

Day 1 of 175 Daily Devotionals for You © by Jim & Barbara Grunseth - CRU 2021

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.

Psalms 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 "*shuwvb*" 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 dessert, 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 voooosh! 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 desert? 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 word 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. HmMMMMM...

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)

I want to 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 truer.

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, and 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 Fox Hole 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, and encourage. We are affirming, accountable, and we 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 disciplined in a totally Gentile community! It was here that the term 'Christian' was coined.

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, and 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 on 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 voooosh! 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. Let us 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, let us 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. Let’s have 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 area 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 King 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 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 a 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, 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 Wednesdays? 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 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 populated 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 setbacks, 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)

Day 71

Today I want begin sharing with you 8 simple benchmarks that hopefully will help each of us to rekindle our faith with our Lord Jesus Christ.

*“Thus says the LORD:
Stand by the roads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way is; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls...”* (Jeremiah 6:16 ESV)

“Do you desire to walk the ancient path? The Lord Jesus Christ is your ancient path. He is the One your tread-weary soul longs for. Call to Him and He will answer you. He will hold you by

your hand. Walk with Him now. Let Him take you by eight ancient benchmarks. They will help you start afresh and walk strong with God.”¹

1. **CONFESS** and 2. **REPENT**: These first two benchmarks are not only a starting point for someone who is praying to commit his or her life to the Lord Jesus Christ, but they are for the maturing follower of Christ as well. To confess means “**to agree**” with God that you have missed the mark of perfection and have fallen profoundly short of the glory of God.

To repent means “**to turn**” from our pride, our sin actions and attitudes, and dependence on anything other than Jesus to provide hope, security, purpose, or joy. Confession without repentance is as incomplete as Abbott would be without Costello, or peanut butter without jelly. Without the accompanying repentance, confession means nothing.

There are people who confess their wrong doing but in a day or two, they start doing and thinking ungodly again.

True repentance means being sorry enough to quit.

Let’s pray for each other regarding this.

“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)

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.”

(Ezekiel 18:30 ESV)

¹<http://marriageanchors.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Rekindling-Your-Faith.pdf> Note: Clicking on the link above will lead you to a free download which is much more in depth and can be used for personal use or in small groups.

Day 72

3. **SUBMIT:** “Means to acquaint yourself with the Lord in such a teachable, surrendered way that at all cost, you will show harmony with, and know intimately the Lord, His preference, and His desires. What was important to you no longer is important, only that which is important to Jesus.

‘Submit’ means to gladly come under the subjection and rule of Jesus, that you freely subordinate your will to His, and that you strongly desire to obey Him, be controlled by Him, and want only what He wants for your life.”¹

I openly confess to you that the first 12 years of my life as a Christian (from age 18 to 30), would have been characterized as outwardly churchy, upright, and Bible Study attending. Inwardly I was corrupt, people-pleasing, and flesh-driven. I was like the waves of the sea. One day going to church. The next day looking for sin to consume.

I would bet donuts some of you can relate. This is perhaps the most miserable a person can be. Saved by the cleansing, shed blood of Jesus on the Cross and operating fully in by my own fleshly power and in bondage to sin.

In order for me, a follower of Jesus, to be directed and empowered by the Spirit of Jesus, I (self-centered me) must get off the throne of my heart and submit to the authority, leading, and lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ. This I must do every day, every hour, and minute by minute.

I must do this by faith: A gut choice of the will.

Let’s pray for each other that we would submit moment by moment to the enthroned Lordship of Jesus in each of our hearts... we who follow and love our Savior.

“Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you.” (Job 22:21 ESV)

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

(Matthew 11:29-30 ESV)

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

(James 4:7 ESV)

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Day 73

4. **ABIDE:** “Means to remain in the presence of Jesus with uninterrupted closeness, surrender, and fellowship. It means not to depart, to continue to be present, to be held and kept continually. It means to “lean on” the Lord so much that if He were to move, you would fall hopelessly flat on your face. It means to draw your very life from Jesus on a continual basis. You must spend much time with Him and His Word in order to abide and learn to hear His tender voice.

I did not have a clue what abiding in Christ meant until my first marriage all but collapsed mainly due to my people-pleasing, flesh-driven way of approaching work, family, and ‘the private life’.

I would have done almost anything for a pat on the back at work while my wife and 2 too small children got the leftovers.

Abiding means you are pressed into Jesus and leaning on Him and His Word, the Bible such that if He were to move, you would fall hopelessly flat on your face. I learned the hard way about the word ‘abide’.

Let’s pray for each other that each of us would abide in Jesus and, thus, His Mighty Word this minute, this hour, and every day!

“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)

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Day 74

5. **SEEK:** Means to possess a strong desire that leads to searching for something. What do you long for right now? What are you searching for? What do you crave and thirst for? Sometimes the things we seek are not good for us and do not please God. Sometimes these things can become giants or idols in our lives.

“Please take a moment and list the golden carrots (idols / false gods) that the Devil has been dangling out in front of you perhaps for a very long time.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

Now simply cast them at the foot of the Cross of Jesus. He is your God, your Good Shepherd, and your Refuge. He wants to be the first thing you seek at daybreak, mid-day, and at night. Only Jesus satisfies your soul. If you desire only to seek Jesus, please pray this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I gladly cast all of these idols and false gods at the foot of Your Cross. Please destroy them. I want only to seek You and rest in You. I desire only to take refuge in You, my Lord. You, alone, are my Life, my Hope, my Strength, my Refuge, my Joy, and my Eternal Salvation. I love you!”¹

Your Signature: _____

“Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.”
(Psalm 119:133 ESV)

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33 ESV)

Let's pray for each other today that God would help us to **seek Him**.

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Day 75

6. PRAY: When we pray, things happen.

We are changed.

God is pleased.

Our 'Child to Heavenly Father Relationship' is enriched.

When we do not pray, not much happens. Our prayers, if controlled by Christ, are powerful. They are powerful not because of us, but because of our all-powerful God. He is living in us, His children. He earnestly wants a deeper relationship with each of us!

Nothing of lasting value happens apart from sincere, persistent prayer.

Prayer is talking with God admitting our helpless, needy condition. Prayer is listening to God when all is quiet. Prayer is communing with our Heavenly Father. Psalm 62:8 says we can pour our hearts out to Him. We can tell Him everything: Our sin, our worries, our struggles, our temptation, our angers, our fears, our fumbling, our hopes, our needs, our praises, and our joys.

Prayer is unleashing the power of God to act in time of need.

Prayer demonstrates our utter dependence upon God who is the only One who can work wonders and advance His Kingdom. Prayer changes the pray-er.¹

When you have the choice to pray or not to pray, **PRAY**.

Let us pray for each other that we become humble, pure-hearted, and steadfast prayer warriors.

“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.” (1Samuel 12:23 ESV)

“And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”

(Luke 18:1 ESV)

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Day 76

7. **OBEY:** We demonstrate to the world that we love the Lord Jesus Christ by choosing day in and day out to obey Him. We obey Him and please Him when we read and obey His Word, the Bible.

Someone once said, *“Spend time with Jesus, Read His Word, Do what He says.”*

Our great problem and tendency is to spend our time on things **we** want to spend time on. There are many who seldom read His Word and if they do, it is out of a sense of duty, performance, and guilt. If we find ourselves in this group, we often don’t do what He says, and we refuse to do what pleases Him (Ephesians 5:10). We choose what pleases our flesh. This is called **sin**. It is also called **disobedience**.

*“How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.*

*With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes!”*
(Psalm 119:9-12 ESV)

*“LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
He who walks **blamelessly** and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart;
who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;
in whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD;
who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
who does not put out his money at interest
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things shall never be moved.”*
(Psalm 15:1-5 ESV **Bold** added)

“**Blameless**” does not mean perfection in human conduct or thoughts. It means “**Upright**”. It means you desire a heart of integrity before God even though you make mistakes and are sinful at times. Do you desire to obey God at all cost to you?

Dear Lord, Please enable me by your Spirit to walk obediently with You today. I need You to guide, protect, and strengthen me each moment this day. I will depend on You by faith. And I will practice Your presence. I will choose to obey you. I will say “No” to temptation and sin by God’s grace.¹ I will say “Yes” to Your rule.

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

(Psalm 86:11 ESV)

Remember: *“Faith is choosing to live as though the Bible is true,
regardless of circumstances, emotions, or cultural trends.”*

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Day 77

8. **SERVE:** It is said that you will know you are a servant when people start treating you like one. Serving means putting others first. It requires humility. The problem is that many do not like humility because it is humiliating!

John, the Baptist stated clearly in (John 3:30 ESV):

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

*“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve,
whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites
in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*

(Joshua 24:15 ESV)

*“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for
the flesh, but through love serve one another.”* (Galatians 5:13 ESV)

This means serving those you like and those you do not like.

If you serve Jesus, then you serve people. It is that simple. He was a servant then, so you are a servant now.¹

Let us pray for each other that He would enable us to serve as He served.

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Day 78

*“He said, ‘**Be still**, and know that I am God...’” (Psalm 46:10 ESV)*

*“**Be still** before the LORD and wait patiently for him;...” (Psalm 37:7 ESV)*

*“And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! **Be still!**’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” (Mark 4:39 ESV) {**Bold** added}*

Have you ever found yourself spinning around from task to task, project to project, and conversation to conversation? My approach to life is to act first; think later, if required. Like many of you, I am a “Doer”, an “Achiever”, a “Get-er-done” kind of guy. Spending time in quiet solitude before the Lord or even just in the quiet is not my natural bent.

I’m like the Tasmanian Devil in the cartoons running around in a tizzy... hoping God is somehow ‘with’ me. However, having turned 67, I must tell you that my body and my energy levels are screaming at me to slow down. My Doctor said to me just a few weeks ago, “Jim...you’re not a Spring Chicken anymore.” Ah...encouraging words but I needed to hear them. I know a number of you can relate.

My problem is not so much one of physical or emotional frenzy, but rather is of a spiritual nature. Notice in the verses above, the Lord is issuing a command. It is my role to simply obey

whether I feel like it or not. Typically I don't see immediate results from being still before the Lord. Pray that I change my mindset. I will pray the same for you. God bless!

Day 79

Old Testament Prophet Samuel's farewell address to all Israel is as good for us today as it was for those people back then.

*"14 If you **will fear** the Lord and **serve** him and **obey** his voice and **not rebel** against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you **will follow** the Lord your God, **it will be well**. 15 But if you will **not obey** the voice of the Lord, but **rebel against** the commandment of the Lord, **then** the hand of the Lord **will be against** you and your king."* (1Samuel 12:14-15 ESV) {**Bold and color** added}

Here is a clear example of "choices have consequences".

In Galatians 6:7, the Apostle Paul says it plainly: *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."* (ESV)

Sadly, many times throughout their history, God's Chosen People rebelled and went their own way. If the truth is known, so have I...so have you.

As those of us who claim to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as born again Believers, we need to walk with and before the Lord with repentant hearts, pure minds, and humble dealings with others. Most of us have strong convictions, but we must be gentle, respectful and kind in our deliberations with others. Where there is penitence and admission of brokenness, there is joy and the helping, affirming hand of God. Let us pray this for each other today.

Day 80

Samuel continues his farewell address to Israel. (1Samuel 12:20-21 ESV)

*“20 And Samuel said to the people, “Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but **serve** the Lord with all your heart. 21 And **do not turn aside after** empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty.”*

{ **Bold** added }

Humans. What is it about us? God, the True King, wanted His Chosen People to love Him, follow Him, serve Him, and trust Him. What do they do? They offend their Almighty God and commit great evil by asking for a human king! What an insult! What a kick in the teeth!

Men and women who prefer the things of this world will always follow the path of sin and that which **feels right** to them.

As we pray today, and pray for each other, let us be reminded to pray for our hearts and minds that we would seek the things above and not the things of this earth. Our God, the Lord Jesus, is a far better King and Lord than any man or woman here on earth or the trinkets they promise us.

Day 81

Samuel goes on with his farewell address to the people of Israel.

“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.” (1Samuel 12:23 ESV)

Samuel was not just exhorting these rather wayward, double-minded people. He included himself as one who must be kept in line as well.

He knew his fleshly tendency was to pray less, study the Scriptures less, and seek the face of the Living God, well, less. Like John, the Baptist, Samuel knew he must fight his natural, fleshly tendency to want the importance and pleasures of his life to grow. John was disciplined and clear headed when he declared, *“He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.”* (John 3:30 ESV) John’s followers did not yet understand. They had hoped their guy, “John, the one who baptizes with water” and his ministry would gain traction and grow.

In verse 24, Samuel clarifies the ‘good and the right way’ and in verse 25 the consequences for disobedience.

“Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. 25 But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.” (1Samuel 12:24-25 ESV)

This loving but firm exhortation should have been met with reverence and trembling. Hopefully, we will learn from these stubborn and stiff-necked people in the Book of 1Samuel.

Let us not cease to pray for each other today and let us choose, by His grace and Holy Spirit, to serve Him fully and to remember His great goodness to us all in the past.

Day 82

In 1Samuel 13, King Saul reveals to us a perfect example of a disobedient man. He was explicitly instructed in Chapter 10:7-8 to do nothing independently from the Prophet Samuel. He was told to go down to Gilgal, wait 7 days...basically wait until Samuel shows up. He was to **wait** for Samuel.

Well in 1Samuel 13, the Philistines, with their overwhelming forces, were assembled to fight Israel. Since Samuel had not yet showed up, King Saul decided to take matters into his own hands (trust in his own wisdom) and offered the burnt offering without Samuel.

When confronted by Samuel, instead of confessing and repenting, he tried to justify himself.

*“And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You **have not kept the command** of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.¹⁴ **But now** your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord **has sought out a man after his own heart**, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.’”* (1Samuel 13:13-14 ESV **Bold** added)

As I write this, the Lord is humbly me. Father, forgive me for the many times I have failed to obey You! I am sorry. Help me to love, serve, and obey You. Can some of you relate?

Of course, this young man who possessed a heart after God was David, the shepherd boy.

Let us pray for each other today that we would learn from Saul’s disobedience. Let us choose to wait upon God and not lean on our own understanding.

Day 83

Goliath, the epitome of man’s arrogance and self-importance, shouted,

“8 ...Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” 10 And the Philistine said, “I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together.” 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.” (1Samuel 17:8-11 ESV)

Have you ever faced a giant? I have. My wife fought cancer for seven miserable years and then died. I prayed. I took her to doctors, and hospitals, etc. I did everything I could think of to keep her alive, but I could not. Despair is not even close to the misery I felt.

Some of you have faced giants. Some of you are in battle right now. We pray for you. We lift you up to the Lord. Like young David, we are here to stand with you and help hold you up. Through prayer, and God's comfort and strength, we will help you fling that rock so that God is glorified as He fights on your behalf.

If you are facing a tough, painful, or private giant, always feel free to email us at jgrunseth@centurylink.net . My wife, Barbara and I, pray out loud together every night at bedtime. Your prayer needs are kept confidential.

Day 84

“And David said to Saul, “Let no man's heart fail because of him (Goliath). Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” (1Samuel 17:32 ESV)

Young David's confidence was not in himself, although he was rather competent with rock and sling. His confidence was in His God, God Jehovah, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. David was defending the honor of the God of Israel. He says to Goliath and the taunting Philistines,

*46 “This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that **the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.**” (1Samuel 17:46-47 ESV **Bold** added)*

Most of you know the rest of the story. Against human odds, God slew this massive giant at the hand of young David.

Question: In what or in whom is your confidence placed? Whose honor are you willing to defend? Are you willing to stand up for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you declare your allegiance to Him at all cost? Will you be used of God to win souls to saving faith in His one and only Son? I ask myself these as well.

Let us pray for each other today that if there is only one who will stand up for Jesus, His honor, and His eternal, true, inspired Word, the Bible, that it would be me or you, whoever has the opportunity.

Day 85

*11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have **joy and gladness**, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."*

(Luke 1:11-17 ESV **Bold** added)

Can you imagine an angel appearing in front of you or next to you right now and telling you authoritatively that you "will have joy and gladness"? This is the month we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He was born of a common carpenter and a humble young woman in a geographical area not highly thought of. For Zechariah and Elizabeth, this news given to them by the angel was extraordinary, and surprising. When the angel first appeared, Zechariah was startled and fearful. If this had happened to me, I would have fallen off my chair!

Each of us faces battles, struggles, failings, health issues, and insecurities. No one is exempt. I believe that God would want you to know that you will have joy and gladness this Christmas Season. You can have that right now. Ask Him to give you His Joy and His Gladness of heart knowing that as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, we are given the sure hope of salvation and eternal life! Let's pray this for each other.

Day 86

‘27 ... And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

*34 And Mary said to the angel, “**How will this be**, since I am a virgin?”*

35 And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.”’
(Luke 1:27-37 ESV **Bold** added)

Have you ever been perplexed, at wits end, and completely dumfounded as to how the Lord is going to work it all out? Perhaps your marriage or family is messy. Every family I’ve ever met is. Maybe your finances don’t add up. Could it be that your health or that of someone dear to you is in jeopardy? Maybe you have the boss from the Land of Doom...

I remember my mom, years ago, after my dad had triple bi-pass surgery. Her nerves were shot. As a Christian wife and mom, she draped her arms over the kitchen island, and shouted to the Lord, **“God, I can’t worry about Frank anymore! I can’t handle this! You take it from me!”** From that moment on, a ‘hard to explain’ peace and calm came over her. God took this burden from her.

This day, turn to God, perhaps even right now. Tell Him what it is you cannot figure out or what it is that you cannot handle anymore. Tell Him straight up point blank. He’s big enough to handle it. He will carry it for you. He will answer in a way you cannot imagine. He did the same for Mary. Let’s pray for each other regarding this.

Day 87

*38 And Mary said, “Behold, **I am the servant** of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1:38a ESV **Bold** added)*

This declarative statement by Mary says it all when it comes to what truly pleases and blesses God. Full, not partial surrender, complete submission, not stubborn resistance, and utter abandoning of self, not trying to serve two masters...God knew this was Mary's heart attitude. So many of our struggles and frustrations occur because we are unwilling to be His servants, surrendered, and abandoned of self.

Someone once said, “*You will know you are a servant when people start treating you like one.*” Now we know why people don't like to serve in general.

Is there something in your life, something in your daily routine, some habit or attitude that needs to be erased from your heart's repertoire? For most, there is. Let us pray for each other today that we would declare out loud to Jesus, “*Lord – I am Your servant today...no matter the cost. I'm Yours.*”

Day 88

Mary's Song of Praise: The Magnificat

46 And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

51 *He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;*
52 *he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;*
53 ***he has filled the hungry with good things,***
and the rich he has sent away empty.
54 *He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,*
55 *as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”* (Luke 1:46-55 ESV **Bold** added)

Note: Ryrie says there are 15 discernable quotations from the Old Testament here. Mary’s family knew the O.T.

Has God done great things for you? He has done great things for me? The fact that He pursued me and saved my wretched, sinful soul from certain eternal punishment and darkness is astounding! Years ago, as a single parent of four, I begged God many days for mercy. He gave me far more than I begged for. He brought me Barbara, my loving wife, whose servant’s heart is such a witness to the world.

Do you fear or highly revere Him? Do you talk with Him often? Do you dig into His Mighty Word, eternal, inspired, unchanging? Have you cried to Him, telling Him you are hungry and thirsty for Him? If you have, he has or is right now filling you with good things... things that last.

Let’s pray for each other regarding these things knowing the Christmas Season is here.

Day 89

*‘8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, “**Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.** 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you*

will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”
(Luke 2:8-14 ESV **Bold** added)

Note that God did not reveal these angels or His Son’s magnificent birth to big wigs, the society’s elites, talking heads, or the blue ribbon people. Here, He reveals them to shepherds! In that day, shepherds were often considered lower than slaves...perhaps a notch above lepers. Usually, they were a filthy lot who lived ‘out there’ with the animals and dirt. Get this! The angel said to this lowly group that they no longer need to fear. Good news of great joy is now upon us... not just for some, but for all people!

Sadly, many poor, rich, educated, savvy, or famous people would and perhaps will miss this good news of great joy because of hardened hearts or hearts that have not yet heard this good news. Let us pray that God would champion each of us to do what this angel did. Let us herald the good news that Jesus, our Savior has come and that this great news is for them.

Day 90

*15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. 16 **And they went with haste** and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.”* (Luke 2:15-16 ESV **Bold** added)

Can you imagine if you were one of those shepherds? Would you say, “*Well now...that angel appearance and message were interesting, right guys? Let’s go back to our camp fire and finish our dessert. We’ll talk about this...maybe tomorrow or in a few days.*”

It says, ‘*they went with haste*’. They did not waste time. They hurried off to discover this ‘*good news of great joy!*’ If you were among them, would you have wanted to engage in this brief journey to Bethlehem...to the animal stable where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were? I would! I bet you would too.

The Bible says that if we earnestly seek the Lord, we will find Him. Better...we will be found **by Him**. Let us pray for each other today that we would stop right now and in the quietness of our heart, seek Him...Seek Jesus...Seek our Great Savior, Friend, and Prince of Peace!

Day 91

*“17 And when they saw it, **they made known the saying** that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 **And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God** for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”* (Luke 2:17-20 ESV **Bold** added)

These men could not contain their joy! The sheer magnificence couched in humble beauty that they experienced that night both with the angelic host and later with the Hope of Eternity in that stable was bubbling forth! Have you ever put a Mentos in a big bottle of Coke? I have not, but I've seen it done. ☺ Effervescence! They had to make known to others the good news of great joy they had just experienced!

In the center of their exuberance were hearts filled not with glorifying their experience that night but rather with God Himself!

Let us center our hearts right now on God and His matchless, priceless gift of His one and only precious Son, Jesus: The Shepherd of our souls. And let us pray that each of us would tell many others in this world that He has come to save us from our sin. Merry Christmas!

Day 92

*“I will **restore** to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten...” (Joel 2:25a ESV **Bold** added)*

Good morning, friends! Just 2 days ago, it was Sunday morning and I had the privilege of helping to serve the elements in Communion. I had been struggling with a discouraged and heavy heart for several months. I was anxious, fearful, and despondent over some things some very ungodly, lying, and fraudulent people had done to my wife Barbara and me. The Communion servers serve the congregation row by row the small pieces of crackers on trays representing the bread.

No one, with the exception of Barbara, knew about my inner struggle. I was standing in the back of the church sanctuary waiting for the others to walk up to the altar together when the Lord clearly impressed upon my heart the above referred to verse.

Being in the back, I don't think anyone could see my eyes welling up with tears...tears of great relief! A **peace** came over me that I will never forget! Right then and there, I knew my Lord Jesus not only understood my pain but that He took this burden from me and assured me He would take care of things. This word **restore** means “to cause to be at peace”, “to be complete, be finished, be ended”, “to make safe, whole or good.” His compensation His way will be made. Let us pray this wonderful verse over each other and over your loved ones this day!

Day 93

*“You shall **eat in plenty** and **be satisfied**, and **praise** the name of the LORD your God, who **has dealt wondrously** with you. And my people **shall never again** be put to shame.*

*You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that **I am the LORD your God and there is none else**. And my people shall never again be put to shame.” (Joel 2:26-27 ESV **Bold** added)*

What a great and faithful God we serve! His love for us believers, His children, knows no bounds. If you look at the **bold** words especially, there is just no reason not to praise the Lord! Yes, the world may hurt and shame us, His disciplines for disobedience can be memorable, but shame?

*“There is therefore **now** no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 8:1 ESV **Bold** added) The Apostle Paul reiterates this great promise to the ones who have been saved by Christ’s shed blood on the Cross. Whatever you have done, oh Saint of God, whatever has been done to you, right **now**, Jesus takes away all shame, all guilt, all stain, and all disdain. You are free! You are made clean. And He will care for you forever! Let us pray for each other today that we would grasp these truths and share them.

Day 94

*“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; **he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.**”* (Zephaniah 3:17 ESV **Bold** added)

It is possible that you have suffered a father wound from your past. You might not even know who your dad was. I am so sorry if this is true. I hurt with you. You might have experienced the blessing of having a great dad in the family you grew up in. For some, the accepting fellowship with dad didn’t come until later in adult life. That was my case.

The good hope we saved ones of the Lord have is that we have a Heavenly Father who knows us, formed us, saved us, and will always be there to love, guide, provide for, and cheer you on.

When you read the above verse, what comes to your mind? For me, right away, I see a loving, affirming dad cradling his young son or daughter tenderly in His arms almost cooing over his child. He is so proud, so caring, and so thankful for such a gift! This, and much more, is how our Heavenly Father thinks of you, if you are His. Let’s pray for each other that we’d experience this afresh right now.

Day 95

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 ESV)

These days, if you watch the news and read about many main line churches, or what’s going on in many college campuses, the great passion of today is **not** what John, the Baptist, is saying here.

There is an overwhelming pressure for social justice, diversity, full acceptance of many minority identity groups, and the idea that “you are not a Christian church or a good person if you don’t love, promote, celebrate, and endorse just about every lifestyle and identity plea that is thrown at you.” Inclusion! Inclusion! Inclusion!

The Apostle Paul emphatically states in 1Corinthians 14:1a *“Pursue love,”* (ESV). Another version says, *“Make love thy great quest.”* The KJV renders it, *“Follow after charity,”*. Paul, earlier in 1Corinthians 13:3 says, *“...but have not love, I gain nothing.”* (ESV)

God is love and God is for love. We dare not forget that!

But He is also the God of eternal, unchanging, inerrant truth. I believe John, the Baptist, knew about this ‘never to be separated duo’ of **love** and **truth**.

Proverbs 3:3 states this essential connection. *“Let not **mercy** and **truth** forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the tablet of thine heart.”* (KJV **Bold** added)

These two, **mercy** and **truth** are never to be found separate. Yes, Jesus was, is and always will be about love. But as John declared here, may we never forget the eternally important truth that Jesus came to save sinners from being damned and lost forever!

I guess in these days of the watered down or forgotten Gospel, I’d like to see us all return to a more healthy balance of mercy and truth. Concepts like conviction, repentance from sin, and a holy reverence for the Word of God are desperately needed in our churches, our campuses, and our culture. Please join me in praying for this if you are led.

Day 96

*“**Good sense** makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to **overlook** an offense.”* (Proverbs 19:11 ESV **Bold** added)

Like me, you’ve had those times in life where you’ve been praised or recognized for some accomplishment or achievement. Also, like me, you’ve no doubt had more than a few times when you’ve been back stabbed, slandered, stepped on or down right shafted.

There have been times when I have not responded well. I’ve been offended and gotten my feathers ruffled. Somehow during those miserable times, I lack **good sense**. I choose to take control of things. I usurp command from Jesus, who is supposed to be my Lord, Master, and Shepherd. Instead of **overlooking** an offense, I look for ways to magnify the offense. I feel I deserve retribution! I want justice and I want it now! *“Why...I did not deserve to be treated that way! No way! That person is a jerk! I’m going to demand justice! I’ll show them! I’ll teach them a lesson!”*

Now I imagine you have never felt like that. Right! ☺

When I yield unto the Lordship and rule of Jesus in my heart and when I ask Him to help me respond as He wants me to respond, He gives me what I lack: **Good sense**. Then and only then will I become slow to anger. Then and only then will I **overlook** the offense.

Let’s pray we each humble ourselves right now, today, that He would give us His calm, kind, good sense.

Day 97

“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.”
(Proverbs 19:21 ESV)

Someone once said, *“Life is what happens to you while you’re trying to live it.”* I confess I often don’t like that quote. However, if you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find this verse absolutely true. I’ve had to learn it often kicking and clawing each step of the way. I am a proud, stubborn soul. I don’t learn His Truth easily. How about you?

Are you stubborn and often proud of heart like me? If you are human, and if you are reading this, you probably are like me. ☺ Oh...we don’t like others to know of our frailties and cracks in our armor, but we, if honest, are a pretty needy lot.

I find the way I am wired, I look for ways to **self-protect** or **self-promote**. Sadly, if at the end of the day, if I haven’t achieved one or both of these fleshly, worldly pursuits, I find myself both frustrated and discontent. Can some of you relate?

It’s as if I’m on a tropical island all alone building up my grass and stick hut 8 feet off the ground so wild beasts and ocean floods will not reach my safe, secure world.

The frustrating and sometimes funny thing is that while I’m trying to prop up my hut stilts and posts with rope and vine, God is there trying to kick out my protective slats and 8 foot posts ruining my attempt at solving my life’s problems, troubles, and insecurities.

At first thought, it seems like He is not **for me but against me!**

Humbly, let us pray that each of us will learn to yield unto His way, His timing, and His honor.

“Though he slay me, I will hope in him...”

(Job 13:15a ESV)

[The Gospel](#)

Day 98

*“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no **longer live for themselves** but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”* (2Corinthians 5:14-15 ESV **Bold** added)

I have been leading a Bible study on the Book of Acts in the New Testament for over a year now. One thing is evident! The Apostle Paul, once saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, **no longer lived for himself.**

He lived only for one Person: His Lord, Master, Redeemer, and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords! “...*but for him...*” Who do you live for right now...today?

If the scales were brought out, would you and I be found wanting?

Are we merely Christian in name but just a millimeter under the surface, we are pure self? This is a tough question. I do thank my God and Savior often that His love for me has nothing to do with my miserable and inconsistent track record as a Christian. Rather, His unconditional love for me is because of His amazing, never ending favor and kindness toward me, once so lost I couldn't see my nose in my darkness.

It is because of His Son, His sacrifice, sin payment, and resurrection that I am set free! I thank Jesus who voluntarily went to the Cross for me where **The Great Exchange** occurred: His Righteousness for my filthy rags. Wow! Isaiah 61:10

If you have called on the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, to save you and rescue you from sin and damnation, rejoice with me today! He, now, is your life, your plan, and your hope. He will guide you, protect you, provide for you, and see you through to glory. Guaranteed! Therefore, let us **no longer live for ourselves but for Him.**

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”
(Joel 2:32a ESV)

Day 99

“²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;

his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” (Lamentations 3:21-24 ESV)

How are you today? While you read these brief devotionals this week, remember this: The Lord Jesus, your Savior, Shepherd, and Friend loves you, is right there with you, and has your best interests in mind.

If you live long enough, you will experience what this fallen world has to offer. Yes, there is joy, surprise, success, great food, bright lights, and fun. And yes, there is pain, sorrow, loss, failure, sickness, death, tragedy, suffering, and betrayal.

Jeremiah, the Old Testament Prophet, knew this. He is known as the “lamenting” or “weeping” prophet. God commanded him in 626 B.C. to warn and prophesy over Jerusalem regarding its impending destruction in 587 B.C. by the Babylonians, invaders from the north. For the most part, the leaders did not listen to him. He was not treated well. Life was not pleasant for Jeremiah. He chose to put his **hope** in the Lord. God’s love (chesed – Hebrew) never failed him. He will never fail you. Let us pray for each other that we would trust in our God and His never ending unconditional love for us. Let’s let **hope** ring true in our hearts today.

Day 100

¹⁸ “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ 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.”

(Isaiah 43:18-19 ESV)

Do you ever find yourself dwelling on the past? I do. Sometimes I beat myself up over past mistakes, poor decisions, and outright failures. I think sometimes looking to some root foundational causes from our past can be beneficial in coming to grips with how certain wounds from our past affect us now. But the Lord does not want us to stay there. The past is done.

Tomorrow is not here yet. What we have is today. In fact, the Lord Jesus wants you to know He is doing a new thing in your life...right now. Expect His touch, His guidance, His provision, and His protection as you spend time with Him and seek Him through His Word daily. He is with you and he loves you dearly. He is not finished with you yet. Let's pray that we'd each accept this as true today.

Day 101

"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."

(Isaiah 43:25 ESV)

I remember a few months back the topic of past sin and forgiveness came up in our adult Sunday school Class. Knowing that many Christians are not adequately grounded in Scriptures led me to point out that according to Isaiah 43:25 and several other passages, God has not only forgiven all our sins, past, present, and future, but has promised to remember them no more. One dear lady in her early 70's was a believer but had been beaten down with the shame and guilt of past moral and relationship failures.

She came over to me after class and said she had never seen that wonderful verse before and that as she pressed faith into it, her shame began to lift. A few weeks later, she was baptized in a nearby lake. She said she shared the beauty and blessedness of this verse with those witnessing.

Know this. God made Himself eternally unwilling and completely incapable of remembering your sins. It does not say *"I will forget your sins."* For one who forgets might recall them. Emphatically He states *"I will not remember your sins."*

If you are a professing follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and are, thus, his son or daughter, God views you as having never sinned! You have the very perfect righteousness of Christ Himself

imputed to you. When you called on Him to save you...when you received Him as Lord and Savior, He removed all your sin stain and guilt past, present, and future, from you. On that terrible cross he bore your sin. In exchange, He not only forgave you but gave you His perfect innocence and holy righteousness that you did not deserve.

Now, as God's child, when you sin in thought, word, or deed, your fellowship is broken. As soon as He makes you aware that you have chosen your way instead of His, thank Him for already forgiving you, repent, and ask Him to, once again, take control of the throne of your heart by faith.

As family, we have the blessed 1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (ESV)

Our relationship is eternally intact. It was our fellowship as God's family members that needed attention.

Let's pray for each other that we would live according to God's Word and not according to our thoughts or feelings.

Day 102

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

Have you ever thought about what it means to be poor in spirit? Does it mean that we should grovel around in sackcloth and ashes? When Jesus gave His Sermon on the Mount (The Beatitudes), He was describing for His listeners what it meant to be a contrite, repentant Jewish person.

Those who are poor in spirit are those who realize they are spiritually bankrupt before Almighty God. They understand that there is nothing in and of themselves that would impress God. They declare they are, spiritually speaking, in abject poverty. Broke. Empty of ability to be impressive or spiritual.

In John 3:30, John the Baptist stated his view in terms of his esteem and place in this world compared to that of the Lord Jesus. He said emphatically *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”* It would be quite Ok for people to forget about him. Rather, they should remember and bring glory, honor, and praise unto the Lord Jesus, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

Are you poor in spirit? Do you want the world to notice or remember you? Do you crave to be recognized for who you are or what you’ve accomplished for yourself or for God? Poverty of spirit is harder than it seems. Let us pray that God would help each of us to be poor in spirit before Him. Blessedness is coming to those who do.

Day 103

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

Jesus goes on in His Mount Sermon stating that happiness and joy are in route to those who are meek. I used to think that to be meek meant I would have to be a mild, mamsy pamsy, milk toast that others would easily run over. Then I read John MacArthur’s great book [Kingdom Living: Here and Now](#).

John states that in this context, to be **meek** means to “endure injury and suffering with patience and without resentment.” Suddenly, meekness describes someone who has the courage to be Christ-like, and to walk the walk whether anyone is watching or not.

I think of the times I’ve endured injury, suffering, and injustice. My responses weren’t exactly meek. How about you? I want the Lord to help me be meek. I do want the joy and peace that comes from choosing to be meek. Do you? Let’s pray to this end for each other today.

Day 104

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

Who reading this doesn't struggle with a pure heart? God knows we all do. If the Apostle Paul said he was chief of sinners...well... then I'm on the short list! I know some of you can relate. That fascinating word repentance...

In Matthew 3:8, *“Bear fruit in keeping with **repentance**.”* (Bold added ESV), this word *metanoia* means “a change of mind of a purpose he or she has formed or something he or she has done.” This, if genuine, always leads to the fruit of repentance: **Action / Obedience / a Turning**.

Now in Isaiah 30:15, it reads, *“For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, ‘In **returning** (repentance) and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.’* (Bold added ESV).

This word *shuwbah* refers to a returning from something and to pursuing something else. It also refers to a withdrawal. The idea of Holy Spirit-wrought repentance in our minds and, thus, in our hearts leads to Him crafting or forging a **pure heart**. A singularly devoted heart involves:

1. A pleading (actually begging God) for a pure heart. We will decidedly choose with God's ready help to change our minds to be 100% in line with God's Word and thus His heart.
2. A total yearning for a pure heart must involve our gut will decision at all cost to turn away from sin and self and return to the captured safety of our Father's Arms. We will withdraw from death and run to life.

Let us pray for each other today with our Father in Heaven that He would capture our hearts and arrest our minds to be fully devoted, craving purity, and lasting repentance. (*Sorry enough to quit for good.*)

Day 105.

Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”* (Matthew 5:14 ESV)

He also said, *“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”* (John 8:12 ESV)

If the Lord Jesus has saved you, then the Spirit of Jesus (The Holy Spirit) lives in you forever. It then is His light that shines, or is supposed to shine, to the world so others might see Him, His love, His truth, and His saving grace.

Who is it that God has place on your heart today? Might they need your prayers, an encouraging word, or a bit of help? Who might you bump into today that could use a Gospel tract or a generous tip? I call it **“Who needs a cup of encouragement?”**. Who do you know doesn’t need such a refreshing cup? The truth? Every breathing soul on earth needs one.

Let us position ourselves today and this week to be available lights of the world so that the world may see, have hope, and run to our amazing Savior. Let’s pray for each other to this end.

[The Gospel](#)

[Shine Bright](#) [Beggars Welcome](#)

Day 106.

Run to Him #1

I asked the Lord what brief devotionals I should write this week. He desires that we run to Him! Sometimes I get so angry and frustrated over the wicked condition of our culture and of the world in general. I just wish people could be kind, be respectful, and simply tell or report the truth.

It seems to me and probably to you that there is much angst, fear, tension, and uncertainty in our land. I guess we should not be surprised. The world is full of us: sinners. We are good at making messes of things.

But for the sincere, humble believer (one who is born again, and yielded to the Spirit of Jesus,) I am convinced the best place to flee to and abide in is **Him**. My tendency, as a West Point graduate is to move out with a purpose, get things done, and if I can't go over or around the hill, to just go through the hill!

So the first of 7 passages this week is Psalm 61:1-4 (ESV **Bold** added). Please meditate on this for a minute.

*“Of David. Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; **lead me to the rock that is higher than I**. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in the shelter of your wings.”*

Let's pray for each other that we each would run to Him as we press into this passage.

Day 107.

Run to Him #2

Last night, Barbara, my wife, made her amazing Lasagna. Our 11 year old grandson, Isaiah, spent the night with us. Since I'm never "over the top", I will tell you that if this creation was in an international competition, I believe she would have taken first place! ☺ She keeps down playing it. I want to shout its excellence from the rooftops!

Yet, in this age of relativism, diversity, and inclusion of just about anything, there is a hunger that I yearn for that is not found in food, adventure, politics, or even family. It is a hunger for Jesus of Nazareth, my Lord, the Messiah. He alone is Life. He alone is Truth. He is my Hope and my Salvation.

Thirty eight years ago, at a very low point in my life and marriage, I cried out to God to help me hunger and thirst for Him...for I did not know how to. He answered my prayer.

Begging is for the destitute. Have you gotten destitute before Almighty God? It is the most humbling and best place for the needy, broken soul. Jesus always hears the cry of the sincerely destitute.

As we run to Him today, let's meditate on this simple verse: Psalm 34:7 (ESV **Bold** added)

*"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who **takes refuge** in him!"*

Day 108.

Run to Him #3

When I was 11, I dragged two large wooden crates that held refrigerators about 1/4th mile from a factory near our home. In the back yard, I assembled them, one atop the other. I cut a few small windows, sawed a lockable door, and I had a first rate **fort!** Inside this fortress, I created an opening so I could crawl up to the 2nd floor. To me, this was Shangri-La!

Ok, another guy, down the road, had carpet and a TV in his fort, but I loved hiding in **MY** fort. Like some of you, I had bullies that often made sport of me. When I was **concealed** within my fortress, I felt safe from them. There was not much worse in the early 1960's than a mean bully who had you on his radar.

As I got older, and having come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ at age 18, I learned of different present dangers: The world, the devil, and my flesh. The greatest enemy I have come to learn is really my own stubborn, sinful, prideful self-will. Who will I allow to call the shots this hour: Me or the Spirit of Jesus? That is the real question. (See Galatians 5)

The Lord Jesus is now my beloved and prized fort. Let's pray that He is all our fort today.

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

Day 109.

Run to Him #4

Have you ever baked bread? What is better than a nice slice of homemade bread from a fully baked loaf with butter and honey on it...all still warm and delicious? Baking is both art and science. We've actually found ourselves occasionally watching **The Great British Baking Show**. Some of

those baked goods prepared by true artisans look so good, I could dive through the TV and bite right into the cake. Why do I have to love cake and especially **Buttercream Frosting!!!???**

Sometimes, if the baker is not paying attention or is not serious about the baking endeavor, the inner portion of the bread or cake may not be fully cooked. It is gooey and gummy and is a real mess. They lose.

There have been too many times in my life when my walk with the Lord Jesus gets the left-overs from my day or week. I have approached my spiritual life and my devotional life in a **half-baked** manner. You know the results. Let us pray for each other today that we each run hard after Him, the Author and Perfector of our faith. Let us each seek Him wholeheartedly!

*“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with **all** your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29:13 ESV **Bold** added)

Day 110.

Run to Him #5

Have you ever faced overwhelming odds? Has the avalanche of life overwhelmed you? Are you, even now, sinking in deep water? Many of you have face the brutality and unfairness of life in this fallen, sinful world. If the Lord Jesus hadn't rescued me from the high waters rushing at my life, I would have surely gone under. Of this I have no doubt. Have you looked in the face of evil or wretched circumstances such as betrayal, slander, abuse, or even those of a dictator?

Some of you may be in places where to follow Christ or possess even a page of Scripture is illegal. Some of you have suffered dearly for your faith. God bless and comfort you!

Jehoshaphat and his people were facing certain destruction from a much superior enemy. He cried out,

*“If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and **you will hear us and save us.**”* (2Chronicles 20:9 ESV **Bold** added)

The King and his people chose to look only to God for help. Then through Jahaziel, God addressed them:

*“He said, ‘Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Juda and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. **For the battle is not yours, but God’s.**”* (2Chronicles 20:15 ESV **Bold** added)

Each of us is facing a battle today. Let us pray for each other that as we run to Jesus, we call upon his Name, we cry out to Him and we **look unto Him to fight this battle.**

Day 111

Run to Him #6

Have you wonders how to stay on the right path, the narrow path that brings honor to the Lord Jesus and is pleasing to Him? Some of you know what I’m talking about when I say that I have had to learn this and re-learn this the hard way. Taking the crooked path of self-promotion, self-protection and self-glory, always leads to death: Death of joy, death of hope, death of fellowship with God, and death of relationships.

Whether you are old like me ☺ or quite young, it always boils down to this: Do I love God more than myself?

Psalms 119:9-12 says it so well:

*“How can a young man keep his way pure? By **guarding** it according to your word. With my **whole heart** I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have **stored up** your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you O LORD; **teach me** your statutes!”* (ESV **Bold** added)

Day 112.

Run to Him #7

When I was at the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, we ran everywhere all the time. I didn't have time to get fat or lazy. I ran the most during my Sophomore (Yearling) year. They stuck me on the Intramural Triathlon team. I had to run 2.5 miles up and down forested hills. This was in autumn in New York State near the Hudson River and the trees and foliage were beautiful.

My Yearling Summer, we spent several months at Camp Buckner. We'd have to get up really early, grab our rifles, and go 2 or 3 miles up and down fairly steep roads in those mountains there.

It seemed like I was running to everything except to God. My excuse? *“Well, I didn't have much time or energy for that.”* I am now 2 years away from turning 70 and one thing I've learned,

“I must first run to Jesus!”

Life just does not add up nor does it make any sense unless I search for Him, yearn for Him, spend time with Him, abide in Him, love Him, praise Him, thank Him and rest in Him.

Let us pray this for each other today.

*“**Come to me**, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **Take** my yoke upon you, and **learn** from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and **you will find rest** for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30 ESN **Bold** added)

Day 113.

Armor Up! #1

Years ago, I loved to play an old fashioned Pin Ball Game at an out of the way burger restaurant. When I'd finally hit the steel ball in the center of the draw bridge, a deep bellowing voice carried out from within the machine... ***"Attack the Castle!"*** With great expectancy, about 5 balls would suddenly be released and I would hit those fine steel balls at the walls of the castle to conquer it and **take it down!**

Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and in particular, Chapter 6:10-18 is not just a significant section of Scripture. It is mandatory for the follower of Christ if he or she wants to truly be a **Soldier for the Cross** and impact eternity by winning and strengthening souls on behalf of Jesus!

Right now, the devil and his rulers, his authorities, his cosmic powers over this present darkness, and his spiritual forces of evil are plotting not to attack the castle, but rather to **Attack the Christian!** You, dear brother or sister, in the saved family of God, are his target. Because you are Christ's personal Ambassador and you are in His Army, the devil has painted a bull's eye on your back.

Paul sums up his letter to the Christians in Ephesus by saying, *"Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."* (v. 11) But many fail to emphasize verse 10. *"Finally, **be strong** in the Lord and in the strength of his **might.**"* (**Bold** added) We'd better be sure that we are yoked up with Jesus, spending time in His Word, and learning moment by moment to abide (John 15:5) in Him. If we are not walking in close fellowship with our Master, Lord, and Battle Commander, there is little chance His Armor will fit or can be carried. We will not be strong enough. We will be in "our strength", not His.

Let us pray for each other today that each of us would be made battle ready and battle strong!

(Ephesians 6:10-18 ESV)

Day 114.

Armor Up! #2

You are in the battle right now. The first of God's Armor pieces we must put on is:

The Belt of Truth

All of God's Word, the Bible, is all of God...inspired, infallible, eternal, all true, always. The Apostate Church which is growing in number, refuses this. They wallow in tragic kindness. For them, it is all about love. That's it. The devil's tactic. We, who follow the Lord and are counted in His ranks, stand on His Truth: All of it! "*We stand in **grace*** (Romans 5:2); *We stand in the **gospel*** (1Corinthians 15:1); *We stand in **courage and strength*** (1Corinthians 16:13); *We stand in **faith*** (2Corinthians 1:24); *We stand in Christian **liberty*** (Galatians 5:1); *We stand in Christian **unity*** (Philippians 1:27); *We stand in the **Lord*** (Philippians 4:1); *We stand **perfect and complete** in the will of God* (Colossians 4:12).ⁱ

All of this means that we are going to be attacked. Fear has no place with us. We must be vigilant, at our post, and fully attentive. Like Sir Winston Churchill, We never give up...never retreat. Full steam ahead!

Let us pray for each other right now that we will **first** gird ourselves with this **Belt of Truth**. Many vital battle accouterments depend on this. Make sure this belt is buckled, not just thrown in the back seat.

Day 115.

Armor Up! #3

The second of God's Armor pieces we must put on daily is:

The Breastplate of His Righteousness

Most of you know this is not our attempt at being good, righteous, or a clean cut, helping, church attending person. This is all filthy rags if this is the only thing you are depending on. Yes, you

are “*created in Christ Jesus to do good works*” (Ephesians 2:10b ESV), but never think you can stand on them or behind them to represent Jesus and fight against the powers of darkness.

Isaiah 61:10c says it well: “*For he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,*” (ESV) The best news is that He has put His Righteousness on us, His beloved family members and fellow soldiers of the cross. It can never be removed. Remember to simply stand wearing it by faith against all forces of wickedness. And they will come! If they haven’t much yet, get in the game!

“Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter...Truth is lacking...it displeased him that there was no justice... He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak....So they shall fear the name of the Lord...” (Excerpts from Isaiah 59: 14-19 ESV)

Let us pray today that we each would be mindful of His Breastplate of Righteousness freely given to us.

Day 116.

Armor Up! #4

It makes sense. The next pieces of God’s Armor that we must put on are:

Shoes for your Feet, having put on the Readiness given by the Gospel of Peace

At West Point, the United States Military Academy, we often wore rugged combat boots. Ah yes! If you’ve worn them in 90 degree humid weather while walking on a 12 mile forced march, **you know what I’m talking about!** Every so often, our gracious leaders would allow us to stop, take off those hot, sweaty boots, tend to our many blisters, and put on a clean pair of socks. Those of us who have done this will tell you: Your feet are everything to a soldier. If they go bad, your effectiveness on the battle field or in training goes way down.

In the days of the Apostle Paul, the Roman Soldier Clothing and Armament providers made sturdy, protective shoe sandals that had strong cleats or nails that would help their feet grip on rough terrain. Slipping led to losing and death.

If you are saved, you are a soldier. Stand on the Truth of Scripture by faith, not feelings, and **always be at the ready!** Like in the formative years of our great nation, farmers, shop keepers, and countrymen were called **Minutemen**. At a “moment’s” notice, they would grab their long rifle, powder, and shot and rush to the cry, **“The British are coming!”**

Likewise we Christian Minutemen and Minutewomen are to be 'at the ready' to share the gospel, tell our story, lend a helping hand, offer encouragement, offer a tract, etc....not in a pushy, bulldozing manner, but rather in a winsome, kind, manner. **Everyone is facing a battle**, thus, **everyone needs a cup of encouragement**. Give them one. Let us pray for each other today that we would be good Minutemen and Minutewomen.

Our Lord's mission is our mission: *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* (Luke 19:10 ESV)

Day 117.

Armor Up! #5

Take Up the Shield of Faith

This God-given trust is brought to the Christian Warrior who yearns for Him, seeks Him, desires to be with Him, and who cries out to Him. It is a faith not in one's own efforts. Rather, it is a humble confidence in who God is and what His Word declares true.

This armor piece is more important than the others for without it, resistance will be futile.

"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6 ESV)

The Roman shield was oblong and covered much of the body. The enemy would shoot literal flaming arrows often at the beginning of a battle to instill fear, confuse, and weaken resolve. Satan's fiery darts, if you've ever been on the receiving end, are real and they can do serious damage if you are not living by obedient faith in repentance and by appropriating the power of the Holy Spirit by faith.¹

As the Scripture says (v. 16), there is an evil one. He hates you and me because he hates Jesus and all things of God, Heaven, salvation, redemption, forgiveness, submission, obedience, love and faith.

Since you belong to Jesus (if you are not sure, go to: [Would You Like To Know God Personally?](#)), you are His Ambassador and His soldier. You represent Him here on earth. When the devil looks at you, he recoils in disgust.

You remind him of his eternal defeat. He is a first rate loser and you are not. You are to shine Jesus, His love, His redemption, His kindness, and His Gospel to a lost and darkening world. He knows Jesus wants to save, strengthen, encourage and disciple souls through you. That is why you must "put on" the whole Armor of God daily...hourly if needed. Let us pray this for each other right now.

¹ <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/holy-spirit-resource-kit.html>

Day 118.

Armor Up! #6

Next, you will want to:

Take the Helmet of Salvation

Those of us who have served in the Armed Forces know how important one's helmet is. To go into conflict without your helmet would be like scuba diving 100 feet below the surface with no air in your tank!

This really is the Lord's helmet that you are to wear. And Jesus is filled with hope! (1Thessalonians 5:8 ESV) says, "*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, **and for a helmet the hope of salvation.***" (**Bold** added)

*"The helmet of salvation protects against discouragement, against the desire to give up, giving us hope not only in knowing that we are saved, but that we will be saved. **It is the assurance that God will triumph.** One of Satan's most effective weapons against us is discouragement. When we are properly equipped with the helmet of salvation, it's hard to stay discouraged."*¹ (**Bold** added)

Let us pray for each other that our Lord's wonderful Helmet of Salvation is worn and securely fastened today.

¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Eph/Eph-6.cfm?a=1103001

Day 119.

Armor Up! #7

The final two pieces of God's Armor are:

The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God

Praying Always in the Spirit

This first piece, the Sword, is essential. I have actually had beloved people from apostate churches try to use the Word of God to shame me or call me names. Gee. Satan will misuse God's Word too. Hmmm.

The Lord will help us to use it. You need to be in the Word daily and under the Word via preaching and, hopefully, from being in mentoring relationships. Chew on the Word. Love the Word. Eat the Word as if it is honeycomb.

Luke 11:28 ESV says, *“But he (Jesus) said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.’”*

Jesus is not only the Son of God, He is the Living Word of God. (John 1:1) The Word of God, like Jesus never had a beginning. He, the Living Word, is eternal. Using the Word takes practice like in fencing. Couch it in mercy and kindness but use it none the less.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2Timothy 3:16 ESV)

Now the second and final piece of prayer is vital. It is through prayer that spiritual strength and God’s full Armor go to work. Prayer is ongoing communion with God. It is in the joy, comfort, and sometimes agony of being in His presence that Prayer is born. Prayer is that faith action that unleashes God’s power to act in time of need.

Nothing of eternal consequence happens apart from prayer. Just pray.

[Prevailing Prayer](#)

[The Praying Believer](#)

[126 Daily Devotionals](#)

Day 120

Isaiah 9:6 (part 1) (All ESV)

“For unto us a Child is born,” Our Messiah sent from Heaven could have come as a full grown man. Theoretically, He could have arrived in a palace. Yet, our Heavenly Father approaches life, redemption, and eternity differently than us. Immanuel (God with us) was given to us by His Heavenly Father. *“For God so loved the world, that **he** gave...”* (John 3:16a - **bold** added) This innocent, helpless baby was the Promised, Anointed One who would take away the sin of the world.

The beautiful Child was born for us. He was given unto us...rotten sinners already sentenced to hell. We did not deserve Him. We still don’t. But Our Heaven Father so loved and continues to love us without limit or condition.

“that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16c) Think of it! We who humbly turn from our wicked path and love of self and gladly welcome (receive) the Lord Jesus as our Redeemer, Savior, Messiah, and Lord by faith will be forgiven and saved from that hideous hell. We will immediately be given eternal life both now on earth and eventually continuing in Heaven. Let us pray for each other today that we would humbly receive and love this precious Child born for us in a manger in an obscure town known as Bethlehem.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-9.cfm?a=688006

Day 121

Isaiah 9:6 (part 2)

“unto us a Son is given;” The Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has always existed. Jesus: God, the Son, was a son prior to becoming a Son on earth. When God, the Son, Immanuel, took on human form, he became both God and man. This way He could relate to us and this way He could become the once and for all time sinless sacrifice to pay the debt we owed due to our sins.

Jesus became *“one person with two distinct natures, functioning together in perfect harmony.”* (Guzik)

He is fully man, thus he can be a substitute for the punishment we so well deserve. He is fully God, thus His sacrifice is not only sufficient but eternally effective. Aren't you thankful that our amazing God thought of everything to secure our salvation? Oh that men, women, and children all around the world would come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His mighty, finished work on the Cross!

Let us rejoice, *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”* (Isaiah 7:14) Let's pray many would behold and receive Him.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-9.cfm?a=688006

Day 122

Isaiah 9:6 (part 3)

“And the government will be upon His shoulder,” Jesus will not be the present ruler of the governments of the earth until the Millennial Kingdom. However, this is quite true concerning the governance of our heart. *“So, indeed, the government is alive and working. Often silently, mostly unseen. We can be and are, by choice, governed by God. Hope and joy and peace and rest cover its subjects. Justice, mercy, and grace, amazingly coexist. I like this kingdom. The borders are open. Come on in.”* (Guzik)

If you know of someone who needs Jesus to rule their heart, send them this link.

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

Merriam-Webster says **Governance** is the “*lawful control over the affairs of a political unit as in a nation.*” Biblically we add the governance of the soul. Who has **lawful control** or governance over your soul and, thus, your will today? Let us pray that each of us would yield by faith to the Spirit of Jesus this day and every day.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-9.cfm?a=688006

Day 123

Isaiah 9:6 (part 4)

“and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor,” Oh how wonderful a Savior and Shepherd He is! Have you ever spent time with Jesus in presence, thought, meditation, or prayer? In my mind, I sometimes practice His presence by either sitting at His feet or crawling up on His lap and just let Him hold me and have the things that trouble me. Some of these struggles are like a duck nibbling at your ankles. Others, quite honestly, are like the shark from the **JAWS** movie coming fast in for a surprise attack. Can you hear the music?

Life is difficult. I heard one person describe each of us as “*bleeding somewhere*”...not literally but hemorrhaging things like hope, energy, joy, and peace, due to feelings of failure, inadequacy, stress, finances, relationships, or sin battles.

Oh how we must remember to run to Him! He is a great Shepherd Counselor and Wonderful is His Name! Let’s pray for each other today to stop right now and run to Jesus. Spend a few moments just with Him. *“He will fill your heart with amazement!”* (Guzik)

Remember this as we pray for each other, “*to counsel with him is to have sweet counsel, hearty counsel, and wise counsel, all at the same time.*” (Spurgeon)

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-9.cfm?a=688006

Day 124

Isaiah 9:6 (part 5)

His name will be called, *“Mighty God”*. What great comfort this is to us, the children of God! Messiah is the Almighty God of the Bible, the Self-Existent One, the God of all creation and glory... *“the LORD who reigns in Heaven, the One worthy of our worship and praise.”* (Guzik) The shepherds and wise men came to see this seemingly helpless baby in a manger. This baby was and is the Creator of all things! He was and is the Savior!

Revelation 1:8 says, *“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’, says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”* If our Messiah – Immanuel – Mighty *“God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31b) The answer, friend, is no one. Yes, there are enemies and there is the devil, but we are safely hid in Christ.

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.” (Proverbs 18:10) *“The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.”* (Proverbs 29:25)

“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God (it is God who) protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.” (1John 5:18 + “it is God who” I added for clarity)

Friend, if you need Jesus, the Messiah, Mighty God to help you, just ask Him. It is what He does. Let us pray for each other today that we would run to Him and find our **strong tower** of safety and refuge. All we really need is Jesus.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-9.cfm?a=688006

Day 125

Isaiah 9:6 (part 6)

The Messiah is the *“Everlasting Father”*. Some of you never knew your earthly dad. Some of you may wish you had not known your dad. Others are grateful for your dad. The one thing our earthly fathers have in common is that they each are or were fallen men. The second truth is that they are only temporarily with us on earth.

The big difference with our Messiah, Jesus, of Nazareth, is that He is not fallen. He is sinless and perfect. The second difference is that He is God and is eternal. He loves with not only a pure love. He loves and keeps you with an everlasting love. The Hebrew word for this is *“hesed”* or *“chesed”*...both are used. It is a remarkable word which means the love from our Everlasting Father is unconditional, steadfast, unwavering, loyal, and never ending. You, son or daughter of

God are the apple of His eye. He longs for you to be close to Him. He simply adores you and His favor and uncondemnable excitement over you will never tarnish or wane.

You are now the glad recipient of His eternal kindness and assured parenting. He is the “*source or author of all eternity...He is the Creator Himself. It does not mean that Jesus Himself is the Person of the Father in the Trinity.*” All things were created through Him. He is God the Son and in this wondrous mystery of the Trinity, He is Everlasting Father. I confess, my limited imperfect mind does not fully grasp all of this. Let us pray today we would find great comfort in that everything about our Messiah is good and everlasting. He will never change.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-9.cfm?a=688006

Day 126

Isaiah 9:6 (part 7)

Finally, our Messiah is the “*Prince of Peace.*” Jesus is the One “*who makes peace between God and man... The Prince of Peace: It is easy for him quickly to allay all our uneasy feelings. This will these titles (parts 1-7) confirm us more and more in the faith of Christ, and fortify us against Satan and against hell itself.*” (Calvin)

Who do you run to when you are troubled? Who comforts you when you are worried, fed up, or fearful? I confess in my lifetime, there have been many instances when instead of running to Jesus, my Safety, I ran to lesser gods, cheap substitutes, and things of rotten impurity. As you have also found out, these other comforts neither last nor satisfy.

Sin often is like that toasty marshmallow on a stick at Campfire’s edge. Oh it goes in the mouth warm and sweet but as it is gluttonously swallowed, its true nature is unveiled. It becomes the white, hot, searing coal it was meant to be burning and scorching the throat of our soul as it goes down producing anguish, despair, shame, and death.

Let us pray for each other that we would run only, continually, and always to Jesus, our true and lasting **Prince of Peace.**¹

¹https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Isa/Isa-9.cfm?a=688006

Day 127

Wisdom #1

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” (James 3: 13 ESV)

There was a time in my life when I craved the notice and affirmation of others. Bluntly put, the first 12 years of my Christian life, from age 18 to 30, I was a complete people-pleasing suck up!

I thought I was pretty smart and I wanted others to reward me and praise me because of it. Boy, was I full of baloney! I was a very carnal, worldly Christian. Yet, Jesus was on the back burner of my life. Me, myself, and I were on the front burners!

Meekness and I had nothing in common. I was proud and shallow at the same time. Meekness is humble, gentle, and deep. Biblical meekness “endures injury and suffering with patience and without resentment” (from **Kingdom Living Here and Now** by John McArthur).

Meekness does not seek for self. It seeks for the benefit of others both for their temporal needs and their eternal destinies. *“Those who do their good works in a way designed to bring attention to themselves show they lack true wisdom.”*¹

Let us pray for each other that God would help each of us to consciously live today in meekness of wisdom.

¹https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Jam/Jam-3.cfm?a=1149013

Day 128.

Wisdom #2

“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.” (James 3:14 ESV)

Notice that this **jealousy** and this **ambition** are not just your everyday types. No! They are of the worst kind: **Bitter** and **selfish**. This is when my flesh is choosing to sit on the throne of my heart. I assure you, I have sat there many times in my life and the wages of these sins has been death. What a waste of time!

The Spirit of Jesus who purchased all children of God from the beginning has the sole right to rule their hearts. He, alone, has won the right to sit on this **heart-throne**. We must surrender to His wonderful Lordship each moment of each day. Most of you know what I’m talking about.

You and I know it is a battle and we will be struggling with it until the Lord calls us home. Jealousy and ambition in the flesh are wicked instruments that not only hurt ourselves but work at ruining others in our sphere of influence. Apart from Christ’s rule and influence, they become the normal way of dealing with life and people.

These two evils need to be recognized if they show their ugly heads. They need to be repented from. And the Lord’s Spirit within needs to be humbly and thankfully welcomed back to ruling our wayward heart. This is godly wisdom. Let’s pray for each other regarding this.

Day 129.

Wisdom #3

“This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” (James 3:15-16 ESV)

“...for the tree is known by its fruit.” (Matthew 12:33c ESV)

Have you ever eaten a bland peach or a rotten, wormy apple? Tragically and dangerously, there are people who may look and sound good on the outside, but after being with them or under their influence for a season, God reveals to you something is not right. You discover there is something unbiblical, dark, and prideful about their countenance or their words. You find out that the fruit born from their life is not God-honoring.

Pride is often wrapped in a kind, false humility. Our flesh craves it. The devil feeds it. Jesus came to crucify it. *“No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”* (2Corinthians 11:14)

We must stay close to the Master, Jesus! We must cling to His Word. We must avoid isolation. We need to seek God’s wisdom and settle for nothing else. We dare not believe our press reports. We all are weak here. Let us pray that God will help us be wise in our weakness instead of being foolish in our weakness.

Day 130.

Wisdom #4

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason....” (James 3:17a ESV)

*“The character of this wisdom is **wonderful**. It is **full of love** and a **giving heart**, consistent with the holiness of God.”¹ (**Boldness** added)*

This Holy Spirit inspired and given wisdom is first **pure**. This not referring to sexual purity but to *“the absence of any sinful attitude or motive.”* (Burdick) It refers to a singularity of passion and devotion to the exclusion of all other tempting competitors.

“Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.”
(Psalm 86:11 ESV) I believe the idea here is this: *“Oh God! Give me an undivided heart that beats only for you or I will be doomed and destined to succumb to my self-focus and pride!”*

Let's pray for each other today that God gives each of us a deep hunger for His Word, His Presence, His, Will, and **His Wisdom**.

Finally, I remember a few gentle, approachable people from my life and past that I loved being near. Peace and optimism just seemed to exude from them. They were like a warm fireplace with embers glowing in a cozy ski lodge. When with them, you remember them and how you felt while near them. A good cup of hot cocoa with marshmallows also does not hurt. Let's pray God would grant us this wisdom today.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Jam/Jam-3.cfm?a=1149016

Day 131.

Wisdom #5

“But the wisdom from above is... full of mercy...” (James 3:17b ESV)

Mercy is withholding that which is due. You deserve Hell. I deserve Hell. Jesus loved us so much that He took our Hell-deserving sin and guilt and freely gave us Heaven and guiltlessness in exchange! We who deserve to be unforgiven, flogged, crucified, and damned received and will forever receive, as Believers in Christ, (John 1:12-13) just the opposite in all cases!

Mercy means you will not judge another from a condemning, hypocritical, *“I'm holier than thou!”* spirit. Mercy, however, does not equate to **license**: (Do whatever you want and think whatever you wish for God has you covered.) No, mercy, under the power of the Spirit of Jesus, will send a clear message offered to all who will repent and call upon Him and receive Him as Lord and Savior. (Joel 2:32) Others will see Christ in you. They may receive or reject. That is between them and God. That's not on you. (Matthew 7:2)

As a biblical mentor for many years, I will tell you that sometimes I had to tenderly share with people that what they were up to was sin, wrong, and offensive to God and destructive to others as pointed out in His Word. Sharing truth is love if done in kindness and humility.

In a sense, warning another soul of impending doom, like *“The bridge is out just over the hill!”*, is merciful in that you are helping that person to avoid reaping what they are presently sowing. Sadly, I’ve had some people storm out of my office in an angry huff. I grieve so much over those but, in the end, I trust I represented the Lord as best I could.

Day 132.

Wisdom #6

“But the wisdom from above is...full of... good fruits, ...” (James 3:17c ESV)

Have you ever seen or bitten into bad fruit? I have. I think my least favorite also reminds me of my most favorite fruit memory. I bit into a peach bought at the store one time. It was bland, blah, mushy and tasteless. I threw it away immediately!

On the other end of the experience spectrum, Barbara and I were at a Farmer’s Market in in Estes Park, in the mountains of Colorado. She bought us each a tree ripened Mountain Lion Colorado Peach. Wow! The flavor, the juices, and even the texture was the tastiest, most succulent fruit we’ve ever tasted! If Heaven has peaches, this one would come close!

The only fruit that is good and lasting in this world is the fruit that is produced in us Christians by the Spirit of Jesus as we yield to Him, and walk repentantly and humbly before Him. His savory grace, mercy, and wisdom will come through to message Him to the lost, the needy, and the lonely.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23 ESV)

So let us pray for each other today that He would grant us this **wisdom** which is full of **good fruits** that will help others and increase Heaven.

Day 133.

Wisdom #7

“But the wisdom from above is...impartial and sincere.” (James 3:17d ESV)

Sadly, this week you will no doubt see someone in person or, for sure, on TV or in a movie that is both partial and insincere. I might even look in a mirror...

This evil of the flesh has unfortunately filtered into politics, business, the arts, education, the judiciary, and even some of our churches.

Impartial means *“unwavering, unbiased, unprejudiced, neutral, nonpartisan, and nondiscriminatory...treating all rivals or disputants equally; fair and just.”*¹

The Lord Jesus is our example. We Christians want to exemplify Him and His character and wisdom to this lost, wicked, and dying world. Our love for Jesus will often be met with disdain, rejection, marginalization, and even suffering. There will be those who respond humbly with grateful hearts.

These thirsty souls will catch a glimpse of The King of Wisdom through you. However, expect the majority to hurt or hit back in some measure or by some means. **This is the way of the Cross.**

Sincere here means *“without hypocrisy, unfeigned, undisguised, without dissimulation (genuine)”*² I don't know about you, but there have been many times, even as a Christian, where, in my flesh, I was pretty much the opposite of these. Can anyone relate? **Anyone?** No Masks!

The only **Hope** we have is Jesus and as His Spirit lives within us, Oh Believer, we are to forget about ourselves more and let Him have His way in us and through us. This is **Wisdom**. Let's pray for each other right now that we'd deny ourselves, live for Christ, and be His blessing to the world.

¹https://www.google.com/search?q=impartial&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS846US846&oq=impartial&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l7.10906j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

²<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G505&t=ESV>

Day 134

Be Christ's Disciple: Put Christ First

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33 ESV)

A Christian disciple is much more than one who is saved, sins forgiven, and the glad recipient of eternal life. A disciple is one who has counted the cost. A disciple is a born again person who has made the difficult commitment to follow the Lord Jesus and be a student learner no matter the consequences.

Only about 2% of Christians are regularly mentoring others one on one, two on two, or in a small group as an outpouring function of their church.

Choosing to become one of the Lord's disciples or intimate followers is perhaps the most painful thing a person can do. It certainly was for me! For many years, as a Christian, I wanted the benefits of being saved like having fellowship, knowing that God loves me and forgives me, and experiencing the fact that I'm going to Heaven for sure someday. **Who wouldn't want these?**

The problem with me was I wanted the things of this world as well. I wanted people's approval. I wanted the perks of this world. I wanted respect. I craved it. When these worldly pursuits left me hollow and empty inside, I would periodically try to fill that void with sin...impure and simple.

Yes, once I repented and stopped being a **disciple of worldly pursuits**, and became a broken, growing follower of Jesus. I stopped caring what others thought. I was filled with a new sense of joy and purpose. I was free!

But the broken, miserable years leading up to that decision (12 years into my Christian faith) were some of the most painful and gut-wrenching I've ever experienced. The process of dying to myself, my dreams, my wants, and my desires was, at first, sickening to me. Could becoming a Christ-disciple / follower actually be satisfying and a worthy pursuit? **The big answer is YES!**

Most of the time, you will need to experience the painful tearing off of old, pride-originating and pride-producing sinful pursuits: **Self-Promotion, Self-Protection and Materialism**. This is tougher than you think!

Then you are free to embrace Jesus, and enter His School of Discipleship...His Way, not yours.¹

Let's pray this for each other.

"And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" (Luke 9:23 ESV)

¹Some ideas taken from **Design for Discipleship** – Navigators (This applies to this and the next 6 devotionals)

Day 135

Be Christ's Disciple: Separate from the World

"¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world." (1John 2:15-16 ESV)

"'Be in the world but not of the world.' The words are from Jesus. But I have not the slightest idea how to accomplish that or even if it's possible. The world will always poke you in the chest with its index finger." (Francisco X. Stork – Marcelo in the Real World)

This is impossible! Yes, it is, but, with the help and strength of the Spirit of Jesus living in you, He makes it possible. **However, it takes a lifetime to complete.**

Are you willing to endure regular doses of hate, rejection, and possibly even suffering and harm? This is the cost of following Jesus at all cost.

"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:19 ESV)

Prepare yourself. Ask God to give you a tender, but very tough heart. **You will need it. It will be worth it!**¹

Let's ask Him to transform each of us into His image for His glory and the increase of Heaven.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2 ESV)

¹[Meditate on Ephesians 6:10-18.](#)

Day 136

Be Christ's Disciple: *Be Steadfast*

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1Corinthians 15:58 ESV)

No one is perfectly steadfast except Jesus. However, may this be our goal as we press into Him and abide in His presence moment by moment.

I confess I have considered 'tossing in the towel' at least 3 times. Being a full time missionary for going on 40 years has been both a privilege and a battle. The wicked one, the devil, has fought us tooth and nail over the years. He hates:

1. Anything that tries to glorify and honor God.
2. Anyone who teaches all of God's Word, the Bible, is **all** of God's Word.
3. Biblical marriage and what it models to the world.
4. All who are trying to follow the Lord Jesus with their whole heart.

His spiritual bullets are quite real. I've been lied to, slandered, betrayed, accused of heinous sins, called the worst of names, and the list goes on. Most of the attacks against me have come from Christians in the church and on the mission field. **PTSD, Depression, and Battle Fatigue** are real. Make no mistake about that!

I'm just saying, that staying on the front lines of spiritual battle takes its toll. There is a price to pay. Perhaps many of you know of such dark times in the grit and misery of Spiritual warfare.

Many Christians through the centuries have endured these and much worse. Barbara and I are reading a book on Martyrs of the faith. In reality, I have nothing to complain about. Their stories of **remaining steadfast** until the end are truly inspiring!

Thank God He has not allowed me to quit. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. As He leads, He protects and provides. Let's pray for each other that He would continue to enable us to **be steadfast** for Him.

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." (Hebrews 12:3 ESV)

[The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#)

[40 Day Journey with Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#)

Day 137

Be Christ's Disciple: Serve Others

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45 ESV)

"You will know you are a servant when people start treating you like one." Perhaps this is why servanthood, though sounding popular, is not all that sought after. Have you ever been treated like a servant?

There are times, if we are honest, when serving in the church or on the mission field, or helping a friend or family member, we'd kind of like to **get some thanks and notice**. There is nothing wrong with giving or receiving appreciation, but this should never be allowed to bake in the oven of our minds for more than it takes to expel this contemptable temptation.

Have you ever had someone, say, in church, or during a retreat, humbly wash your feet? Have you ever washed someone else's feet? I have. It is humbling and a tad embarrassing on both sides of the equation. When I'm tired, fending off a headache or aching muscles, or just plain weary of the daily grind, the last thing I want is to serve another selflessly.

During some of those times, I rather be served or just left alone. Have you ever entered your kitchen only to find dirty dishes in the sink waiting to be washed? Enough said.

Christianity, and God's overarching message of **redemption**, are messaged to the world by Jesus followers with servant's hearts, approachable hearts, and humble hearts. People catch a glimpse of Jesus when the Christian refuses to run from service. Others are blessed when the Christian chooses to serve quietly, looking for no fanfare or limelight. Jesus came to serve. He always does. Let's pray He would help us to do likewise today.

"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (2Corinthians 4:5)

Day 138

Be Christ's Disciple: *Give generously*

*⁹ **Honor** the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
¹⁰ **then** your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*"
(Proverbs 3:9-10 ESV **Bold** added)

At the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, our math instructors drilled into us the importance of the "=" sign. The idea is this: **If** 3 + 5 is added, **then** you get 8. (3+5 = 8) In other words, the left side will / should equal the right side. **If** you are grateful for what God has done for you and you revere Him and hold Him in the highest trust and esteem, **then** He will receive your **obedience**. For you to give Him otherwise would dishonor Him and slap Him in the face!

If you are thankful to the Lord Jesus for dying on the Cross and paying the eternal debt for your sins and giving you unconditional forgiveness and eternal life, you will want to obey Him by honoring Him, and thus upholding His Word.

God loves a cheerful, honoring, private, and **generous** giver. Here is the math: Was He generous toward you? (John 3:16) If so, be the same back to Him. If you receive less money and provision this month, choose to give Him more. Go ahead! Test Him in this! (Malachi 3:10)

Let's pray for each other that we each honor God by being generous givers.

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2Corinthians 9:6-7 ESV)

Day 139

Be Christ's Disciple: *Develop World Vision*

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8 ESV)

Whether it is the Fast Food 'drive thru' employee passing you your burgers or the entire world (7.6+ Billion souls), **Jesus' passion is for the lost**. If you do not yet have an aching burden to see lost souls reached, saved, and discipled by the Spirit of Jesus, then please get alone with God and beg Him for lost souls.

Ask Him to well up within you an **overflowing passion** for the hearts of men, women, and children. Seek and ask Him to burn into you a **relentless burden** to see none perish in the endless fires of Hell. (2Peter 3:9)

Luke 19:10 says, “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*” (ESV) Now Jesus came here for many reasons (Read Psalm 146), but one is paramount. If the multitudes are warmed, sheltered, medicated, and fed and redemption through Christ’s shed blood on the Cross is **not shared and achieved**, how will this increase Heaven?

Great ministries help with these noble causes. Their work is vital. Yet, as important as these are, the work of salvation and spiritual growth must be centered in their operational DNA.

If someone cuts me, I want **passion for lost souls** to flow out. Just like it did and still does for Jesus.

Let’s pray this for each other today.

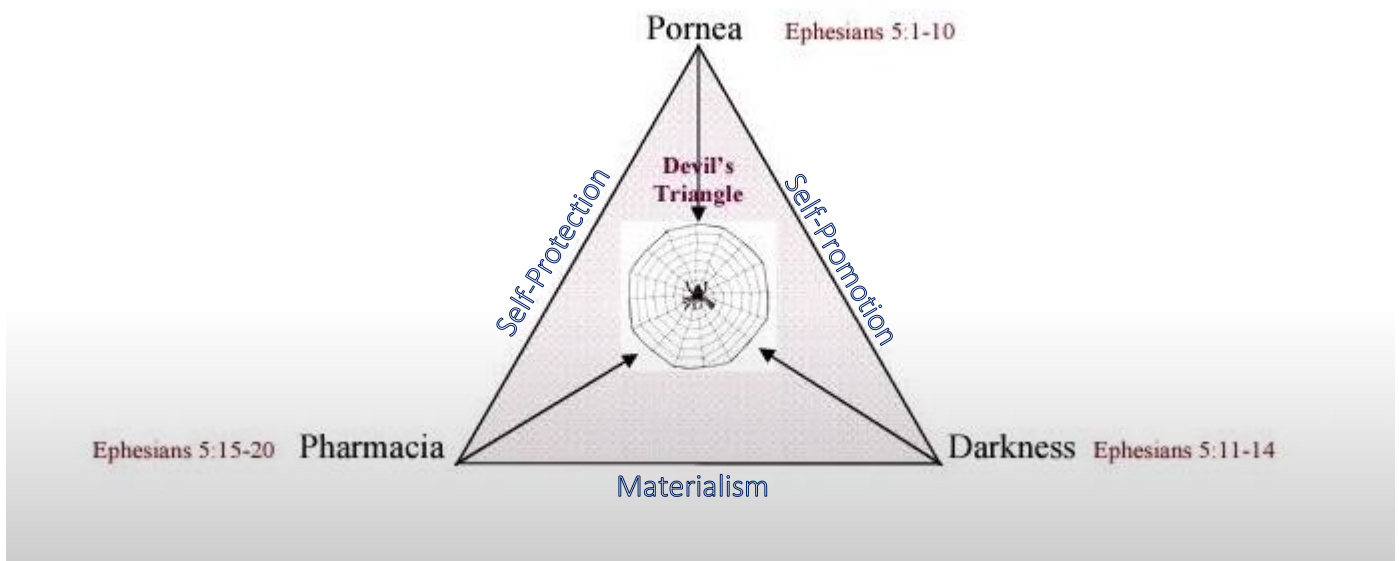
“¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20 ESV)

Day 140

Be Christ's Disciple: *Be accountable*

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1Peter 5:8 ESV)

From almost 40 years of ministry, I've learned an important principle regarding following Jesus and being His disciple. *"Godly wisdom is learning to trust yourself less and less each day and learning to entrust yourself to your mate, if married, and to 1 or 2 good people of the same gender."*



The above **Devil's Triangle** is a simplified strategy the Wicked One uses. Think of the inside of the triangle as one of those 'Catch a Mouse Sticky Traps' you put on the floor. Getting you hooked, stuck, or tempted to be drawn in via one angle or side is good. Yes! But he is crafty and often will employ several angles or sides to get you ensnared in deep bondage. He wants you in the middle of the trap. **He wants you ruined and dead.**

I have voluntarily been in a **Foxhole Buddy** relationship since 1988 not because I'm super great and holy. It is because I am profoundly weak and I don't trust myself. I want to be wise in my weakness, not foolish in my weakness. I'm in my 3rd Buddy relationship now. Seth, married, and a father of 4, and I have either met in a restaurant or called weekly for 6 years. **We've got each other's back.** The 4 pillar verses we uphold in confidence are:

James 5:16

Hebrews 3:13

Galatians 6:2

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

If you are not in a grace-based, encouraging, accountable, and confidential same-gender relationship where you look out for each other's Christian walk, thought life, marriage, priorities, fatigue levels, etc., then you are like the tied up goat in the first **Jurassic Park** movie: **Lunch!**

Let's pray that each of us would get and keep a **Foxhole Buddy** for the honor of God and the protection of our witness for the Lord Jesus.

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

Day 141

Hope in the Hidden Places

I went for a walk in a mature pine forest near Wisconsin Dells. It was a beautiful summer morning. The sky was blue, the sun up, and the stillness amongst the tall pines was dripping with calm. I found a nice tree and I sat down on the thick, soft bed of pine needles that had gathered by the base. I took in a deep breath of the pine scented air. I looked up. There, high up in one of the trees about 100 feet away, was a large red-headed woodpecker pecking his best trying to get a bug breakfast from under the bark.

I don't think I've ever experienced such quiet and peace. No other sound filled the air except for this beautiful bird and the muffled, hollow sound of pecking.

I've told a few people this. I feel closest to God when I'm in a pine forest. The distractions of life are, for a moment, gone. I can just focus on God. His presence is real and so comforting. The pine forest is a hiding place for me and for the Lord. I long for it as I write. Let's pray for each other today that we would find Him in the hidden places.

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

Day 142

Seek Him When the Ducks Are Nibbling

I went to an animal petting farm with our family when the kids were young. If you've not been to one, the experience is memorable. I loved holding the little chicks and petting the sheep, goats, and cows. At the same time, I was looking for that alcohol hand sanitizer!

As I was slowly meandering through the barnyard, suddenly a quick moving brood of ducklings ran up to my feet and began nibbling ferociously at my ankles. They were precious little things and they were persistent.

My thoughts immediately transferred to these little ducklings and their incessant nibbling. Wherever I went, they followed. My ankles knew no relief.

I have found that many days of my life have been like that. Priorities and urgencies, some small, some big, finding their way to my heart and soul nibbling away at my joy and attempting to distance me from fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Here in lies the danger.

I am, with great difficulty, learning to seek the Lord Jesus when seeking Him does not fit into my crazy, impulsive schedule or “To Do” list. You see, the way I’m wired, I’m a Doer... a “Get er done!” kind of guy. Most of you (including the ladies) are as well, no doubt. When I can cross stuff off my pressing list of things I “gotta do today!”, I feel some temporary relief and my anxiety is reduced. Much of my life is about anxiety reduction. I seldom volunteer to do things. Why? Well, first, I learned in the Army... Ha! Second, if I take on new tasks, my anxiety thermometer just goes up and up.

I have to choose to seek Him. Putting other tasks on hold and then choose to seek and spend time with God and His Word tends to produce anxiety. Why? My flesh, when Jesus is not ruling my heart, wants ANXIETY REDUCTION!

I realize I must choose to seek Him no matter what. He, not getting things done, is my life. Let’s pray that we each would center in on this today.

“Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,” (Psalm 119:2 ESV)

Day 143

Stay Your Thoughts on Him

Have you ever pondered a thought with intentionality? Have you studied something to the point that others wondered when “you’d come up for air”? I’m not too good at meditating. My mind tends to travel so fast I feel like a jack rabbit running on a hot bed of coals.

I’ve seen people in art museums, real art lovers, standing in front of some painting staring and pondering for minutes at a time. I often wonder what they are so enamored with. I think they are pondering, studying, and feeling deeply. Perhaps their very soul is moved.

I get that way sometimes when I listen to well written, well-orchestrated, and well performed symphonic music. I am moved deeply, stirred wonderfully, and with eyes closed, I envision some wondrous scene that reflects what I’m hearing and feeling.

I think Psalmists understood this in relating to Almighty God and His Scriptures. They loved all of God; His essence, His character, and His Word. They meditated upon Jehovah and His wondrous

cheched (Hebrew) unfailing, unconditional, and never ending love for His people (His children). Let's pray for each other that we'd learn to do likewise today.

"We have thought (meditated NIV) on your steadfast love (cheched), O God, in the midst of your temple." (Psalm 48:9 ESV)

Day 144

Choose the Narrow Path

Have you ever gone hiking? If you've been in the military like many of us, you've gone on many fun and exciting hikes. Hm!

Seemingly, the best way to hike is to find the smoothest, widest, path...one that was made or repaved recently. Ah yes! Easy, wide, smooth. My self-centered nature prefers that path which gives me what 'I want'!

If you have been a lover and follower of Christ for a certain period of time, His Spirit will lead you to a life changing option. Some call it a **Turning Point**. He will invite or summon you to take the road less traveled. He will say to you something like, "Turn. Come this way. Follow Me over here." When I was 30, He brought me to this brokenness. I had been leaning my ladder against the wrong wall of success.

The path to worldly delights and applause is well lit and extremely attractive. Enticing!

Like me, many of you have been on this destructive path. Its Pain: Too deep to describe.

Jesus rescues His truly beloved, His Own Children. The Good Shepherd goes after His sheep.

Let's pray He would pull us toward the good path.

"This says the Lord: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16a.b.c. ESV)

Jesus said, *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* (Matthew 7:13-14 ESV)

Day 145

Trust Him When Your Life Screams Not To

At least once in your life, you will be brought to the end of your rope. You will wonder where God is. You will doubt if He is really for you. You will question if He is working on your behalf. I confess during my first wife's 7 year battle with terminal cancer (diagnosed at age 33 with 4 children), I experienced the full misery of what seemed like God abandoning me.

The chemotherapy, the emotional struggles she and we all of had, the incessant uncertainties of this wretched disease and the humiliating, distancing it causes in marriage brought me, the exhausted care giver, to my knees.

I can't even watch a cancer commercial on TV. I drove to a lonely park one day near the end and cried out to God that I felt abandoned by Him. I knew His character and His Word stated otherwise. That's a defining term, "**otherwise**".

Either I was going to walk in anger and despair and listen to what my life was screaming at me, **or** I was going to love and obey God by trusting that He was a God of His Word. By God's grace, accountability, and lots of tears and prayer, I chose the latter. I'm glad I did.

Maybe you've been in the dark of life. You may be there today.

Let us pray for each other that we would choose to put our hope and trust in Him and His Word which is eternally true.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV)

Day 146

Learn From the Geranium

My wife, Barbara, loves flowers and gardening. I like them too, but I don't like planting, weeding, or watering them. Basically I have a brown thumb.

On the front step she has a nice, red, potted geranium plant. It is really beautiful. If you were to water it, wait for 2 or 3 days, then gently pull the plant out of the dirt, chances are much of the dirt formed by the pot would come up and out with the plant.

The reason is that the God-designed, beautiful plant has been drawing its very life from the dirt. Simply put, the roots have been clinging to the soil.

I think our relationship with Jesus is to be like this. We are to spend much time with Him, reading and studying His Word, and praying to and fellowshiping with Him pretty much as a way of life.

The roots not clinging to the soil, when pulled up will easily become disengaged from the soil. This is never to be the life of a follower (disciple) of Christ. Let's pray for each other today that we would cling to, remain, or abide in the Lord and His Word. There is just no other way.

"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)

Day 147

Rest by the Quiet Waters

Imagine you are far from the din of city noise or people interacting. You are sitting down on thick soft grass under a restful shade tree. A gentle stream is quietly flowing next to you about 8 feet away. There is a whisper of a breeze and it's around 70 degrees F.

You are aware that you are not alone but that Jesus is with you sitting 5 feet away. He just wants to be with you, just you. What are you feeling? What are you thinking?

Is it possible He just wants you to want to be with Him near these quiet, peaceful waters under this protective, shade tree? Not only do I think it possible, I believe it is most probable. He loves you and me. He so badly wants us to be caught up in closeness and fellowship with Him.

If you haven't been with Him in a while, find a place away from the din and just "be with Him". If what was on your mind was needing to be by a new washcloth, He, I'm convinced, would be thoroughly interested in this endeavor. Remember: He is humble and lowly in spirit, approachable, kind, and wholeheartedly for you. He is your Best Friend.

Let's pray that each of us would meet with Him this very day.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul." (Psalm 23:1-3a ESV)

Day 148

The Scent of Sacrifice

Autumn is upon us. We were watching our wonderful church service on line. Covid-19 has changed our lives at least until most people are vaccinated. On line church is not the same as being in person experiencing fellowship, hugs, handshakes, smiles, and a nice cup of coffee. Our church, like many worldwide, is doing its best to adjust to this new world.

Yesterday was Sunday. We found out that it was a Communion Service. We normally don't have wine in the house, but we had a small bit of red wine. Barbara got each of us a wheat thin for the bread and poured each of us about a half inch of wine in a glass.

Something very gentle and meaningful happened during the few minutes before our pastor shared the elements. I was about 3 feet away from the wine. Softly, subtly, I began to catch the sweat fragrance, the undeniable scent of the wine. It had been years since I had any wine and the sweet fragrance struck me.

In making wine, first the grapes must be crushed. In like manner, our Lord suffered on the cross. This simple wine or juice we drink representing the precious shed blood of our Savior touched my heart in a very special, thankful way. He shed His blood and died for me. He did also for you.

"Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." (John 12:3 ESV)

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere." (2 Corinthians 2:14 ESV)

"But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:26b ESV)

Day 149

Good Will is God's Way

The Apostle Paul said, *"15 Some preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from **good will**. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here (in prison) for the defense of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:15-16 ESV **Bold** added)

I had to ask myself this morning, *"Am I a man of good will or do I internally harbor less excellent motives at times?"* I think you know the answer.

Good will is defined as “kindly intent; benevolence”. On the night our Savior, Jesus, was born in Bethlehem, the angels appeared to the low cast shepherds considered the dregs of society back then.

And suddenly the angels appeared and said, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, **good will** toward men.*” (Luke 2:14 KJV **Bold** added)

In verse 10-11 of Luke 2, he writes, “*10 And the Angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you **good tidings** of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*” (KJV **Bold** added)

‘Good or glad tidings’ literally means “...*they preached the gospel to these shepherds, who were regarded as social outcasts.*” (David Guzik Commentary www.blueletterbible.org)

God’s way is clearly mercy, grace, underserved kindness, and His provision-gift of His only Son...all of which are His **good will** toward us.

Let us pray for each other today that not only would we be messenger-ambassadors for these glad Gospel tidings but that we also would be men and women of His **good will** toward all we meet both in person, on the phone, and digitally.

Be blessed by this incredible song
[PENTATONIX] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJsC0Xr7lq8>

Day 150

Prepare and Straighten

‘2 As is it written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will **prepare** your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘**Prepare** the way of the Lord, make his paths **straight**.” (Mark 1:2-3 ESV **Bold** added)

John, the Baptizer, was a true prophet of God who was prophesied about in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 hundreds of years before John or Jesus.

When was the last time you were asked to prepare or straighten anything? I remember preparing for exams in school and preparing for the Obstacle Course at West Point which, to this day, still gives me the shudders!

As a cadet, we had to straighten our rooms on a daily basis. Friday nights we had to really prepare and straighten our beds, uniforms, desks, laundry hampers, shoes, and our socks and underwear drawers.

Why? Saturday Morning Room Inspection (draws open and staggered) and, later, in ranks inspection zeroing in on the details of our uniforms, haircuts, shaves, rifles, etc. And then we marched in a parade! Of course, we often had classes on Saturday morning as well. Saturday mornings were so much fun...

In this scripture passage, The Prophet-Messenger John, the Baptizer, is said to be one who is “*crying*”. This does not mean weeping but, rather, it means “*to raise a cry, speak with a high strong voice, to implore, to shout out in a tempestuous way.*” (David Guzik Commentary www.blueletterbible.org)

In other words, you most likely could have heard him from a distance. During summer training at the Academy, we learned how to shout out loud commands as if we were addressing a great gathering of troops. John was announcing with great volume and vigor that the Lord Messiah, the Christ, was here!

My clear sense is that he was declaring in a rather commanding voice, “*He is coming! Turn from yourselves, your fruitless wickedness! Become lowly and humble! Prepare your wondering heart. Straighten your priorities! Get right in your relationships! Your Redeemer is here!*”

Let’s pray for each other that God would help each of us repent (turn from self – and turn to Christ), prepare, and straighten our hearts and lives so the Spirit of Jesus may have His way with us.

Day 151

To The Other Side

“*And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*” (Mark 4:39 ESV **Bold** added)

We are only days away from our next American presidential election. Covid-19 infections are not going away. There are still many people in our cities and now suburbs who live in fear of the next gun shot or fire set. Wild fires burn out west and storms rage on our coasts. Many businesses are diminished. By all appearances, we, as a nation, are in turmoil. Many of us are angry, fed up, and “*fit to be tied!*” (Google it)

There are many voices coming at us from so many directions: The Media, friends, political leaders, family, work, church, neighbors, Twitter, Facebook, Podcasts, etc. Life has become, in some situations, uncivil.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus was in the boat with His disciples. They were moving across the Sea of Galilee and there were other boats with him. I wonder who was in these other boats and if they experienced the same concern and fear that the disciples had?

I want to challenge us today (and I'm writing largely to myself on this) to take our eyes off the rancor, division, and fretting that swirls around and drenches us like those tumultuous waves of that sea.

I assume the disciples forgot or failed to trust their Master's words before they got into the boat; *"On that day when evening had come, he said to them, **Let us go across to the other side.**"* (Mark 4:35 ESV **Bold** added)

What Jesus had done was to promise them that they would get to the other side of the sea. He did not indicate they would drown. The disciples focused on their immediate circumstances and not on their Lord...the One who made that sea, the world, the universe, and them!

Let's pray for each other that we each embrace Micah 7:7, *"But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."* (Micah 7:7 ESV) He will calm our way.

Day 152

Dear '74 Prayer Warriors,

Seek First

I have sought many things in my life. Some things have been lofty and virtuous. Some have been rotten and ugly. Who wants to stand up on a table at church, work, or at home and shout, *"I'm telling everybody I know...I'm a wretched, stinking, rotten sinner and here are the specific ways I've let God and man down!"*

Typically, that is not how any of us act. Over the years and with the Spirit of Jesus in me since age 18, He has worked a sanctifying work in me for His glory and ultimately for my benefit and the benefit of others.

I come from a long line of worriers. My mind travels fast sometimes like a humming bird flitting from one flower to the next. In the past, I have collected so many worries in a day's time, I would get burdened down and exhausted. I would literally have to cast or fling them to the Lord. (1Peter5:7)

*“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them **all**. But **seek first** the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* (Matthew 6:31-33 ESV **Bold** added)

So I ask myself and I invite you to ask yourself, *“What do I seek this day?”*

Let’s pray for each other today that He would help each of us to first seek Him and His Word.

Day 153.

Nearing Thunder

I love middle ages castle movies like Robbin Hood and Camelot and those stories where the castle walls are thick and high, the moat deep, and the castle inhabitants safe. At West Point, we studied the History of Military Art and Warfare. Much changed when gun powder came on the scene.

So instead of having to try to scale the high castle wall to get inside to conquer it, the attacking enemy only had to blow a big hole in the wall. Several holes would do the trick. When you mix cannon fire with exploding cannon balls, warfare changed even more so.

The same goes for bows and arrows. Before gun powder, opposing forces often employed bows and arrows and cross bows, some of them with fire. From the Welsh to the English, the long bow was adapted from a hunting to a tactical warfare weapon. Bow warfare was never the same. On August 26th, 1346 during the early part of the Hundred Years War, the Battle of Crecy, Northern France took place.

The French greatly outnumbered the English but the English had the long bow which could fire 10 to 12 volleys a minute to the crossbowman’s 3 to 5 per minute. The long bow could also shoot some 1800 yards! Guess who won? The English did.¹

The enemies of God may surround you today. You may sense the threatening sound of horse’s hooves. You may see the cloud of dust being kicked up in the distance. Fear not! God is on your side! Those enemies need to fear and tremble at the nearing thunder of God’s Armies!

*“Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. **Some trust** in chariots and some in horses, **but we trust** in the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.”* (Psalm 20:6-8 ESV **Bold** added)

Let's pray for each other that we would trust the Lord and stand in His uprightness.

¹<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/The-Longbow/>

Day 154.

Love Bears, Believes, Hopes, Endures...All Things

I turned to the Lord in prayer this morning. I was clueless as to what He wanted me to write about in this devotional. Instantly 1Corinthians 13 came to mind. Thinking He would have some wondrous insight that I could somehow pass on to you was quickly shattered.

He brought me here to first convict my own selfish heart of failing to love others with His Love. I had put a certain loved one on performance and, in my book, this person simply did not measure up to my expectations.

I can be quite boorish at times especially if I'm tired, stressed, or in pain. **No excuse.** Before I started writing today, I asked forgiveness of the certain loved one and I asked the Lord to forgive me as well. She quickly forgave for which I am grateful.

"Love stands in the presence of a fault, with a finger on her lip."(Spurgeon)¹

You see, in my flesh, I am able and quick to find fault in others, even in family members. God's Love will stand mightily against my flesh. God's Love desires to shut my critical mouth and soften my complaining heart. His Love reminds me that I don't deserve His favor either. The tongue can be a fire from hell.

Let's pray for each other that He would soften each of our hearts and help us to choose wisely and kindly the words we form with our lips.

¹https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-1Cr/1Cr-13.cfm?a=1075007

Day 155

Where Does Your Soul Rest? Part 1

*“and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to **rest** on the mountains of Ararat.”* (Genesis 8:4 **Bold** added ESV)

Days, months, and seasons roll by us. Some seem to be better or more promising than others. Some of us have been battling challenges and difficulties for many years...perhaps a life time. As you well know, these battles can be in the form of physical or mental illnesses, disabilities, financial struggles, marriage and family strife, sorrow, grief, loss of jobs, tragedies, and the consequences of bondage to sin.

There can also be great upheaval and unrest in our lives and in our souls from a collection of stressors that we wouldn't wish on anyone: War, pestilence, violence, division, deep anger, storms, earthquakes, religious and political differences, etc.

We have just ended one of the most upsetting, tension and isolation filled years of our lives.

2020!

I confess there have been times I have gotten so thoroughly frustrated, I had to confess to God many times in one day. From the Corona Virus to Masks, to political turmoil to **Cancel Culture**, I found my soul bouncing from one dissatisfaction to another. Divisiveness seemed to rule the day.

I had to finally ask myself, “Jim, where does your soul rest?” I’ve been looking in all the wrong places. Can you relate?

My wife, Barbara, and I have been praying together more this last month than ever before. I sense the result is that God is gripping me and drawing me close to Him. He is **my** hope. He is **my** rest.

Noah's ark finally came to rest. It didn't happen overnight. The same is for me and perhaps for you today. Let us pray for each other that we each would find our soul position, presence, and rest in the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone.

Day 156

Where Does Your Soul Rest? Part 2

“... I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:1-2 ESV)

In the **Sound of Music**, Maria comes to the Mother Superior at a critical time in her life when she is searching for answers, hope, and direction.

Wisely, before Mother Superior sings Climb Every Mountain, she encourages Maria with the essence of the above verse. Look up! Look unto Jesus! He is your answer. He is your hope.

Frankly, our tendency is to look anywhere but up. We look down, we look at the TV or Social Media. We look at others to compare ourselves, and we look at our troubled world. Life can get scary quick.

We who are to look to Jesus for our rest and hope need also to look out for others especially as this new year unveils. Despair, depression, isolation and discouragement are running high worldwide. As we rest in Jesus today, let us pray that we each would be a listening ear to others who perhaps are lonely and in pain, a comfort to those in need.

Day 157

Where Does Your Soul Rest? Part 3

“He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.” (Psalm 121:3 ESV)

Did you know that the Lord Jesus watches over you, His saved child, day and night? It is as if you were a lowly sheep in the pasture and your strong and attentive shepherd has the joy of watching out for you day and night... even when you sleep. He watches over you and **keeps** you in His care as if you were the only sheep in his flock.

The Lord has no need of rest. However, you do. He knows you are weak. He knows you get weary. He understands you are prone to wandering. Jesus, your **Soul Keeper**, will guard you and, if need be, he will employ 10,000 angels to assist.

Are you troubled and anxious right now? That is OK. We all get there now and then. Run into the arms of Jesus! Just as you are... Worries, angst, sin and all. Let Him guard you right now as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings sheltering them from the storm. Tell Him you want to rest your weary soul. He will give you this rest.

Let us pray for each other that we would run to Him now and find rest for our souls in Him.

Day 158

Where Does Your Soul Rest? Part 4

*“The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will **keep** you from all evil; he will **keep** your life. The Lord will **keep** your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”* (Psalm 121:6-8 **Bold** added ESV)

I remember calm days. There were days as a 10 year old boy when my greatest concern was whether I would take my trusty Daisy BB Gun (the best gift ever!) outside and shoot yellow jacket bees as the popped up from their ground hole or whether I would take my large magnifying glass and go out in the fields to find and burn black and yellow spiders. Come on! Am I the only delinquent in the bunch here? Ha! I think not.

When I turned 11, I was able to get a hold of two very solid, big refrigerator plywood crates. I put one on top of the other, secured them, put a hinged, lockable door on it, and settled into the best fort a boy could have. Though not saved yet, I still felt a great sense of peace and security in my little boy-made escape. If you’ve never had or made a fort, there is still time!

Now that I am a follower of Jesus, my fortress is Him and Him alone. In Him I find safety. In Him I find rest. Ministry will not give it. Our culture will not provide it. Even family can drive you stir crazy at times. Only Jesus satisfies your soul and mine.

Let us pray for each other we’d find rest right now in Him, the Fortress of our Souls.

Day 159

Where Does Your Soul Rest? Part 5

I remember days not so calm. I had days, weeks, months, and even years of difficulty that were so bad, I take deep breathes now as I write these words: Days of trouble, days of attack, days of slander against me, days of failure, days of a loved one clinging on to life.

There were 7 years in a row I thought would never end. These were the years my first wife battled terminal cancer and mental illness. Before this 7 years battle began, my best friend and his 2 kids were killed in a car-truck accident. Then our moving van from Arkansas to Illinois went up in flames while in a repair shop midway. This was the drama during my first year in Seminary.

The second year was the terminal cancer diagnosis. She was only 33 and she was home schooling our 4 children. We all battled it for 7 long years. All I could do was cling to Christ and trust His Word, the Bible. I felt wooden inside, numb, with migraines and anxiety attacks on a regular basis. I found myself crying out to God, depressed and woeful at times.

I surrounded myself with some really good, godly men. We met weekly, sometimes spontaneously, if needed. Jesus was and still is my place of Rest. Who or what is your rest these days?

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28 ESV)

Let us pray for each other to come to Jesus, our Good Shepherd, Our great Savior who, alone, gives us the rest we so desire.

Day 160

Where Does Your Soul Rest? Part 6

“Pride makes us believe we can find the answers, and lust makes us look for answers in the wrong places.” (Blaise Pascal 1623-1662) ¹

Men and women have not changed a bit over the millennia. As my friend, Joe Greer indicates, often times we look for hope in temporal places. (Joe this is the understatement of the year!) He is correct, of course. This certainly has been true way too often in my life. Is it any wonder I have failed to find rest for my soul so often at so many times, in so many places. Experience as a missionary and counselor for almost 40 years has shown me I am not alone in this struggle.

We either seek notice or we covet something to hopefully fill the void.

I am learning that my soul rests in God and Him alone.

“Lord Jesus, I humbly cry out to you right now this moment. I am Yours. I need You. I run to Your Arms. Imprison me with Your love, Your presence, Your wisdom, and Your protection. This world is too much for me. I hide myself in You. And I am safe.”

Let's pray for each other right now that we find our rest only in the Lord Jesus today.

“so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”
(1Corinthians 2:5 ESV)

¹Out Of The Ordinary, David Roper, Discovery House Publishers, 2003, Grand Rapids, MI. p. 70.

Day 161

Where Does Your Soul Rest? Part 7

“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each person and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ.” (Blaise Pascal 1623-1662)¹

From hope comes rest. Hope involves expectations. Rest involves surrender. Peace, real peace, can only be produced when we place our eternal hope in the Lord Jesus and His Word, the Bible. Then, and only then, comes true, deep, and lasting rest... the kind our soul longs for.

Jesus longs to have you experience His love, joy, and peace. Rest is yours for the receiving.

When you think about it, the devil works overtime to get us to **wallow** in our past or **worry** about our future. There is no rest for the soul in these places. As Believers in Christ, the only moment we can be filled, empowered, and controlled by the Spirit of Jesus is literally the moment we have right now...the present...in His Presence as we yield all to Him. Don't think about 2 minutes from now. Think and surrender by faith now.

This is the only time in all of eternity our soul can find and be at rest where the struggle and the tempest cannot rule. The next moment will come soon enough. When it does, yield to Him again in His **Rest**.

He is waiting for you and for me.

Let us pray for each other that we for this moment would be captured by His Love and fellowship.

*“Faith is choosing to live as though the Bible is true (which it is), regardless of circumstances, emotions, or cultural trends.”*²

¹<https://itsjustme.wordpress.com/2006/02/16/quote-from-blaise-pascal/>

²https://crustore.org/catalog/product/view/?ignore_category/1/id/1239/s/destined-for-security/

Day 162

Is Your Life Available?

Madeline Pena writes *“Jim and Elisabeth Elliot were missionaries to the Auca Indians in Ecuador. Jim was martyred alongside four other missionaries during Operation Auca on January 8, 1956. After her husband's death, Elisabeth went to go live among the tribe that killed her husband with her three-year-old daughter, Valarie, and share the truth of the gospel with them.”*¹

Since I was born in 1951, I did not learn of these two Christians until I was much older. After reading some of Elizabeth's books and listening to her on the radio, I have learned they were simply two common, imperfect people the Lord Jesus saved, brought together in marriage, and called to **an uncommon mission**.

The great news is that God only uses chipped vessels, sinful men and women, and boys and girls, who discover that apart from trusting wholeheartedly in Jesus and His Mighty, Eternal Word, their attempt at living a godly life or touching eternity is impossible! Lasting love and truth will not occur with a double-minded heart.

Three quotes by Jim Elliot:

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

"Wherever you are - be all there."

"God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with him."

Question: Is your life and is mine available for our Master's use?

'And I (Isaiah) heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."' (Isaiah 6:8 ESV)

Let's pray for each other that we would wholeheartedly avail ourselves to the Lord.

¹<https://bethanygu.edu/blog/stories/jim-and-elisabeth-elliott/>

[Books written by Elizabeth Elliot](#)

Day 163

What are you called to?

"Mary Slessor was a devoted missionary, with nearly 40 years dedicated to the nation of Nigeria. While pouring into the nation in which she loved, Mary would become one of the first single missionary women to make a nationwide impact. Bravely, she did missions work without a team or a family. Mary transformed whole communities with the love of the Gospel; starting orphanages, preaching the Good News, standing up for women's rights, and saving many innocent lives from death. Today, hospitals, schools, orphanages, and churches all stand because of the impact Mary Slessor left in West Africa." (She was born in the United Kingdom, born 1848 and had an very difficult childhood)¹

Calabar is a port city in southern Nigeria near the Cameroon border. Most men from Mary's home area that went to this wicked city never returned. It was called **The White Man's Grave**.

Mary's courage was based on God's call. She was aghast! She saw human sacrifices to idols, burying wives alive with their dead husbands, cannibalism, and the killing of new born twin children thinking they were evil. The tribal people began to respect her because she refused idol worship and was not afraid. By God's grace, she helped to end these devilish practices. On top of this, she battled malaria and had to go home several times.

Being mentally and physically exhausted and marinated in spiritual warfare, she would often fall to her knees and pray, *"Lord, the task is impossible for me but not for Thee. Lead the way and I will follow. Why should I fear? I am on a Royal Mission. I am in the service of the King of Kings."*²

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13 ESV)

Let's pray God would clarify His call on our lives.

¹<https://bethanygu.edu/blog/stories/mary-slessor/>

²<https://landmarkevents.org/assets/email/2019/01-14-history-highlight/>

Day 164

Facing fear, sacrifice, loss, and danger

McKenna writes, *"John G. Paton (1824-1907) was a Scottish Christian missionary for 49 years to the former cannibals in the South Sea Islands. He was alone on an island for four years with the hostile natives and his life hung in the delicate balance of constant danger. However, John trusted that he was immortal until God saw fit for his work to be done. Today, the impact of his life and dedication to faith in Jesus Christ can be seen in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu."*¹

Can you imagine meeting Head Hunters at work today or when you are taking a walk? Frankly, I'm not sure I would have the courage to do what John Paton did. The call of God upon his life must have been clarion. In fact, he suffered great setbacks one of which was that his wife and child both died shortly after arriving on these remote islands in the South Pacific. Plus he had to flee for his own life numerous times from "the hunters".

The question each of us, if we are true followers of Christ led by His eternal, Holy Word and Spirit is, *"Am I willing to surrender my life and all that I hold dear for the sake of His upward call and the Gospel?"*

Let us ponder our loving service unto our King. Are we willing to suffer much loss and shame and even dreaded conditions should Christ lead that way? Let us pray for each other that we will be when and if called.

Paul stated, *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* (Philippians 4:21 ESV)

John, the Baptist responded, *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”* (John 3:30 ESV)

¹<https://bethanygu.edu/blog/stories/john-g-paton-working-among-the-cannibals/>

Day 165

Love for Christ and, thus, love for people triumph over fear.

*‘Catherine of Siena was born in 1347 (Siena “Tuscany” Italy). That year, according to writer Charles L. Mee, Jr., “in all likelihood, a flea riding on the hide of a black rat entered the Italian port of Messina. ... The flea had a gut full of the bacillus Yersinia pestis.” With that rat, flea, and bacillus, came the most feared plague on record. In just three years, 1348 to 1350, the **Black Death killed more than one-third of the entire population between Iceland and India.** Remarkably, the young Catherine survived the onslaught.’*

Society Unraveling

“It is hard to grasp the strain that the plague put on the physical and spiritual fabric of society,” Mee concludes. “People went to bed perfectly healthy and were found dead in the morning. Priests and doctors who came to minister to the sick, so the wild stories ran, would contract the plague with a single touch and die sooner than the person they had come to help.”

‘People barred themselves in their houses or fled to the country. A fourteenth-century writer, Jean le Bel, wrote that “one caught it from another, which is why few people dared to help or visit the sick.”’

*“Yet when another wave of the plague struck Catherine’s hometown of Siena in 1374, she determined to stay. **(She was 27)** Following the example of the early Franciscans and Dominicans, she and her followers stayed to nurse the ill and bury the dead. Respected nineteenth-century historian Philip Schaff wrote that during the plague Catherine “was indefatigable by day and night, healed those of whom the physicians despaired, and she even raised the dead.” (God through her...)*

*“Such courageous service was nothing new to Catherine. When she began her ministry, writes Caroline Marshall, “she performed the most distressing nursing chores among those incurably ill of cancer and leprosy. Her patients were in pain and often abusive. She believed that these experiences **helped her to share in the suffering** of the crucified Christ and were, therefore, a*

great help along her path to the mystical union with God, which was her ultimate goal.”¹ (**Bold added**)

Let us pray for each other today that God would deepen our love for Him and for people no matter who they are or what they believe.

¹<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/black-death>

Day 166

Don’t take middle ground. Stand for something! Stand for Truth.

Alexander Crummell (March 3, 1819 – September 10, 1898) was an African-American “*scholar and an Episcopal priest. (He) went to Cambridge University with support from abolitionists. He spent the next 20 years in Liberia as a missionary. He returned to the US in 1872, and by 1875 he started St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, the first independent black Episcopal Church in Washington, DC. He led the congregation until 1894. His work in Pan-Africanism and the abolition of slavery were both fused by the Christian call for **redemption and grace.***

*In a sermon titled “**Building Men**” (I Cor. 3:10), he says, “There are people who would fain convince themselves that it is possible to stand in a place of utter indifference in spiritual matters; devoid of all moral responsibility. Never was there a more deceptive error framed by Satan for human ruin.*

***There is no neutral line** between the two great principles of good and evil; no intermediate point or party between the strong hosts of goodness, on the one hand, and the leagued bands of wrong and evil, on the other. In the universe of God there are two great principles ever antagonistic, one to the other; that which conserves, and that which destroys.”*¹ (**Bold added**)

Brothers and sisters, what was heavy on Alexander’s heart is heavy on mine. More than likely you are with us on this. Our world has always had evil and sin but it just seems like our nation and this world have entered a rapid phase of “**Blanketing Darkness**” enveloping society...much like the Black Death of the 14th century in Europe. Millions are deceived and are celebrating perversion, fornication, lawlessness, and deceit of extraordinary proportions.

Covid 19, although bad, is not our greatest threat. No, our greatest threat is that good men and women will do nothing, take no stand for righteousness and the Word of God, and will be little in travailing prayer unwilling to suffer loss for the sake of the Gospel and Truth.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*”²

One must prayerfully and courageously stand up to **Totalitarianism** early. Otherwise it will be too late.³

John 14:6, *‘Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”’* (ESV)

Philippians 3:8 *“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”* (ESV)

¹<https://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2017/02/black-history-month-10-african-american-church-leaders/>

²<https://ask.metafilter.com/292168/All-that-is-necessary-for-the-triumph-of-evil>

³https://www.google.com/search?q=what+is+totalitarianism%3F&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS846US846&oq=what+is+totalitarianism%3F&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l9.12185j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

³https://www.google.com/search?q=examples+of+totalitarianism&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS846US846&oq=examples+of+totalitarianism&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l4j0i20i263j0j0i10j0i390.15294j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

³<https://www.worldviewweekend.com/radio/audio/andy-woods-march-11-2021>

Day 167

Have you asked God what His calling is on your life?

Jeannette Li (1899–1968) was born into a Buddhist household in South China. Because of God’s call on her life and her obedient response to it, she became a cross-cultural Christian evangelist. She became ill as a child and was taken to the hospital. Her family feared foreign doctors but what choice did they have? Wonderfully in God’s sovereignty, the foreign doctor led Jeannette to saving faith in Christ. Then God led her to enroll in the mission’s school.

“Li was baptized as the first Christian in her family at age 10. At the age of 16, Lee entered an unhappy marriage with a non-believer. After several years her husband married another woman, leaving Li to raise her son as a single mother.

Realizing that her true calling was evangelism, she enrolled at the Ginling Bible College in Nanjing to train for ministry. In 1934 she made the first of many trips to Manchuria where she was part of a fruitful cross-cultural outreach in streets, homes, hospitals, and orphanages throughout the region. Her ministry during these years was subject to near **constant persecution** and harassment from Japanese occupiers.

*In 1952 Li was **imprisoned for 17 months** by Communist officials for her faith. Upon her release, Li moved to Guangzhou where she once again volunteered as an evangelist until she was allowed passage to Hong Kong and, eventually, the United States. Throughout all the difficulties in her life, Li continued to share her faith, witnessing to **God's steady provision in times of trouble.***"¹ (**Bold** added)

Mark 10:49 (ESV) says, 'And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take Heart. Get up; he is calling you."'

Let us pray God reveals His fresh calling on our lives today.

¹<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2017/october/chinese-christians-western-church-should-know.html>

Day 168

"Double lives, worlds apart."

Benjamin and Tatiana Candee were far from close. He lived in the United States and she was from Brazil. Both experienced similar backgrounds in that both had been living moral, upright, church involved lives.

They did not know each other and were thousands of miles apart. The Lord reveal to each of them that they were spiritual frauds. They were lost. Playing the Christian game, they knew about Jesus, His Word, and serving in church. They knew the Christian lingo. The problem is they were banking their respective salvations on their good works, their performance, and their "looking pretty good" in light of the rest of the world. Neither had a repentant, vital, and personal relationship or fellowship with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Neither possessed saving faith.** They were each living for this world and not in light of eternity.

At different times and under different circumstances, the Spirit of Jesus pursued both Benjamin and Tatiana and convicted them of their sinful, hell-deserving condition of wretchedness. Not only did God save them, but miraculously He brought Benjamin to Brazil when He called him to serve as a church planting missionary with the **ABWE (Association of Baptists for World Evangelism)**. Guess where? Brazil.

They met and now are happily married serving the King of Kings together.¹

*'Benjamin and his wife Tatiana are missionaries serving in Rio Grande Do Sul, Brazil with a focus on church planting, evangelism, and discipleship. Their ministry slogan is "Sent to Send. Impacting the World through South Brazil."*² (**Bold** added)

¹<https://www.abwe.org/blog/double-lives-worlds-apart>

²<https://www.abwe.org/work/missionaries/benjamin-and-tatiana-candee>

Please pray for them. Covid-19 is rampant in Brazil.

benjamincandee.wordpress.com

Let us pray for each other that we would live the singularly devoted life unto Christ. Psalm 86:11

Day 169

There are many in our world today that have regard for some parts of the Bible. Many others have laid down their lives in defense of it and of the Lord Jesus Christ who is **The Living Word**.

The tactic of the devil is to woo and deceive well intended people to only embrace as true and authoritative those Scripture verses that warm the heart, comfort the ego, and affirm what they already approve.

This is a deadly poison with eternally damning consequences.

“The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.” (Psalm 12:6 ESV)

Here is the **Truth** regarding all of God’s Word (all the words in the original languages Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek):

1. **Psalm 12:6 - pure (without error)**
2. **Psalm 18:30 - perfect, flawless**
3. **Psalm 119:89 - eternal**
4. **Revelation 14:6 - eternal Gospel-no change and timeless, never had a beginning; no end. Always existed; always will. (John 1:1)**
5. **Psalm 119:160 - All His Words are true**
6. **Romans 1:2 – Holy (set apart)**
7. **2Timothy 3:16-17 – God-breathed (expired by God / inspired into the authors)**

Many of you already embrace these all important truths. These eternal perfections are to be our food, breath, comfort, and guide forever. God’s Word has no buffets where you can pick only what you like.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105 ESV)

Let us pray we each will trust, honor, obey, and follow all of God's Word today and every day even if it forces us out of our comfort zone.

Day 170

*"The LORD is my **strength** and my **song**, and he has become my salvation; this is **my** God, and I will praise him, **my** father's God, and I will exalt him."* (Exodus 15:2 ESV **Bold** added)

This is a very timely verse for all of us right now. Moses wrote this amazing book 1450-1410 B.C. That is some 3471 years ago! For a considerable time now we have been dealing with:

- The Pandemic
- Political, racial, and civil unrest; censorship
- Personal, financial, family and relational strains
- Some of us are experiencing medical, physical, and emotional trauma, even PTSD.
- Terrorism, school, community, and highway shootings, looting, and rioting.

Some of us 'more senior' folks in or near retirement might think we are exempt from the emotional cost and trauma from the above mentioned stressors. However, I think all of us, young, middle-aged, and... seasoned are in pain of some sort. Some of us are experiencing yearnings, loss, and fear from multiple fronts. We finally got the chance to hug and visit with one of our daughters and our two teen granddaughters. It had been about a year and a half since we saw them face to face. Long time.

Through these difficult times, it is good for each of us to be kind. When one is kind, one is beautiful. Whether it is a difficult family member, co-worker, church friend, or social media contact, let us be respectful while we stand for everlasting truth found in Scripture.

There is someone in your life, right now, who needs a prayer, a good word of affirmation, a touch of encouragement, a hug that listens...and that person might just be **you**. If you are that person, Barbara and I want you to know that we care for you, are here for you, and are praying for you. God is for you and with you. If you ask Him, He will help you. He is able and willing.

Let us pray we each would ask God to lead us to one soul who needs a touch of kindness today.

Day 171

I am reading a book by D. L. Moody, **The Overcoming life**, originally published in 1896 and republished in 1994. How refreshing it is to dive into a book written 125 years ago by someone not afraid to write truth and tell it like it really is.

He describes what it is like becoming a new convert (saved by grace through faith: Ephesians 2:8-9) and then realizing the intense battles that he has yet to enter. Moody writes,

“It is like this: when a man enters the army, he is a member of the army the moment he enlists; he is just as much a member as a man who has been in the army ten or twenty years. But enlisting is one thing and participating in a battle another. Young converts are like those just enlisted.

It is folly for any man to fight in his own strength. The world, the flesh, and the devil are too much for any man. But if we are linked to Christ by faith, and He is formed in us the hope of glory, then we shall get the victory over every enemy. It is believers who are the overcomers.”¹

The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, states the Believer’s hope of glory:

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.” (2Corinthians 2:14a KJV)

If you are converted from a spiritually dead soul to an eternally alive redeemed one by the shed blood of Jesus on that Cross, His Spirit, then, lives in you, the **Hope of Glory!** By humble moment by moment faith, as you yield and surrender all to Him, His guidance, His power, and His love will win the day.²

Let us pray for each other today that Jesus will help us through the battles and blessings ahead with victory, virtue, and the Hope of Glory!

¹D. L. Moody, *The Overcoming Life*, (Chicago, Moody Press), 8.

²<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/transferable-concepts/be-filled-with-the-holy-spirit.html>

Day 172

Have you ever felt like the whole world is against you? If not the whole world, how about some unkind people, unwelcomed circumstances, and the pains of life? The truth is we have all faced

giants in our path: Health, family, employment, financial, spiritual attack, sin struggles, strained relationships, discouragement, etc.

“The story is told that Frederick Douglas (1818-1895), the great slave orator, once said in a mournful speech when things looked dark for his race: ‘The white man is against us, governments are against us, the spirit of the times is against us. I see no hope for the colored race. I am full of sadness.’ Just then... a woman rose in the audience and said, ‘Frederick, is God dead?’ My friend, it makes a difference when you count God in.”¹

That wonderful lady was a God-send. I would have loved to have been there to have seen that.

There is a small church in Tennessee country that has a wooden sign stuck in the ground out in front as folks walk in. Painted on it are the words, **Be kind. Each of us is facing a battle.**

As biblical counselors for many years, my wife, Barbara and I can tell you that the above is true. You may look at another’s circumstances and think, *“Gee, I wish I lived in a home like hers.”* Or *“That great family who lives on the corner...they don’t ever seem to struggle. Their kids are smart and good at sports. They seem to always be going on a vacation somewhere. Why can’t I have a good life like that?”*

We’ve counseled many such so called happy, successful, well off couples who would give anything to have some trust, love, and peace in their lives. Battles are real. Battles are fierce. When one subsides, another is around the corner.

The bottom line: *“With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes.”* (Psalm 60:12 ESV) and...

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.” (Psalm 28:7 ESV)

Let’s pray for each other that we will focus today on **Who** is for us and not on who or what is against us.

¹D. L. Moody, *The Overcoming Life*, (Chicago, Moody Press), 9.

Day 173

We have an Adversary.

The Wicked One, Satan, the Charmer, the Deceiver is a patient enemy. Oh yes, he wants to destroy and corrupt viciously, but he is willing to wait for the most opportune moment. (Luke 4:13)

“No sooner has a soul escaped from his snare than the great Adversary takes steps to ensnare it again. He puts forth all his power to recapture his lost prey. The fiercest attacks are made on the strongest forts, and the fiercer the battle the young believer is called on to wage, the surer evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. God will not desert him in his time of need, any more than He deserted His people of old when they were hard pressed by their foes.”¹

Moody writes that when we take our eye off of God, and I add, ‘and His Word’, we fail. Every human on earth fails at times. Even those heroic, beloved figures in history have failed much and failed profoundly. You and I are in good company!

It is when, by an act of the will (**faith**), we choose to look unto Jesus and decide to live as though the **Bible is true**. Then the Spirit of Jesus rules our hearts **regardless** of circumstances, emotions, or cultural trends.²

“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (1John 4:4 ESV)

Let’s pray for each other that we would choose to live today, even this hour, according to His Spirit. May His Word have **full command** of our hearts.

¹D. L. Moody, *The Overcoming Life*, (Chicago, Moody Press), 10. [Note: Satan cannot steal or remove your salvation, nor can you, oh child of God, lose it. But he will try to enslave you to his bondage of sin, doubt, fear, and self-loathing.]

² destined for security, “Session 1: Can You Be Secure in Your Relationship with God,” pages 13-14, Life Builders, Campus Crusade for Christ, 2003

Day 174

Fear: The best definition I have found is from the On Line dictionary. Fear is *“the likelihood of something unwelcome happening.”*

Have you experienced much fear in your life? I’ve had my share. Most likely you have too. Life is filled with beauty and wonder. But it also has its thorns, ruts, miseries, spiritual warfare, failure, and smacking into brick walls. Sometimes life can be brutal. Sometimes it stinks! It can seem like a dance with the divine or long date with despair.

“To fear is to have more faith in your antagonist than in Christ.”¹

The phrase “**fear not**” occurs 138 times in the ESV. I don’t think God wants His beloved children to fear. The first time it appears in Scripture is:

*“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “**Fear not**, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” (Genesis 15:1 ESV **Bold** added)*

Roughly 600 years later (700’s B.C.), The Holy Spirit breathed into the prophet Isaiah the eternal words:

*“**fear not**, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10 ESV **Bold** added)*

Some 760 years later in 60’s A.D., God breathed into Dr. Luke the following wondrous words:

*“And the angel said to them, ‘**Fear not**, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” (Luke 2:10 ESV **Bold** added)*

Finally, some 30 years later in the 90’s A.D., God breathed into the Apostle John:

*“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘**Fear not**, I (Jesus) am the first and the last,” (Revelation 1:17 ESV **Bold** added [Jesus- added for clarification])*

Our Lord, God, Shepherd, Friend, and Savior literally, with firm kindness and assurance in His voice, commands us to **fear not**. You may be in the swamp of fear or in its miserable cousin, the slough of ‘despondency’² (hopelessness, depression, sadness, despair, blues, dejection, gloom)

When you and I obey His hopeful, uplifting command, no matter what we are experiencing, we will be free from fear...right here...right now.

Let us pray that each of us would obey the Lord in this.

¹D. L. Moody, *The Overcoming Life*, (Chicago, Moody Press), 13.

²Idea taken from *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 1678, written by John Bunyan (*Slough of Despond*)

Day 175

Do you know someone not willing to go to Heaven? That may seem like an odd question, yet, I ask it anyway.

Many of the people you and I know will never go to Heaven.

“When He (Jesus) enlists a man in His service, He shows him the dark side; He lets him know that he must live a life of self-denial. If a man is not willing to go to heaven by the way of Calvary, he cannot go at all. Many men want a religion in which there is no cross, but they cannot enter heaven that way. If we are to be disciples of Jesus Christ, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him.

So let us sit down and count the cost. Do not think that you will have no battles if you follow the Nazarene, because many battles are before you. Yet if I had ten thousand lives, Jesus Christ should have every one of them.

Nearly everything around tends to draw us away from God. We do not step clear out of Egypt onto the throne of God. There is the wilderness journey, and there are enemies in the land.”¹

If you are a Christian (Christ’s one), you were crucified on the cross with Christ.

*“**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 **Bold** added)*

The reason you and I will go to Heaven is that we have **chosen to believe** (with hearts of repentance) that God, the Son, Jesus, of Nazareth, lived and died for us. His precious blood eternally washes us clean from all sin. His sinless, blameless, purity and perfection are upon us and in us. His righteousness is credited to us.

God only allows perfect people into Heaven, perfection not earned, but bestowed; freely given.² This perfect righteousness of Christ has not been given to saved souls based on their hell-deserving merit, but rather graciously and mercifully has been showered on them who deserve the fires of damnation. It is His free gift that can never be taken away. (Romans 8:38, John 6:39, John 10:28-29, Isaiah 61:10)

Now if someone wants to go to Heaven someday, they really should count the cost. Salvation is God’s **free gift** but following the Lord in the fierce battle for the souls of men, women, and children **will cost them everything they have**. There is simply no more worthy life than to live each hour for Jesus and His glory.

Let us pray He would help us grasp this calling, and this cross we have the privilege of bearing.

¹D. L. Moody, *The Overcoming Life*, (Chicago, Moody Press), 14.

²From a sermon by Pastor Howard Matson, Calvary Community Church, Williams Bay, WI.

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