job to revolve around me and my own selfish desires. I craved the respect of people primarily those at work. I was your dyed in the wool people pleaser. I lived for notice and a pat on the back.

Having one foot in the world and another in the Lord’s camp just does not work. I was miserable. My mind and heart were always on work. My family got the leftovers.

One night near Christmas, 1980, the Lord confronted me with John 15:5. I was brought low, humbled and broken like never before. I realized that all of my external church attendance, teaching, and Bible studies were just wood, hay, and stubble. I was doing all that to look good, to get and maintain respect.

That night I realized I had been leaning my ladder up against the wrong wall of success. I wept and repented. I told Jesus I did not even know the first thing about how to hunger and thirst after Him (Matthew 5:6). I pleaded with Him, “Lord, please help me hunger and thirst after you!”

Since that night, God has continued to school me. I am learning now as I learned that night, “Take this world, but give me Jesus!”

Day 43

December 28, 1973 “a new book by the Nobel-winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn appeared in the Paris book markets. This book, too, was about prison--a documentary of the horrors of the Gulag Archipelago, Stalin's prison camps in central Asia, a system of inland "islands" which taken together would have been as big as the country of France.

Trained as a mathematician, {He} found his fame as an author instead. In 1945, while serving in the Russian army, he was arrested and sent to prison for criticizing Russian dictator Josef Stalin in a letter. While in prison he met Christians whose faith impressed him, and he came to appreciate the deepened understanding of truth which comes through suffering.

The day came when he was able to say, ‘Bless you, prison, for having been in my life.’ For in prison, he recognized what a spiritual monster he had been. There he listened to his conscience; there he found God. Prison made him firm.”¹

As we gather today to pray for each other and our loved ones, may we be reminded that our suffering as we yield to Jesus for His honor is never in vain.

“He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity.” (Job 36:15 ESV)

“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also, rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” (1Peter 4:13 ESV)

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” (1Peter 4:19 ESV)

¹ <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1901-2000/solzhenitsyns-gulag-archipelago-published-11630837.html>

Day 44

Ann Hasseltine Judson (1789 – 1826) was one of the first female American foreign missionaries. She was a Bradford, Mass. native, teacher, and the wife of Andoiram Judson. “Two weeks after they married, the couple set out on a mission trip — first to India, then to Burma.

While her husband was imprisoned in Burma under suspicion of being a spy, Ann wrote stories of the struggles she faced on her own in the mission field. She included tragic descriptions of child marriages, female infanticide, and the trials of the Burmese women who had no rights except for those their husbands gave them.”

She died of smallpox in Burma, at age 37.¹

Can you imagine the courage it took to head out, young, inexperienced, and newly married and going to places that had no penicillin, air conditioning, or air travel and, for that fact, no car travel either!

Let us pray for one another that we would be brave in the days ahead regarding what the Lord Jesus has planned for us. May our eyes be squarely on Him and Him alone.

“Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!” (Psalms 31:24 ESV)

¹ <https://thedisplacednation.com/2011/11/07/called-to-travel-overseas-for-the-benefit-of-others-7-female-missionaries-of-the-victorian-era/>

Day 45

It was in the early 1500's. William Tyndale (1494-1536: Gloucestershire, England) listened to God rather than the domineering voice of man. You could receive the death penalty for just possessing an unlicensed possession of Scripture **in English!** Well, he believed that all people should be able to read and understand the Bible, not just the priests and the elites.

*“Tyndale's translation was the first English Bible to draw directly from Hebrew and Greek texts, the first English translation to place God's name [Jehovah] in its rightful place, the first English translation to take advantage of the printing press, and first of the new English Bibles of the Reformation. It was taken to be a direct challenge to the hegemony (human domineering control) of both the Roman Catholic Church and the laws of England maintaining the church's position.”*¹

In 1536, he was arrested for heresy, hanged, and then burnt at the stake.

Have you ever been persecuted, accused, or insulted for doing, saying or believing in that which is right in God's eyes according to His Word? If so, the pain is real and sometimes the scars do not fade. Like Tyndale, we may be called upon in this rapidly darkening culture. Night is upon us...not physically, but spiritually. If you love and follow Jesus you will stand out like a city on a hill at night. And that is good. It will be painful, but it is Christ's honor and name that we uphold at all cost.

“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.” (2 Timothy 2:3-4 ESV)

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Tyndale

Day 46

*“Corrie ten Boom was the first licensed female watchmaker in the Netherlands. She learned the trade from her father, who was so fascinated by the craft that he often became so engrossed in his own work he would forget to charge customers for the services.”*¹

The Nazis invaded the Netherlands in 1940. Some Jewish folks humbly asked if her family would hide them from capture. Corrie’s family said, “Yes!” Most of you know the rest of the story having read her book **The Hiding Place** or seen the movie that followed.

Corrie and her brave family trusted God. They did the right thing in God's eyes. That was all that mattered to them. The Nazis eventually arrested all of them and most died in the death camps. Corrie was miraculously spared. She travelled the world speaking to audiences and churches on the fact that God's forgiveness and love are greater and go deeper than any sin, evil, or darkness.

After the war, she was confronted face to face with one of the prison guards that was partly responsible for her sister’s death. A battle ensued in her mind and heart. She reached down deep and remembered what her Lord and Savior Jesus had done for her on that despised cross 2000 years ago. By a gut choice of the will, she grabbed his outstretched hand and greeted him. She chose to forgive. She was free.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” (John 13:34 ESV)

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrie_ten_Boom

Day 47

*“Clive Staples Lewis (1898–1963) was one of the intellectual giants of the twentieth century and arguably one of the most influential writers of his day. He was a Fellow and Tutor in English Literature at Oxford University until 1954, when he was unanimously elected to the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University, a position he held until his retirement.”*¹

An author of many works such as **Mere Christianity** and **The Great Divorce**, he went on to write **The Chronicles of Narnia** which has sold over 100 million copies and has led to 3 motion Pictures. Time magazine stated he was one of the top 100 Christian authors of the Twentieth Century.

This Irish born intellectual giant was a man who loved the Lord Jesus. He often used fantasy fiction to convey enduring truths about God, Scripture, and the Christian life. As many of you have experienced, he also knew much sorrow for the love of his life, his

wife, Joy, battled cancer and died. They were together only 4 years. If you've ever lost a love one, words cannot describe the depth of sorrow and soul groaning that occurs in the pit of grief. If he were alive today, I bet he would comfort those of you experiencing grief, pain, and loss with his nearness, not his words. The suffering you go through often has no explanation and is miserable at best. Our great Comfort is that Jesus knows your pain. Even, at times, if you feel He is silent, He is very close. He will hold you, cry with you, and help you. It may not be with words but with His presence.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5b ESV)

¹ <http://www.cslewis.com/us/about-cs-lewis/>

Day 48

"Betsey Stockton (c. 1798 – 1865) was a freed African-American slave who left domestic service to travel as America's first single female missionary to Hawaii, then known as the Sandwich Islands. In fact, she went partly as a missionary and partly as a servant to one of the couples on the mission, the Reverend and Mrs. Stewart.

After being asked by the son of the Hawaiian king to teach him English, Stockton started up a school in... West Maui for the... fishermen, farmers and craftsmen who lived off the land ...which continued after she left.

Stockton's diary: Stockton kept a detailed written record of the mission, which conveys her somewhat turbulent, occasionally agonized, inner spiritual life; her interest in the natural world — including the kinds of fish caught from the ship, the color of the waves, and various bird life; and her spirit of adventure. Like others on board she was frightened at her first sight of the Hawaiian men who come out in canoes to greet the ship:

*'half man and half beast—naked—except a narrow strip of tapa round their loins...'*¹

As we pray today, let us be strengthened by Betsey's authentic faith in Christ. It was not 'holier than thou' but rather it was genuine, real, with ups and downs, fears, and joys. Have you ever experienced turbulence and even agony? I most assuredly have as did Jesus and His disciples. Good news! You and I are not alone.

"For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you." (Isaiah 41:13 ESV)

¹ <https://thedisplacednation.com/2011/11/07/called-to-travel-overseas-for-the-benefit-of-others-7-female-missionaries-of-the-victorian-era/>

Day 49

“Amy Carmichael (1867 – 1951) was a small-village girl from a devout Presbyterian family in Northern Ireland (her father founded an evangelical church in Belfast). She was called first to work among the mill girls of Manchester and then overseas, finding her life-long vocation in India.

Key achievement: In those days, Hindu priests kept “temple children” — mostly young girls who were forced into prostitution to earn money for them. Carmichael tried to rescue them by setting up a sanitarium in Tamil Nadu, thirty miles from the southern tip of India...

She would dress in Indian clothes, dye her skin with dark coffee, and travel long distances on hot, dusty roads to save just one child from suffering...

She died in India at the age of 83. She asked that no stone be put over her grave. Instead, the children she had cared for put a bird bath over it with the single inscription Amma, meaning “mother” in Tamil.

While serving in India, Carmichael received a letter from a young lady who was considering life as a missionary. She asked, “What is missionary life like?” Carmichael wrote back saying simply,

‘Missionary life is simply a chance to die.’¹ Note: Elizabeth Elliott wrote a fine book entitled **A Chance To Die**²

When we get to a certain maturity in life, we realize that the Lord Jesus, if we follow Him, has given us this gift and that we have a chance to live for Him. In reality, following Jesus is a serious call to death...death to self and death to me. As we pray today, let us ponder this.

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21 ESV)

¹ <https://thedisplacednation.com/2011/11/07/called-to-travel-overseas-for-the-benefit-of-others-7-female-missionaries-of-the-victorian-era/>

² https://www.amazon.com/Chance-Die-Life-Legacy-Carmichael/dp/0800730895/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1504032417&sr=8-1&keywords=%22a+chance+to+die%22

Day 50

Galatians 5:22 (ESV) says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love...”* As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, He forges His character in us. As we study His Word, the Holy Bible, as we practice what He teaches us, and as we serve and fellowship with other believers, His quality of **Love** begins to manifest in and through us to impact others lives.

This first fruit that the Holy Spirit unleashes and grows in us over time is not just for our benefit.

This love is God's amazing, unconditional, uncondemnable love. When we surrender to His will moment by moment, He will not only bless us for this obedience, but will draw others to Himself. Like a lighthouse on a cliff overlooking the dark and stormy sea, God will shine his love through us to those who need help and who need Him. Let's pray for each other to bear this fruit.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." (John 13:34 ESV)

"Pursue love,..." (1Corinthians 14:1a ESV)

Day 51

Galatians 5:22 (ESV) says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is...joy..."*

Think back for a moment when you were a child. Was there a family member, a teacher, a friend, or someone you knew that just seemed to radiate joy? I'll bet you wanted to be around that person. Who wouldn't? Who in their right mind would want to be around a grump, a complainer, or someone who usually sees the glass as half empty?

On my own, joy or gladness does not come naturally. Oh I crack a lot of jokes and get people chuckling but deep joy, the kind that is to be "down in my heart" as the campfire song goes, only seems to be produced when I spend quality time with Jesus in His Word and in His presence. The Lord is joyful and possesses a glad heart. When was the last time you knew you had deep down joy? You know, the kind that draws attention to Jesus? Let's pray for each other to bear this fruit.

"And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth," (Luke 1:14 ESV)

"And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10b)

Day 52

Galatians 5:22 (ESV) says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is...peace, patience..."* Do you and I, by faith and obedience, choose to abide in the peace and patience of our Risen King and Shepherd? This **peace** is *"the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatever sort that is."* (Interlinear Concordance Online www.BlueLetterBible.Org)

The other fruit today that seems to be clearly linked with **peace** is **patience**. The same online source defines it at, “*endurance, constancy, steadfastness, perseverance, forbearance, longsuffering, slowness in avenging wrongs.*” Wow! Now that’s a mouthful! ☺ But think about this. As we abide in Christ and as we continually yield and draw our delight from the Lord’s presence, His peace and His patience begin to permeate our souls. When was the last time you or I sat down in a chair, on the floor, by a crackling fire, or under a tree on a forest floor and took refuge in our Hiding Place...Jesus? How about now? Let’s pray for each other to bear this fruit.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5 ESV)

“Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4)

“You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.” (Psalm 32:7 ESV)

“You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word.” (Psalm 119:114 ESV)

Day 53

Galatians 5:22 (ESV) says, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is...kindness, goodness...*”) These two fruits brought forth in and through us by the Holy Spirit living in us are wonderfully linked. They seem to walk hand in hand fulfilling the purposes of God here on earth. Wouldn’t you rather be with someone who is kind and good than with someone who is unkind and evil? Since Jesus is kind and good, it should follow that His disciples are kind and good.

This does not mean we are to compromise the Word of God or sound biblical theology and doctrines. It means that while we are standing for truth and holding the line as God’s Ambassadors, will choose to issue kindness and goodness when? **Always!** Let’s pray for each other to bear this fruit.

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32; ESV)

*“They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant **goodness** and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.”* (Psalm 145:7 ESV)

Day 54

Galatians 5:22 (ESV) says, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is...faithfulness,*” What does it mean to you when someone says ‘God is faithful’ or ‘that Christian is a faithful person’? The direct meaning is ‘full of faith’. The (Interlinear Concordance Online www.BlueLetterBible.Org)

defines **faith** in relating to Christ as “*a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God.*”

If someone is faithful, we say they can be counted on. They are dependable. They will come through no matter what. We hopefully know that our God of the Bible is faithful. Are you? Am I? Do our family members trust us? Can our co-workers and friends count on us?

In our ministry, we define **faith as**: “***Choosing to live as though the Bible is true, regardless of circumstances, emotions, or cultural trends.***” Basically, faith is living right now knowing the Bible is true especially when everything in life screams at you that it is not true. So when a Christian is ‘full of faith’, they are full of this guttural, unyielding conviction stated in **bold** above. What are your thoughts on this? Let’s pray for each other to bear this fruit.

“*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*”
(Hebrews 11:1 ESV)

“*The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,”* (Exodus 34:6 ESV)

“*The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,”*
(Deuteronomy 28:1 ESV)

Day 55

Galatians 5:23 (ESV) says, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is...gentleness,*” Again the (Interlinear Concordance Online www.BlueLetterBible.Org) defines this fruit / word as: “*mildness of disposition, meekness,*” Typically, our western mindset, what comes to mind is someone who is a passive milk toast, a doormat, a wimp, or a cooked noodle with no backbone. This is not what this biblical word means at all!

Yes, in this word is the essence of approachability, reasonableness, and tender countenance. But make now mistake. There is real power in this fruit of the Holy Spirit. John MacArthur, in his fine book,

[Kingdom Living Here and Now](#) says that meekness or gentleness is the power of God that is only to be used in the defense of His honor. He goes on to write that the Holy Spirit’s gentleness or meekness empowers the believer to endure injury and injustice with patience and without resentment. Now that takes power! God’s power! Let’s pray for each other to bear this fruit.

“*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*” (Matthew 5:5 ESV)

“*Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*” (Philippians 4:5 NKJV)

Day 56

Galatians 5:23 (ESV) says, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is...self-control; against such things there is no law.*” Once again, the (Interlinear Concordance Online www.BlueLetterBible.Org) says self-control is “*the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his or her sensual appetites. Temperance.*”

If we are truly honest, if we, as Christians, have this fruit ruling our lives, it no doubt came with a regular, ugly resistance and fight on our part. Taking a look at our culture today, apparently many people famous and not so famous struggle vigorously against this desired fruit known as **self-control**.

I believe this is one of the most lacking fruits or qualities in Christians lives today. In general, we suffer individually and as a people from the **lack of self-control**. I sense you agree with me. ☺

I think this is a key are where we each need to seek advice and strengthen from the Lord Jesus. Right? Right! Let’s pray for each other to bear this fruit.

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”
(Proverbs 25:28 ESV)

“for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”
(2Timothy 1:7 ESV)

Day 57

Can you relate to King David? Here is a man chosen by God. He has courage against Goliath. Later, he falls into sin with Bathsheba. At one point, his honor for God prevented him from slaying his pursuer, King Saul. Later, his honor is out the window when he sets up Bathsheba’s husband, General Uriah, to meet his end on the front lines of combat. I sure can: Inconsistent, honorable at times, carnal at other times. Yet, David loved his God and, in general, was honest and authentic with Him. Take in his humble sincerity.

“1 In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! 2 Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!

3 For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; 4 you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. 5 Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.”

(Psalm 31: 1-4 ESV)

The Lord does not want us to wallow in the past with its troubles and sins. Once we come clean, He washes all our sin from us.

“9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1John 1:9 ESV)

Rather, He desires we look to Him, be completely honest before Him, and then unashamedly surrender our will, our plans, and our very lives to Him. Over all, this was Kind David’s heart. Lord Jesus, may it be ours as well. Let’s pray for each other.

Day 58

The prophet Jeremiah (627-585 B. C.) was known as “the weeping prophet”, “the prophet of loneliness” and also “the reluctant prophet”. From before the time he was born, God had chosen him to be a prophet who, “for more than 40 years, faithfully proclaimed God’s judgment on apostate Judah, all the while enduring opposition, beatings, and imprisonment.”¹ His was literally a thankless job: almost no perks, at-a-boys, thanks, or encouragement. The leaders hated what he kept telling them.

“5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” 6 Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” 7 But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 1:5-8 ESV)

Do you feel like very few people listen to you? Do you minister, witness, share your faith, do your job, but you don’t see much fruit and no one seems to care one way or the other? Are you fearful, at times, of taking a stand for God and the Bible in this “dark ages” culture? I have felt these.

Our brother in the faith, Jeremiah, knows these fears quite well. He can relate to us. May we remember this, however! Verse 8 above is God encouraging Jeremiah and, I believe, us. *“There is no need to be afraid. I, God, am with you and will deliver you. That is all you have to focus on. I will take care of the results my way, and in my time.”* (Verse 8 paraphrased) Let’s pray for each other.

¹Ryrie NIV Study Bible, Book of Jeremiah Introduction, p. 1008.

Day 59

I love the Book of Joel, (835 B. C.) in the Old Testament. It is only 3 chapters, yet, there are some amazing gems in it. A very famous verse is:

“32 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.”
(Joel 2:32 ESV)

Notice the Apostle Paul loved it and referred to it in his powerful letter to the Roman Christians in the New Testament.

“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13)

Do you know of someone who has not yet, to your knowledge, call on or cried out to the Lord Jesus Christ to save them from their sin, and eternal damnation in Hell? I most certainly do. Consider praying about copying and sending this and similar devotionals to them. Seeing them receive eternal life is well worth it. Even if they reject you and devotionals like this, at least you were faithful to be an effective witness to them. Let's pray for each other.

Day 60

These prophets in the Old Testament had a tough calling from God and a rough road for much of their lives. Once again, our friend, Joel (835 B. C.) had a difficult assignment. Has God given you a difficult assignment? I bet glazed donuts He has! 😊

In chapter 2 of Joel, the prophet is required by God to exhort the Jewish people to repent from godless living. They were, indeed, a stubborn and stiff-necked people.

*“**13** and **rend** your hearts and not your garments.” **Return** to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.* (Joel 2:13 ESV **bold** added)

Through Joel, God is commanding these wayward people to “tear” in peaces their hearts like a wild beast would do or “split asunder” their hearts. (Strong's 7167 www.BlueLetterBible.org Lexicon) God is then commanding them to “repent” or “restore”. The way of the flesh is so alluring. Choosing to turn to or return to the Lord and live by His Spirit in order to walk in His ways according to His Word is seldom easy. But it is best. Let us pray for each other that we would do the same.

Day 61

The way of the righteous is good and profitable. There will be fruit that lasts. However, the way of those committed to the practice of wickedness will experience, misery, condemnation, death, and destruction. The prophet Nahum is a little known man of God who gave God's harsh message of coming judgment to Nineveh through the people of Judah.

Can you imagine? Jonah led many to repentance in the city of Nineveh after he, himself, first repented. Yet one hundred years later we find these new Ninevites never caught the message to follow, love, and obey God. In other words, their saved, repentant ancestors failed to pass on Jonah's message of repentance, godly values, and truth! One or all of those generations dropped the baton! Wow!

“7 The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. 8 But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.” (Nahum 1:7-8 ESV)

For those of us who have children, grandchildren, or even great grandchildren, we might want to ask the Lord to help us gently share the Gospel and the truth of God Word. They need to know that Christianity is not a religion. Rather, it is a vital, tender, and growing relationship with a Person: The Lord Jesus Christ. [The Gospel Message](#)
He is their and our only Hope! Let us pray for each other in this.

Day 62

In God's eyes, there is a great distinction between two kinds of people:

First, there are those saved, forgiven individuals who have been declared righteous, holy, and blameless by grace through personal faith. They have chosen to trust in who Jesus is and what He has done for them on that Cross.

Second, there are those lost, unsaved, unforgiven people who reject the Lord Jesus as the only provision and hope for one's forgiveness, salvation, and new, eternal life. Many of these **“Rejecters”** are visibly wicked people: unrepentant thieves, murders, rapists, pornographers, drug and human traffickers, carousers, drunkards, etc.

Many, however, are not visibly wicked. Yet, in God's eyes, they suffer from a wickedness, the stench of which is utterly unbearable to our Holy God. This is the wickedness of the unsaved, lost person's own self-righteous attempt at being good and impressing God.

This person may go to church, serve the poor, give money to charity, and help a neighbor in need. They may think they are saved, and going to Heaven someday, but they are not.

“23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23 ESV)

“1 ... there is none who does good. 2 The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. 3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.” (Psalm 14:1-3 ESV)

They, in fact, are already condemned in their own wretched pride and self-worthiness. They are blind to redemption because, quite honestly, they do not think they need forgiveness, repentance, faith, and redemption. They actually think they can gain entrance into Heaven based on their own merits. They don't need the merits of Christ.

Let us pray for not only each other that we might walk in repentance, faith, and complete humility, but let us also pray for those who desperately need Jesus but don't yet know it.

Day 63

Zechariah (written 520 – 518 B. C.) predicted more concerning the coming Messiah than anyone except for Isaiah.¹

Are we looking for Jesus today? Are we searching the Scriptures for Him? Do we see Him in the face of the poor child, the homeless mother, the person languishing in prison, or the sick in the hospital?

You know, most people miss seeing Him. Most miss Him all together.

Let's read what Zechariah wrote

“9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9 ESV)

I believe the main reason most Jewish people in Jerusalem failed to see Jesus, the promised Messiah riding on that donkey during His Triumphal Entry the week He was crucified, was **they simply weren't looking for Him**. They had the Old Testament Scriptures. Many of them were taught in school about the coming Messiah. Their hearts were not humble. They were not looking up. They were caught up with the things of this world. Their hearts were hard and cold...self-focused on temporal things

Let us pray for each other today that we would have eyes that can see, ears that will hear, and hearts that will find Him. Let us be Christ-focused and Heaven-Minded.

¹Ryrie NIV Study Bible, Book of Zechariah Introduction, p. 1273.

Day 64

I'm learning afresh that Jesus is with me all day and all night by His Spirit. The Holy Spirit. This morning, in the quietness of my heart, He said, "Jim...do not fret. It only leads to evil." Interesting.....

Psalm 37:8 ESV says, "*Refrain from anger, forsake wrath. Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.*"

I was fretting about something these last weeks over something basically unimportant. Typical. The word "fret" in the Hebrew means "a slow burn": Like burning a large pile of leaves. Hmmm. I'm good at that. How about you?

Let's pray for each other that we will obediently choose to stop fretting over those piles of leaves in our hearts that frequently tend to smolder and smoke. Let us cast these troubles unto Him, King Jesus, the Shepherd and Savior of our souls.

Day 65

When was the last time someone was kind to you? I remember there were certain times in my life when people chose to be kind to me. I didn't particularly deserve it. One time I was about 8. I was skating at the community rink. I wasn't any good. This older kid was a bully and was skating towards me really fast and threatening to smash over me. I was scared!

At the last second, an older boy who lived two houses away from ours, jumped in front of me taking the hit from this bully. This kind Neighbor's name is Keith. I was both relieved and grateful. Awhile back, I bumped into Keith at Culvers, a local restaurant. We had such a great chat. He and his wife were there, both now retired, and our friendship connection had not changed. Kindness lasts.

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32 ESV)

Let us pray for each other that we would obey this command.

Day 66

"One of the scariest days of my life!" You've probably had one. Some of you have had more. I was a Second Lieutenant Platoon Leader stationed in Germany. The year was 1976. The day: May 6th. It was 9 months to the day and my young wife was at the Hospital giving birth to our 1st child. All appeared joyful and happy on the surface.

Back then, I was not allowed in the delivery room. There I sat all alone in the rather cold, undecorated waiting room.

Suddenly, the German doctor bursts through the door with fear on his face! He blurts out with a heavy German accent, “Ve are going to try to save da baby undt your wife! Ve might lose both. Ve tink da cord iss wrapped around da baby’s neck. Da baby’s heart rate is too low. Vee are going to perform a radical, emergency C-Section.”

He then rushes back through the swinging door.

I am left there utterly alone. No cell phone. No other people. Nothing. Fear gripped me. Here we were in a foreign country in an old WWI refurbished Hospital in Stuttgart. And I might lose my wife and new child in a matter of minutes.

Although I had been a born again Christian for 6 years, my maturity level as a follower of Christ was abysmal. Yes, we attended church here and there when I wasn’t on maneuvers and we went to a Bible Study once in awhile, but I was deep inside a people pleaser living a carnal existence. My soul may have been saved but my feet were firmly planted in the world.

My heart raced. I felt a heavy panic. I cried out to the Lord! “Help!” The Army moved us permanently back to the States. We settled in Colorado Springs, Ft. Carson, near Denver’s big military hospital.

Some how God pulled us through.

Isaiah 41:10 (ESV) has become like s friend. *“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.”*

Sara. Soon to be 42, is married with 3 beautiful children. She is the oldest of 7. Let us pray for those of us who are facing scary times and difficult trials. And let’s help and encourage each other if we can.

Day 67

Is it just me or is Wednesday the toughest day to get through? I remember back when I was a cadet at the Academy. Wednesday was like being half way on a swim across the English Channel... during a storm! My studies, parade practices, Obstacle Courses, room inspections, inspection in ranks, and the general ongoing pressure of the Spartan academy lifestyle left me drained.

Even now, Wednesday is my longest day with leading a Bible Study at 7 AM 25 minutes from home. Sometimes I crave a nap because my energy reserves are depleted by mid day. Do you like Wednesday’s? Some call it Hump Day. Wednesday dinner in the Cadet

Mess Hall was the best meal of the week. It was steak night. Occasionally, they'd toss in a lobster. I guess they were trying to help us get through the week. It helped.

Sometimes life throws us more than just a tough Wednesday. Some of you, right now, are going through rough seas that are weeks, months, and even years long. The drain and pain of life is bitter and, at times, almost unbearable. We've been there. Barbara and I want to be in the prayer trenches with you. Remember two things. First, you are not alone. Jesus is with you and so are many others, in spirit and in prayer. Second, this difficult time will not last. There will be an end.

The Lord cares. He will not abandon you. He will carry you through the storm.

"You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah" (Psalm 32:7 ESV)

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe."
(Proverbs 18:10 ESV)

Day 68

As I've gotten older, almost 67 now, having experienced one heart attack and other health issues, I have come to the humbling conclusion that I'm not 21 anymore. Why...I'm not 40, 50, or even 60 anymore. Those of you brave souls who've hit 60 know what I'm talking about. I'm not the man I used to be. Well...that might actually be a good thing. Ha! Thank God He is not nor has He ever been finished with me. In terms of godly character, I know I am not yet the man He is making me to be. That is good news!

My physical status does, however, affect my emotional condition. I don't have the strength nor the energy that I once had. Cleaning out the eaves on that ladder and lawn work just doesn't motivate me anymore. I am learning to face reality. I cannot do everything I used to be able to do. I get tired much more easily. This is humbling. Can some of you relate?

My God is not finished with me yet. That's the great news. Seasons of life change. But His desire to extend the Kingdom of His Son never changes. He, if we are willing and available, will use us and our prayers to reach many souls for Christ. I want Heaven filled with as many souls as possible. I pray you do as well. Let's serve Him with the strength and character He gives us. Let's pray for each other that we fill Heaven together.

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6 ESV)

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 3:14 ESV)

The Gospel <http://marriageanchors.com/2012/05/18/your-anchor-dont-leave-port-without-him/>

Day 69

“I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where?” How many of you remember singing this song at camp or in Sunday school? What a great song with a great message. I am learning (the hard way as usual) that **“Joy”**, like love, is a choice. It is not so much a warm, bubbly feeling I get from people, things, or experiences. Rather, it is a moment by moment decision to hold the hand of my Savior Jesus and choose by faith to possess a **glad heart**.

Now it is time for **True Confessions**. I am not joyful or glad much of the time. I find that I have allowed the disappointments in life, the set backs, and the outright royal shafts that come to cloud my judgment and my faith. Like the Apostle Peter on the Sea of Galilee and during the night of Jesus’s arrest and mock trial, I tend to quietly groan in grumbling and, at times, fear.

During these times, I take my eyes off of my Jesus, my Great Shepherd and lower them to this world, with its intrigues, its pressures, and its troubles. I might not be alone in this. Right? I do confess I am ‘missing the mark’ for this is what sin is. **Sin** is an archery term. It is the ‘sin’ distance which measures by how much my arrow misses the mark of perfection on the bull’s eye.

Sin is a condition which misses the perfection of God.

Like Peter, whether, sinking in the drink or slinking in denial, I am the opposite of joyful when I do this. I really desire that God gives me the Spirit-directed power to choose joy as well as to choose love. These two are like loyal roommates. One is not without the other. Please pray this for me. I will pray this for you.

“And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10c ESV)

Day 70

What is your passion? What drives you? Why do you wake up in the morning? What might you weep and pound the table over? Perhaps it is making money to pay bills and live comfortably. Perhaps it is to become somebody the world will remember. Could it be to avoid anxiety, have some fun, and be liked? For some, it may be to serve God faithfully with integrity and honor.

Lately, I’ve been discussing with Barbara, my wife, and our middle daughter, Anne, about spiritual gifts in light of what it says in 1 Corinthians 12 – 14:1. Consider reading this passage for yourself.

Remember these things. God's gifts are good. They are given to His children for His glory, for the building up of His Church, the Bride of Christ, and He will shine through you to reach souls for salvation, discipleship, and service.

If you are a Believer (a saved, born again follower of Jesus) you have at least one gift of the Holy Spirit for He resides in you, His Temple.

Also remember that it is God who **determines** which gift(s) you receive. Yes, you can pray for and desire gifts, but no one determines the gift(s) except the Lord for His reasons alone.

I do want to zero in on one key verse, 1 Corinthians 14:1a. (ESV)

“Pursue love,”

Other versions say, *“Follow ye charity”*, *“Make love your aim”*, *“Make love thy great quest”*, etc. The idea here is actually beautiful and quite deep. If you have an out-building on the farm with 5 large sealed Bell jars (representing different spiritual gifts) on the shelf. This building is supposed to be your honey storage building. What good are the jars unless they are filled with honey? The honey is the love of God and, thus, His love for people...through you.

Let us pray for each other that we pursue God and sinful people with His love regardless of the spiritual gift.

“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” (1Corinthians 13:3 ESV)