

Daily Devotional Studies



“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Luke 9:23

September 2025 – February 2026

Introduction To These Daily Devotional Studies

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10

The Christian life is a relationship with God. Of all the things He could have made for Himself, He made you. He loves you. May these devotional studies of His Word be used of the Holy Spirit to move you to more deeply love our Lord Jesus and our Father in heaven.

The good works prepared for us by God, require that we live a life built on three principles. Each day, as we fellowship with God, we should consciously,

- **Yield Ourselves To God To Use As He Will**

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” Rom. 12:1

- **Read And Commit To What He Reveals To Us In His Word**

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim. 3:16-17

- **Go And Selflessly Love Others**

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” Phil. 2:3-4

As you give your life to God, build your life around the principles of His Word, and selflessly love those the Holy Spirit leads you to love,

“You are the light of the world... let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:14-16

Yield Your Life. Read and Commit. Go and Love. Every Day.

Tim Copper

A TIME TO PRAY

Our devotional times with God should, of course, involve talking to Him. This is why prayer is given the emphasis it has in His Word to us.

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.” Col. 4:2

“Pray without ceasing.” 1 Thess. 5:17

“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” James 5:16

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” Eph. 6:18

You do not have because you do not ask.” James 4:2

Given this clear emphasis, every seventh of these devotional studies focuses on prayer and God’s exhortations to us regarding it. It will be a time to pray.

SEPTEMBER 1

OUR CALL TO PRAYER

“As a matter of first importance, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men.” 1 Tim. 2:1

Our devotional times ought not to be just a time of reminding ourselves of the truths God has given us in His Word. Acting upon these truths must follow. (2 Tim. 3:16, John 15:16) What we do in life, and how we do it, is the emphasis. Since the Christian life is a relationship with God, and He has chosen to do His work through us as His beloved children, we are invited to be devoted and unceasing in our prayers to Him.

“Pray without ceasing... for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thess. 5:17-18

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.” Col. 4:2

“In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” (Phil. 4:6)

Because of this, every 7th day of these devotional studies is an encouragement and a reminder to use your devotional time to talk with God, asking Him to intervene in the world to glorify Himself. **Choose one of the following five groups** today and talk with God about them as the Spirit leads you. Remember, *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”* John 15:7-8

1. For all those in authority.

“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 2:1-4

2. For all the saints.

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” Eph. 6:18

3. For the lost.

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14

4. For the members of your church.

“The whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Eph 4:16

5. For the members of your family.

“Pray for one another...the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” James 5:16

SEPTEMBER 2

NO SELFLESS LOVE? NO CHURCH.

“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love...I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place -- unless you repent.” Rev. 2:4-5

Do you go to a good church? This is a common question. So how do you define “good”. Better yet, how does our Lord define it. During its first fifty years, the church in Ephesus was a leader in the Christian world and praised by Paul, especially for their love for one another.

*“I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, **and your love for all the saints**, do not cease giving thanks for you.” Eph. 1:15-16* But many in the church at the time of this letter had left this selfless love of others and were living life for themselves.

It is very important to note that Christ was also commending them for a number of other good things they were doing. It is amazing that these were not sufficient to please Him, because they constitute what many would consider to be, all that is needed to be a good church. But they weren't, and the church faded into insignificance, and ceases to exist to this day. Notice the commendations that Christ cited. *“I know **1) your deeds and 2) your toil and 3) perseverance, and that 4) you cannot endure evil men, and 5) you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and 6) have endured for My name's sake, and 7) have not grown weary”** Rev. 2:2-3* Wow! And even beyond these efforts Christ also commended them for one other major thing: their stand against a major heresy infecting the churches, the Nicolaitan heresy. *“This you do have, that **8) you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”** Rev. 2:6* These false teachers had come into the church denying the divine/human nature of Christ, that grace excuses sinful behavior (licentiousness), and that they could perform pseudo-miracles like the apostles, among other things. But even all of these commendations did not soften the Lord's rebuke for turning to self-interest from selfless love. ***“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”***

This essential attribute of selfless love of God and others is expressed throughout the NT. Christ stated its priority: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, **if you have love for one another.**”* John 13:34-35

Paul clarified it also: *“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”* 1 Cor. 13:1-3

So, do you go to a good church? What is it known by? Its good doctrine? Its moral standards and the virtuous lives of its members? Is rejection of false teachers and teaching? Its endurance in the face of life's tests and trials? If so, great. But, *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has beheld God at any time; if **we** love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected **in us.**”* 1 John 4:11-12

To what extent is the love of God visible in your church? To what extent is this because of you?

SEPTEMBER 3

REMEMBER. CONSIDER. IMITATE.

*“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you;
and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” Heb. 13:7*

His name was Eli. He came to be the Pastor of the small church I was attending as a new Christian. For two years I listened to his solid biblical teaching from the pulpit and watched him as a committed husband and father, counselor, and leader. I then moved away. As I faced the issues of my life going forward, I often remembered and considered what he had said and done. I imitated him, his faith, and his commitment to it. Doing this, I would say, was very profitable. Having godly Pastors and Elders as our leaders is a blessing. We are to be doing three things:

- **Remembering their biblical teaching.**

I have often remembered some of Eli’s teaching. For example: “If you are not sure how to respond to something, ask yourself what your natural inclination is – and consider doing the opposite.” He said this when teaching a series about our battles with the flesh. He made his point memorable for me. God’s ways are usually the opposite of our natural inclinations. I remember this often now. He gave many such memorable illustrations of biblical principles.

- **Considering the results of their biblical responses to life.**

I have faced daily decisions in the many years since Eli was my Shepherd. I was married, and faced being a good husband every day. So did Eli. I began to have children, and much of my life began to be taken up by them. Eli had 4. I was a member of a church with people of varying maturities and problems. So was Eli. I had unsaved relatives. So did Eli. Watching and considering how Eli responded to his, often difficult, relationships and decisions, and why, has been very helpful. As he said once, “God has allowed me to go through some of the things I have, because I am in the ministry. I need to learn things, so I can help others respond to what they face.” He did.

- **Imitating their faith, hope, and love.**

Learning God’s perspectives on where we are, what we face, what is to come, and why God allows things, is the basis of our faith, our hope, and our self-denying love of others. Eli was a man of faith in what God has done for us in Christ. He was a man of hope in the promises of God. And he was a man who loved others as a church member, a family man, and an evangelist. He was a man to be imitated.

Remember those who have led you. Often.
Consider the results of their conduct in life. Thoughtfully.
Imitate their faith. Purposefully. Today.

SEPTEMBER 4

CHRIST AT THE DOOR KNOCKING!

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him.” Rev. 3:20*

Commentators differ on whether these words are addressed to those who are not saved, or to Christians who are living life apart from God. In this lukewarm church it could be either or both. In both cases, Christ is outside the hearts of this indifferent, foolishly self-sufficient church. But here is Christ standing outside, knocking, knocking, asking to be let in.

1. Let Us Be In Awe Of This Condescension

Here is the Lord of Glory, humbly coming, knocking, asking to be let in. Such a story of a condescending God would never be thought of by men. Here is the Sovereign Creator of the universe asking to be let in to the life of mere men who have considered Him irrelevant to their life! Such mercy, such grace, such forgiveness, such love.

“Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Phil. 2:6-8

2. Let Us Be In Awe Of The Treasures Christ Brings As He Knocks

The gold, the white garments, and the eye salve He offers are symbolic of true salvation, true righteousness, and true knowledge. God offers us these treasures of a life shared with Him, along with the capacity to share it.

“You were dead in your trespasses and sins...But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)... For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:1-10

3. Let Us Be In Awe Of His Acceptance Of Those Who Deserve The Opposite

Mercy is not giving someone what they really deserve. To know about Christ and His selfless work of salvation on your behalf, and then to go about your life as if He is irrelevant and not to be honored, is to deserve something besides grace, love, forgiveness, and eternal blessings beyond imagining. Yet He is found knocking at the door of their hearts, asking to be let in.

“What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called.” Rom. 9:22-24

4. Let Us Be In Awe Of The Promise He Gives To Those Who Invite Him In

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne.” Rev. 3:20-21 On His Throne? With Him? Them? Me?

SEPTEMBER 5

HELPING OTHERS RECLAIM SURRENDERED GROUND

“With all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another.” Col. 3:16

His name was Bill. He had no biblical foundation as a child, had lived a godless life, and come to Christ in his 30s. He had been deceived and controlled by our Adversary. There were very strong mental fortresses in his mind that needed to be destroyed with the truth. It would take time, and require a significant investment. A lot of time, selfless love, patience, and work. Should I pursue it? If so, how? Helping others escape from the mental traps they are in, and walk in the light of God’s freedom and power, is a matter of doing the same 3 things we need.

We need to help and disciple others using the same truths and principles of life that we have learned. But let us consider today the principles of determining if a person like Bill, or anybody, is someone God wants me to invest my time and life in. He has a plan. (*Eph. 2:10*)

Who are you responsible for? Who does God want you to accept responsibility for? A child is one who others must still assume responsibility for. We become adults when we have assumed responsibility **for ourselves**. We become mature in Christ when we begin assuming responsibility **for others**. There are three groups that God’s plan will lead a mature adult to: Your family first, your church family second, and then folks like Bill. Sometimes He gives us grace to be involved with all three. Sometimes not.

- **Assuming responsibility for my family.**

Husbands, love your wives. Parents, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Sometimes this is a wonderful life long task. Sometimes sin, selfishness, and Satan make it very hard. Sometimes we are alone. But these are the first ones we are to live for.

- **Assuming responsibility for my church family.**

Our church family comes next. We are to give our lives to them. We are to take our place in God’s chosen local church and employ our God given gifts in serving one another. Sometimes with family and church family, there is little time and energy left.

- **Assuming responsibility for folks like Bill, inside and outside the church.**

How do we determine who? There are a few principles that God uses to guide us. 1) **Get counsel** from your church leaders. (*Heb. 13:7,17*) 2) Give them **an initial biblical project** to pursue and repeat this going forward. If they pursue it, then continue. If they do not pursue it, then try again. If it is not done again, then this is probably not God’s place or time for you.

*“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but **with humility of mind** let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.” Phil. 2:3-5*

So, what is your plan for today?

SEPTEMBER 6

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know... what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” Eph 1:18-19

Getting God’s perspective on life is found in His Word to us. Getting His perspective on who **you** are puts you in one of 2 groups. Either you are a Christian or you are not (2 Cor. 5:17). If you are in Christ it is because you have and are receiving many great blessings from God. Paul begins his letter to the Ephesian church by stating 10 of these. You are very, very, very special to God. That is His perspective. God says that:

1. You were chosen in Christ to be blameless before Him! (1:4)
2. You have been predestined to adoption as His child! (1:5)
3. You have been redeemed by the blood of His Son! (1:7)
4. You have been forgiven of your trespasses against Him! (1:7)
5. You have been lavished by the riches of His grace! (1:7-8)
6. You have been told the purpose of history and the meaning of life! (1:9-10)
7. You have been given an inheritance that is eternal, infinite, and glorious! (1:11-12)
8. You have been given the gift of saving faith! (1:13)
9. You have been sealed in Christ by the gift to you of the indwelling Holy Spirit! (1:13)
10. You have been taught about God, His nature, works, and love for you! (1:2-13)

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**.... I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, **and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.**” Eph. 1:3-23*

Did you know that you are the fulness of Him who fills all in all? Could you explain that to me? It means that you are very, very, very special to the Creator and Sovereign King of the Universe. So that’s who you are.

IN THE MORNING, O LORD

"In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice; In the morning I will order my prayer to Thee and eagerly watch." Psalm 5:3

David began his day with the Lord, ordering his prayers around what he was facing, and promising God that he would "eagerly watch." Using other daily devotional material, like this one, that direct our minds to the truths of God's Word, have the same goal of "setting our minds" on God, and His perspectives and instructions regarding how we are to live today. David's example leads us to ask two questions.

- **Is this pattern of starting each day with the Lord my pattern?**

Getting up early to go to work every day is commendable, but being devoted to prayer is more so. (*Acts 6:4, 1 Cor. 7:5, Col. 4:2*) Leading your family in a daily focus on God's priorities, provisions, and commandments is clearly required. David not only had morning devotions, he also closed each day in this way. *"Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!... Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. The LORD hears when I call to Him... Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still."* Psalm 4:1-5 *Is this your pattern?*

There are many ways that the Psalms can be used in our devotional times every day. Here are two that many have found helpful.

- 1) Read one of the 15 "Psalms of Ascent" (*Psalms 120-134*). Scholars believe that these Psalms were sung by the Israelites as they made their annual travel and ascent to Jerusalem from their homes. There is an obvious parallel to our journey as believers through life. We go from conviction of sin (*Ps. 120*) to our final eternal blessing (*Ps. 134*). The many progressive steps on this journey are the focus of each Psalm.
- 2) Read every 30th Psalm every day, in the appropriate day of the month. (e.g. Psalm 1, 31, 61, 91, and 121 on the first day of the month)

- **What was David "eagerly watching" for as he then went out to face his day?**

God's answers to his prayers for help of course. He not only faced great responsibilities, but he also faced great opposition, and great temptations like we do. He was a man who spent mornings and evenings with the Lord in His Word and then in prayer. Then He eagerly watched.

"But as for me, I shall sing of Thy strength. Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Thy lovingkindness in the morning, for Thou hast been my stronghold, and a refuge in the day of my distress."

Psalm 59:16

SEPTEMBER 8

INITIAL. ONGOING. UNCONDITIONAL.

*"And Jesus said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.'
And they immediately left the nets and followed Him." Mark 1:17-18*

This **INITIAL YIELDEDNESS** of their lives to Christ was just the beginning for these men. It was only the first of three stages of yieldedness that every Christian must progress through. Our surrender to God's will is an ongoing, maturing part of our restored relationship with God. Sometimes there is a decision to make Christ the Lord of your life when we receive Him as our Savior. Sometimes there is not, as the love, forgiveness, and acceptance of our Savior dominate our thoughts. Soon however, this necessary result of having a restored relationship with the Ruler of the Universe is placed in our path.

"Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." James 1:21-22

ONGOING YIELDEDNESS is to describe the moment by moment living of our life in relationship with Christ. We are not always consciously yielded, but we should be. This is why we are to pray without ceasing, (1 Thess. 1:7) always talking to God about what He thinks and wants. And then, when we sin, following our own will and pursuing our own desires, we are to confess this openly, and quickly surrender again to God's will.

"You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." Eph. 5:8-10

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

The final stage of our maturing yieldedness is **UNCONDITIONAL YIELDEDNESS** to God's will. This is tested as we mature, with God promising that His enabling grace is sufficient for us to endure all the tests that He allows. We are strengthened to do everything that God calls us to do as we yield to His will.

"I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Phil. 4:12-13

*"We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; **strengthened with all power**, according to His glorious might." Col. 1:9-12*

Why is being fully and unconditionally yielded to God's will important? Because there are several consequences if we are not. Christians who do not surrender cannot go on to maturity. They will not know the right paths or choices to make. They will lack the supernatural power to do the impossible things God asks of us. They are easily deceived by the enemy. Eventually, their lives look no different than an unbeliever's.

"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." Rom. 12:1

SEPTEMBER 9

NOT SAVING GRACE, BUT NOW, ENABLING GRACE

“God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” 2 Cor. 9:8

To what extent are you trying to serve God and sincerely pursue His will for your life – in your own strength? Remember, the Christian life is not hard, it is IMPOSSIBLE in our own strength. That is why we must be *“strengthened with power through His Spirit.” Eph. 3:16* To understand this well, it is important to distinguish the difference between **saving grace** and **enabling grace** to live the Christian life after salvation. The free gift of salvation from the penalty of sin is graciously given by God. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works.” Eph. 2:8-9* But after our salvation God asks us to live for Him as light in the world. This requires God’s power working in us and through us. So, we are told to *“work out (not for) your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Phil. 2:12-13*

We must learn the primary aspects of this enabling power to do God’s will, for *“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” 2 Cor. 9:8*

- **The purpose of enabling grace.**

The Christian life is a restored relationship with God. The Father has sent the Holy Spirit to be with us, lead us in the work prepared for us (*Eph. 2:10*), and empower us to do it. (*Lk 4:11*) It is His work done through us, as we yield to, and are led and empowered by the indwelling Spirit. *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Gal. 5:25*

- **The works prepared for us to do by God’s enabling power.**

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” John 15:16 *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for** good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10*

- **The gifts of grace given to us to employ.**

*“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each **exercise them** accordingly.” Rom. 12:6* *“As each one has received a special gift, **employ it** in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” 1 Pet. 4:10*

- **Enabling grace can be ignored or rejected by a Christian.**

The usefulness and fruitfulness of believers varies greatly. Some excel, because the grace of God abounds in their life (1 Thess. 1:1-8), but others become useless vessels. (1 Cor. 3:1-15)

- **Its goal of producing fruit through a believer.**

*“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; **for apart from Me you can do nothing. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.**” John 15:4-8*

Grace be with you.

SEPTEMBER 10

THE DOORS GOD OPENS. FOR WHOM, TO WHERE, AND WHY.

“Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have... kept My word, and have not denied My name.” Rev. 3:8

God opens doors for His beloved children into places that are inaccessible to others. Several of these places are made known to us, as well as the reasons they have been opened.

1. God Opens Doors To Several Places.

- Into reconciliation with Himself. (*Cor. 5:17-19*) The door to heaven has been opened.
- Into wisdom and understanding. (*Rev. 4:1*) The door to faith and hope has been opened.
- Into hearts. *Praying...for us...that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ.” Col. 4:3*
- Into effective service. *But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me.” 1 Cor. 16:8-9*
- Out of prisons.

“Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.....And when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself.” Acts 12:6-10
There are several “prison rooms” that God opens doors of escape for us. We can leave the prison of bitterness, the prison of moral failure, and the prison of pride to name a few. He opens the doors into the freedom of a child of God.

2. God Opens Doors For His Children For Several Reasons.

- To fulfill His plans for us. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph 2:10*
God has a plan for your life of service for Him while you are here. Whatever it takes, He will open the doors required to fulfill His plan. (*John 15:16*)
- When we pray and ask for what we need in order to do what He has asked of us.
“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.” John 15:7-8
*“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and **to him who knocks it shall be opened.**” Matt. 7:7-8* Incredible. But notice, the doors we knock on are opened.....
- When we are committed to going through the door the Lord opens for us.
A “double minded” Christian will ask God for His opinion and will in a matter, but will only proceed through the door God opens if he likes it. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, ...and it will be given to him. But, let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.” James 1:5-7*

SEPTEMBER 11

WHY DID GOD ALLOW THIS?

*“Demas has deserted...Crescens is gone...Alexander did me much harm...no one supported.”
2 Tim. 4:9-18*

We need to accept that bad things often come at the same time that fruit comes as we walk in the truth in this fallen world. Bad things do come to good people. The most faithful ones, the most mature ones, often face the worst things. When the going gets tough as we serve Christ, the support we should have gotten from other Christians is sometimes lost because of their immaturity, fear, or other weaknesses. This is hard, but God takes these grievous things and turns them by His power into glory for Himself and those He loves! Read this! “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose....What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” Rom 8:28-37

Paul had been opposed by the world wherever he went to preach and live. He had often found good support from other saints and whole churches. But when he entered the hardest part of his journey and was facing death for being a preacher of righteousness, some of his brothers in Christ were backing away. “Demas has deserted...Crescens is gone...Alexander did me much harm...no one supported.” (2 Tim. 4:9-18) Standing for Christ in our humanistic and godless day is hard enough. But the compromises and lukewarmness of many in our churches has been the main battle for many. God uses even these challenges and heartaches for our good. Carefully study Paul’s responses to the opposition and abandonment of the Christians around him and ask God to help you respond as he did during the last, and perhaps greatest griefs of his faithful life – thinking of others. Read 2 Tim. 4:3-18 where the following can be seen in his responses. God allows these difficult things because:

- 1. They allow God to be our comfort and actually increase our usefulness. (2 Cor.1:3-4)**
- 2. They help us discover the healing that comes from true mourning over sin. (Mt. 5:4)**
- 3. They help us set our affections more on Him. (John 10:28)**
- 4. They are the upward path to God’s peace. (Rom. 5:1)**
- 5. They are God’s tutor to overcome depression and lead us to joy. (Rom. 14:17)**
- 6. They are allowed that we might learn to set our hearts on eternal things. (Col. 3:2)**

SEPTEMBER 12

HOW GOD RESPONDS WHEN WE FAIL

“But God, being rich in mercy...” Eph. 2:4

Mercy is NOT giving someone what they deserve. On the wall of my office is a wooden plaque with just 2 words on it, “**But God...**”. It is there to remind me of 2 things. **First**, though I was a sinner and deserved the consequences, I have received mercy through Christ. I will not face what I deserve, for Christ has died in my place. I was dead in my trespasses and sins... But God....

Secondly, I am still here to serve and please God, in the work He has prepared. But I often fail and grieve the Holy Spirit who is with me to strengthen and guide me. I do not always walk in a manner worthy of my calling. During these lapses of walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit, thoughts come to me, often I think, from the enemy. “You failed again.” Yes, But God... “You have chosen poorly.” Yes, But God... “You should have...” Yes, But God... “You knew better.” Yes, But God... has heard my prayer and confession and has forgiven me. He has cleansed me from all my unrighteousness again as He said He would.

Until we stand before Him and are free from our old nature, we will struggle with saying no to our old nature and yes to the leading of the Holy Spirit through our new nature. We will fail, but, by His transforming power, less and less as we mature in our abiding and self-less love for God and others. But we will fail at times until He takes us home. But remember...

*“**You** are a fellow citizen with the saints, and are of God's household. **You** have been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in this work of mercy and grace, **you also** are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”*

Eph 2:19-22

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” Eph. 1:18-19

Of all the things God could have made for Himself – He made **you!** (*Eph. 2:8*)

Of all the things God could have given His life for – He died for **you!**

“For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer... For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God.”
1 Pet. 3:12, 18

SEPTEMBER 13

HOW SATAN CAN TAKE CONTROL OF OUR MIND

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception.” Col. 2:8

The primary battlefield for Satan is our mind. If our mind can be occupied and controlled, then total victory over our life is won. We respond to what we face in life by what we think. This is clearly how Jesus was tested by the Deceiver. Satan tried to get Him to sin using false ideas and concepts, just like he did with Eve.

*“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, **being tempted by the devil**. And He ate nothing during those days; and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil said to Him, **“If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”** And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone’.” Luke 4:1-4*

What will occupy your mind today? It will be a struggle, all day long. Remember,

*“The weapons of our warfare (God’s revealed truths) are...divinely powerful for the destruction of (mental) fortresses. We are destroying (these) speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and **we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.**”*
2 Cor. 10:4-5

So... *“Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.... Gird your loins with truth...and take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.”* Eph. 6:11-17

What must we defend against?

The audio and visual technologies developed over the last 75 years have been amazing. But most of the content is not good. Much of it is evil. Satan is using it to lead people into the mental bondage of false concepts and evil thoughts. TV, movies, and cell phone activity control the lives of most people today. Pornography dominates the internet. If we are trying to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,” it is easier not to watch. If we do, we must go to war. That is what God says. *“**See to it** that no one takes you captive through... empty deception... rather than according to Christ... keep seeking the things above...**set your mind on the things above**, not on the things that are on earth.”* Col. 2:8, 3:1-2

In the same way our educational institutions have put God out and become institutions of humanism. *“**See to it** that no one takes you captive **through philosophy**... according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world.”* Col. 2:8 Sending children to humanists to be educated is the opposite of what God wants. He wants them to “set their minds on the things above.” We are to “**See to it**” that they do, in every way we can.

SEPTEMBER 14

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR YOUR FAMILY

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.”
Rom. 12:10

Our family members are our focus today. There are many relationships here that the Lord has chosen for us.

*“Husbands, love **your wives**, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”*
Eph. 5:25-26

*“Children, obey **your parents** in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you.”* Eph. 6:1-3

*“Wives, be submissive to **your own husbands** so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”* 1 Pet. 3:1-2

Added to these close family members are the extended members of our family. Siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, grandparents and others. In some of these you may be faced with the heartaches and trials of a broken or difficult relationship. There may be offenses and separations. But remember, God has been divorced. God has been rejected. But it is His responses of forgiveness, longsuffering, and love that are held up to us to imitate. Praying for your family members, in whatever status your relationships are in, is what He asks of us.

There are 35 prayers of the apostle Paul in His NT letters. They are all for others! They are good models for us to use as we make intercessions, supplications, and thanksgivings for our family members. Here are just two.

“We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” Col. 1:9-12

“We pray for you always, that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
2 Thess. 1:11-12

SEPTEMBER 15

GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL PLAN, CARE, CONTROL, AND RULE

"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Rom 8:28

We are the objects of God's providential care. We are under His guiding and protecting hand. We are not at the mercy of fate or chance. We are under the watchful eye of our Sovereign Creator, who rules and overrules all things, according to His plan for history.

"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" Rom 8:28-31

The Providence of God may be defined as His total control of all that comes to pass in the world, directing all things to their appointed end, in their appointed time, just as He has planned. God did not create the world and check out. No. He sustains it, manages it, and rules over it, according to His plan and purpose.

- Providence means that the universe is personal and moral, not abstract and immoral.
- Providence is purposive. History is going somewhere by God's determined plan and will. What happens to us and is allowed in our life is part of God's Providential Plan for history, is accomplished by His sovereign power, and will result in His glory and ours.
- Providence uses all things, including evil, to accomplish God's good purposes in the world and history. God hates evil, but He is allowing it for His ultimate glory – as with the cross.
- Providence is always correct. God does not make mistakes.

How are we to apply these truths?

1. **Let Providence be an antidote for your fears.** Nothing comes to pass but what is ordained by God's decree and is ordered and controlled by His providential care and power. Israel was trapped between Pharaoh and the Red Sea, and they looked upon themselves as dead men. But Providence so ordered it, that the sea was a safe passage for them and a grave for their enemies.
2. **Let Providence give you the confidence to pursue God's calling for your life.** The path God has planned for us is often through bolted gates we cannot open and mountains we cannot climb. When David faced his Goliath, he understood God's Providential rule and power enough to allow him to do battle with a man three times his size and strength. What Goliaths stand against you in the path of God's plan for your life? God has providentially prepared them for both His glory and yours.
3. **Let Providence sustain you in sickness and loss and suffering.** God has a purpose – and it is for your good. God has a plan – and it must be accomplished for your greatest blessing.

"What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer."

SEPTEMBER 16

THE BLESSINGS OF BEING BUFFETED

“If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation.” 2 Cor. 1:6

Pastor John had lost his wife of 30 years a few months earlier. He was asked how he was doing by a friend he had not seen in a while. “Really, it has been perhaps the best thing that has ever happened to me for my ministry. I have compassion for people that I have never had before. It has been hard. But it has been a great blessing in disguise. It has changed me, and my ministry.”

Paul explained the reason for his own experience of suffering as a servant of Christ and his “thorn in the flesh”. It was given to teach him how to comfort others and make him more useful in helping others who were facing tough things in life. He was kind, gentle, and compassionate as never before. He was also better able to give them God’s perspective regarding suffering.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; **who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.** For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. **But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.**”* 2 Cor. 1:3-6

There are a number of reasons why we suffer in life. We noted them in yesterday’s devotional. But these hardships Pastor John and the apostle Paul experienced were not caused by their own sin or mistakes. They were used of God to allow them to see and meet the needs of others who were experiencing hard things like they had.

*“Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God....**but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**”* Rom. 5:1-5

Have you experienced the loss of someone special to you recently? Family? A close friend? Or rejection, perhaps? After much effort and sacrifice? Or has your health degraded to the degree that you are limited or unable to do much at all? Or is what you have labored long for, now gone? May the Lord comfort you in your loss. He will. And may He use you to comfort others with the comfort with which you have been comforted.

SEPTEMBER 17

SUCCESS

“Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be...” Matt. 20:26

How should we define success for ourselves and others who are followers of Christ? What are God’s primary goals for us who are seeking to please Him? What should we be committed to pursuing with all of our heart and teaching to our children and others? Here are the three goals that Christ said He pursued during His life that defined success for Him. It is how He defines success for us.

1. He submitted his will to God’s will for his life.

*“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”
John 6:38*

2. He built his life around the principles of God’s Word.

“I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.” John 8:28

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.” John 14:21

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”
2 Tim. 3:16-17*

3. He assumed responsibility for others God chose for him.

“It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Matt. 20:26-28

Success is not measured by what we are. It is measured by what we are compared to what we could be. By grace and obedience we can be yielded to God’s will. (*Phil. 2:13, Heb. 13:21*) We can build our lives around the principles of God’s Word (*Eph. 1:18-23*). We can assume responsibility for others (*Mt. 20:18-20*).

SEPTEMBER 18

WEARY IN WELL DOING?

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Heb. 12:1

Repeatedly, we find encouragement in God’s word to press on in the battles we face living for Christ. We need it. It is not uncommon for faithful believers to grow weary in well doing. Some lose heart after doing well for some time. The first laps of our race are often ok, but then we often become weary. Some become anxious and fearful. Some become timid in the face of the hardship. Some quit.

*“Let us not **lose heart** in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not **grow weary**. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men.” Gal. 6:9-10*

*“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus,.. considering Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not **grow weary and lose heart**.” Heb. 12:1-3*

*“But as for you, brethren, do not **grow weary** of doing good.” 2 Thess. 3:13*

The exhortations to us, as we face our inevitable times of weariness in well doing, are clear. Here they are:

1. **Fix your eyes upon Christ and consider His suffering for you, as you run your own race for Him.** *“Fixing our eyes on Jesus...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.” Heb. 12:2-3*
2. **Lay aside your worldly encumbrances and resist your many temptations. Run your race without these heavy weights to carry.** *“Let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Heb. 12:1*
3. **Pray with thanksgiving for the trials ahead and find God’s peace, knowing His providential care and rule.** *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:6-7*
4. **Remember, there is a reward waiting for us if we finish well.** *“And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.” Gal. 6:9*
5. **Persevere by God’s enabling power and finish well.** *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Tim. 4:7-8*

If you are not weary at the moment, there are others who are. They need some encouragement.

SEPTEMBER 19

THE 6 MOST SERIOUS WEAKNESSES OF BELIEVERS

"But I have this against you." Rev. 2:4,10,14,20,3:2,16

Christ's exhortations and warnings to the churches in Revelation 2-3 are very personal. They are from Him to His people, His church. We have them because we are part of the church He is building. These letters do state His commendations, but His real focus is to clarify our weaknesses and warnings if we do not repent and change. The following is a summary of the major weaknesses our Lord wants addressed by His people. If any apply to you a deeper study should be done. His letters explain what is to be done, and what happens if it is not.

1. A fading love for God. (Rev. 2:4)

"But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent." Rev. 2:4-5

2. Fear of suffering for Christ. (Rev. 2:10)

"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer." Rev. 2:9-10

3. Accepting lower standards. (Rev. 2:14-15)

"I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.... You also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." Rev. 2:14-15

4. Tolerating false teachers. (Rev. 2:20)

"But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." Rev. 2:20

5. Quitting before their work is done. (Rev. 3:2)

"I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God." Rev. 3:1-2

6. Being lukewarm in my heart about God. (Rev. 3:16)

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." Rev. 3:15-16

If you are not convicted personally about any of these, are there members of your church who should be, and need your help?

SEPTEMBER 20

ACCEPTING AND INVESTING IN OTHERS

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.” Acts 12:25

The stories of John Mark’s acceptance by Barnabas, Paul, and Peter, and their significant investments in him, teach us a number of important truths. Their accepting and investing in John Mark is an example for all of us to follow.

- **It causes us to EXAMINE OUR ATTITUDES toward those who have been weak.**

Have you been let down or abandoned at a crucial time by another person at church? There is no question that Mark caused Paul trouble and acted selfishly. Furthermore, he was most probably right not to trust him again until he had matured spiritually. But he did, under the acceptance and investment of Barnabas. We can visualize him coming after a time and asking to speak with Paul, confessing, and asking forgiveness. And we can visualize Barnabas, his mentor, standing in the background watching and praying for reconciliation. And Paul was open to allowing God a victory even beyond reconciliation. He wrote a letter to Timothy, helping Mark with his ruined reputation, and he personally accepted and invested in him further. (2 Tim. 4:11)

There are usually John Marks on our team. What are your attitudes toward yours?

- **It challenges us to BE AN ENCOURAGER of others.**

His given name was Joseph, but because of his work of accepting and investing in others, they changed his name to Barnabas which means “son of encouragement.” Barnabas encouraged so many others we know about: for the first Jewish church, with a gift of land (Acts 4:36), for Saul, when no one else would (Acts 9:26-28), as the pastor of the first Gentile church (Acts 11:24-28), as the leader of the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-2), for the needs of the Jerusalem Christians during the great famine (Acts 11:27-30), and of course, for John Mark (Acts 12:25).

Barnabas was always looking around to see who needed acceptance and encouragement. He gave others words, notes, inclusion, and his time. How much like him are you?

- **It calls us to PRESS ON when we fail ourselves.**

Peter did, Paul did, and Mark did. Failure humbled Peter, and gave him a sense of his own inadequacy. This made him skeptical of his own power and brought him to rely instead on God’s enabling grace. For Paul, there were many lessons that he spoke about. But, the love and acceptance of his Savior encouraged him to press on when he failed.

“I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 3:12-14

SEPTEMBER 21

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.” Heb. 13:17

Our Pastors and Elders are our focus today. These church leaders have been appointed by God to protect, teach, and disciple us as a priority in life.

“And He gave some... as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.” Eph 4:11-13

We are to acknowledge their God given authority and have right attitudes and responses to them.

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13:17

We are also to remember their teaching and example, and the investment they made in our life. We are told to remember that they gave their life to help us live for Christ.

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” Heb. 13:7

Remembering your Pastors and Elders – past and present – as you talk with God today. These prayers could include:

- 1) Thanking Him for giving them to you.
- 2) Asking Him to protect them as they are principal targets of the enemy. Their families are also.
- 3) Asking Him to encourage them and comfort them in the face of the trials that they may be facing in ministry and life.
- 4) Asking Him to give them His counsel and direction for themselves and the members in their church.
- 5) Asking the Lord regarding sending a note of thanks or blessing them personally.

SEPTEMBER 22

NOW TRY IT ONE HANDED

“Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work, and the other holding a weapon.” Nehemiah 4:17

After the returning exiles from Babylon had rebuilt the first half of the wall around Jerusalem in obedience to God, opposing forces appeared that required half of the builders to stop work on the rebuilding and stand guard. Furthermore, the rest of the builders had to work while holding a sword in one hand. In addition, more of their time and attention was spent in prayer than had been given during the first part of the rebuilding.

So, they proceeded on to the hardest part, the lifting of the large stones above head height, one handed, with half of the manpower as before. And they finished this incredible task in just 53 days, constantly occupied with possible attacks from multiple opposing forces.

Rebuilding our lives for God, and doing it in the midst of God's enemies, is God's work, done through God's people, for God's glory. Halfway through the rebuilding of your life, don't be surprised that the enemy will see you as a threat and seeks to stop your work. And then...you will have the opportunity to live a supernatural life as never before, lifting impossibly large stones, one handed, asking God to strengthen you to do His will.

You will need to remember the truths about where you are and why, who you serve and how, and what you are to ask for and do. The word “remember” is used nine times in Nehemiah by way of example to us. (1:8, 4:14, 5:19, 6:14, 9:17, 13:14, 22, 29, 31) Here is one:

*“And our enemies said, “They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them, and put a stop to the work.” When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people: “Do not be afraid of them; **remember the Lord who is great and awesome**, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.” And it came about from that day on, that **half** carried on the work while **half** of them held the spears, the shields, the bows, and the breastplates...Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load **with one hand doing the work** and the other holding a weapon... So we carried on the work with **half of them** holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared.”* Nehemiah 4:11-21

If you are now working on rebuilding the 2nd half of your life for God, are being opposed now more than ever, and are limited to using only “one hand”....remember: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.” John 15:16

SEPTEMBER 23

ARMOUR? WARFARE? FORCES OF DARKNESS?

“Take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist..., and having done everything, to stand firm.” Eph. 6:10-13

“Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” Eph 6:10-13

God depicts our life as a Christian as one lived in a great war against His enemies, which it is. Notice that men and women are not our principal Adversaries, but the fallen angels, who deceive and use them, are. Remember today what God has told you about where you are, who you are, what you face, and how to face it. Unless you do, there will be some setbacks and casualties, rather than advances for God’s Kingdom on earth.

1. Where are you today? Still on earth, serving God in the final days of His saving work.

“I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.” Matt. 16:18

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matt. 28:19-20

2. Who are you? A Soldier in God’s army.

“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 Tim. 2:3-4

3. What do you face?

We must face the invisible fallen angels who operate principally by deception, attacking and controlling their victims by how they think. *“Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, ...and after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.” 1 Pet. 5:8-10*

4. How are you to fight? God’s battle plan focuses on three things.

- In His strength, not ours.

*“Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of **His** might.” Eph. 6:10*

- Using the weapons He has given us - the truth.

“Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth.” Eph. 6:14

- Calling headquarters and asking for the artillery.

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times.” Eph. 6:18 You have a direct line.

SEPTEMBER 24

GOD'S RULE ON EARTH – IN THE PAST

*“And God created man in His own image...male and female He created them...and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; **and rule...** over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*
Gen. 1:27-28

God's providential plan has not been hindered in any way by man's sin. But man's sin has brought about a number of incredible changes in the form of God's rule on earth through man.

- **Adam's Sin** caused the first change in God's methods of ruling on the earth. God gave earthly dominion to Adam, but Adam rejected God's rule. So, God took away man's exalted place and rule on earth. Its full return would have to wait for God's Son to become a man, die as mankind's Savior, and then return after the salvation of many, to rule and reign personally on the earth. This has taken thousands of years so far, as God's plan proceeds to save millions of sinners. Thank you Lord, for waiting for us.
- **The Flood** was the second major change. Only 8 people were saved by grace, out of the millions that had been born and were rejecting God's rule. Then came...
- **The Tower of Babel** and the delaying of sin then as thousands of languages were imposed on rebellious mankind. This retarded of their uniting together against God's rule, as they began to war against each other. Separate and warring governments have slowed the spread of man's rebellion since then. Then came another form of God's rule on earth through man.
- **The covenant promise to Abraham**, through Isaac and Jacob to a particular people through whom God would rule came after this. God sent them judges, and then kings, but they also rejected God's rule and turned to worship other Gods. But before Israel was destroyed to make way for the “age of the Gentiles” and the start of the church, prophecies were given declaring what would happen next regarding God's rule on earth through man. They said...
- **God Himself would come personally as the Messiah (Supreme Ruler)**

*“A child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And **the government will rest on His shoulders**; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, **On the throne of David and over his kingdom**, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on, and forevermore.”*
Isa. 9:6-7

Christ came as promised, but Israel rejected His rule. Israel was destroyed and God began, as planned, to build His church starting about 2000 years ago. Jesus asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit to fill, lead, and empower those who would be “born again.” This new form of God's rule on earth involves you. It is....

- **In the hearts of men and women “born again” and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.**
“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”

John 14:16-17

SEPTEMBER 25

CHRIST'S RETURN AND REIGN WITH HIS SAINTS

"...They will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."
Rev. 20:6

We are 2000 years into the age of the church, still waiting for the explicit promise of Christ to return to set up a literal, physical kingdom on earth for a thousand years. We have been told several things regarding His return: **1.** He will return and establish His capital in Jerusalem. **2.** The revived nation of Israel will lead all the nations under Christ's rule and reign as the King of the earth. **3.** Although not perfect, for sin and death still remain, it will be a time of progress and prosperity under the leadership of Christ. **4.** The saints who were part of the first resurrection will join Him and will reign with Him.

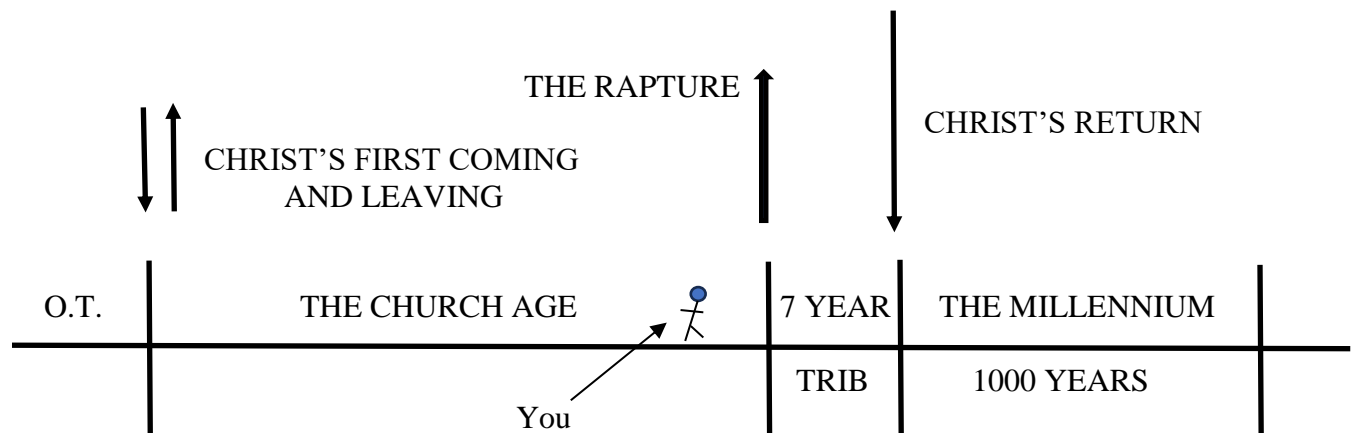
"Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."
Rev. 20:6

Not only will we reign with Christ, but notice, we will also be His priests, thus directing both the civil government and the spiritual instructions for the world's population. The manner of these duties has yet to be revealed. Apparently there will be a hierarchy of many vast duties. (Lk. 19:17,19, Lk. 22:29-30) For example, ministries will surely be needed for a time for those who died very young, even in the fetal state, before the "age of accountability." Many of the saints may be assigned for a time to allow these children to grow both physically and spiritually.

But remember, even after 1000 years of a perfect human environment, with no war, no crime, an abundance of material wealth and excellent spiritual instruction, and the presence of Christ Himself, there will still be a multitude of unsaved men and women on the earth ready to reject Christ and rebel against His rule.

"And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, ...to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore." Rev. 20:7-8

THE THINGS TO COME



SEPTEMBER 26

THE STORY OF JOHN MARK – THE NOBODY AND FAILURE

“Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.” 2 Tim. 4:11

There are seven passages of Scripture that tell us John Mark’s story. It is the story of a weak, unfortunate failure, a nobody, that God loved and graciously exalted to prominence. He is mentioned in six NT books, and was associated with Paul, Luke and Peter when they wrote them. He also wrote one himself. His life tells us a great deal about God. And us.

1. God loves “nobodies”.

Just ask Peter, an uneducated fisherman, or Joseph and Mary, or Zacchaeus. That God would condescend at all to be with man is a wonder, but He has made it clear that He is a lover of the least among us. We are not to doubt His love for us, and know that His eyes are open and His hand is extended to protect, help, and comfort us who are the “nobodies” on the earth.

2. God is gracious when His children fail.

After Mark’s failure, we can be sure that it was God that led Barnabas to seek him out, encourage him, and help him grow. When Peter heard of it, he was probably prompted to remind Mark of his own 3-fold denial, and then Christ’s special visit to tell him his failure had not changed God’s love for him. It had only opened the door of grace wider.

3. God is patient and longsuffering with His children.

It took many long years for Mark to become a mature Christian, someone that Paul would trust without question in his darkest hour, and ask that he would come and be with him. What a transformation. God never gives up on us. His love never weakens and never runs out. Love is patient, as Mark shows us.

4. God provides all we need to grow spiritually. He does so exceedingly.

First there was Peter, the great apostle, who befriended Mark and asked for his help. Then there was Barnabas, the kind man who accepted him. Then there was pushy, demanding, challenging Paul, who told him that he was soft, lazy, and a man of little faith. Then Peter again, then Barnabas, and then Paul again over time. All were led to invest in Mark’s life and bring him to maturity. God provided all that was necessary for Mark’s spiritual growth and did so abundantly. When every story is told, it will be the same. (2 Cor. 9:8)

5. God exalts His children and gives them prominence.

We are not told how John Mark’s later years on earth went. But, his prominence as a mature Christian probably led to some significant opposition, rejection, and suffering, before he left for heaven. They would have added to his rewards. We will see him at the Bema, and get to rule and reign alongside him soon. What a gathering of nobodies and failures.

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” John 15:16

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10

SEPTEMBER 27

APPOINTED AS A PROPHET TO THE NATIONS

"I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1:5

What has God appointed you to? Is it possible that He has appointed you, in some capacity, to be used of Him in reaching some people in the "nations" with His message to them? It is more than possible. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Matt. 28:19-20

What is a prophet? A prophet is an "intermediary" who speaks to others for God. **Prophets are chosen** – like us. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, **just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.**"* Eph 1:3-4

Appointed O.T. prophets were given three things from God– just like us.

1. Insights and truths from the Spirit.

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; **that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**"* 2 Tim. 3:16-17

2. Clear direction to proclaim the truth.

*"I solemnly charge you ...**preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."* 2 Tim. 4:1-2

3. Protection and power to endure through their ministry.

*"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and **let us run with endurance** the race that is set before us."* Heb. 12:1

*"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, **and appointed you**, that you should go and bear fruit, and **that your fruit should remain.**"* John 15:16

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Eph 2:10

What is it that our day needs? Prophets from God. Why are you still here, instead of in heaven? There is still some work God wants to do and He wants to do some of it through you.

"I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." Let's go. Time is short.

SEPTEMBER 28

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR ALL THE SAINTS

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” Eph 6:18

“Saint” is the most common word in the NT for a Christian. It literally means “set apart ones”. Tens of millions of saints live on the planet, spread across more than 200 countries and thousands of people groups and languages. This exhortation, which ends Paul’s discussion of our weapons of truth, that we must use in our battle against the Satanic forces we face, shows the importance of our prayers. Notice the four “alls” in the passage. “All prayer...at all times...with all perseverance...for all the saints”!!! The scope of this is incredible. The privilege of it is wonderful. The potential fruit of it is eternally immense. It is directed toward you. Time to pray.

How can we pray for so many like this? One way is to set aside time to pray for those saints that you know, who are ministering around the country, or around the world. Another way is to intercede for the many you don’t know, either generally, or systematically based on the many continents, countries, and other divisions of our world. Today you are encouraged to pray for the saints who live and minister in CHINA.

China has a population estimated at 1.4 billion, slightly less than India. China has 302 different living languages, which are collectively spoken by 20 percent of the world's population! Mandarin Chinese alone is the most widely spoken native language in the world with nearly a billion within China alone and 1.2 billion worldwide. This is a few hundred million people more than the next most widespread languages, Spanish and English.

You may know the challenges that some of the saints are facing there, and perhaps even some of the saints themselves. The work of reaching every tribe and tongue and people and nation is reaching its completion. We are a part of this as we pray “*with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.*” Someday soon we will know what fruit has been produced through our intercessions and petitions.

SEPTEMBER 29

YOU MIGHT DIE ONESIMUS. GO BACK ANYWAY.

“I appeal to you for... Onesimus... I have sent him back to you.” Philemon 1:10-12

During the fourth year of his confinement in a Roman prison, a runaway slave named Onesimus came into the apostle Paul's life. Having probably stolen some money from his master, Onesimus had run away to Rome where he was likely seeking to lose himself in the immense population which was made up of perhaps 50% slaves. When Paul met him, Onesimus was not a Christian, but had accepted Christ under Paul's influence. Paul was now sending him back to his master Philemon, whom Paul knew and had also led to Christ. We have the letter Paul wrote for Onesimus to take back with him and give to Philemon.

There had been a slave rebellion in the Roman empire. Since slaves were such a large part of the population, this was a major threat. Because of this, runaway or rebellious slaves were punished cruelly, often by crucifixion, to discourage any further rebellions. Going back to his master meant Onesimus could be crucified. What was Paul doing!

He was making a disciple for Christ, teaching him what he had learned as a disciple, and helping him to apply what he had been taught. It is this disciple making pattern that God wants us to see and imitate. What had Paul learned? There are a number of things.

1. **He had learned to be “others oriented”.** Paul was living his life for others. That was how he got into prison. That would be why he would ultimately be beheaded. Read the list of what else it had cost him in 2 Cor. 11.
2. **He had learned how to be useful to God.** He had studied and spent time learning God's perspectives, plans, and principles of life. He knew God and His word well.
3. **He had learned to be evangelistically engaged.** Instead of only sharing a cell, being kind, or talking to Onesimus about slavery or prison life, his engagement with this man was pursued with the intent of getting him to heaven.
4. **He had learned he was to teach others about Christ and to live for Him.** Paul was actually saying to Onesimus “Be an imitator of me, as I am of Christ.” Paul had learned to be a disciple maker, and invest in those who God brought into his life.
5. **He had learned to be a blessing to his disciples.** Paul blessed Onesimus in three ways that we know about. First, he wrote the amazing letter of appeal that we have. Without it, who knows what would have happened. With it there was the potential, which probably came to pass, of a wonderful story of God's grace. Second, Paul also sent a valuable escort with him. Tychicus delivered the letter, and Paul most likely paid for the expenses of Onesimus' journey. Thirdly, Paul offered to pay for what Onesimus had stolen. Paul had thought through what would make Onesimus successful, and did all he could to ensure that it happened. He invested in him.

What did Onesimus do? We know he went back, prepared to die, because we have the letter. Then he probably imitated Paul, and made disciples of his own. Which is why we have the letter.

SEPTEMBER 30

THE DAMASCUS ROAD AND THE THORN

"He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you." 2 Cor. 12:9

The grace of God describes two very different aspects of God's dealing with fallen man. The first is when we are in our fallen state and unsaved. The second is when we are serving Him as Christians. Both of these are seen in the life of the apostle Paul.

PAUL'S DAMASCUS ROAD EXPERIENCE – Saved By God's Grace FOR Him (Acts 9)

Do you remember how we met Paul in Acts? Zealous for God, Paul was working hard FOR his own salvation. He was excelling in good works keeping up with his fellow, "working for our salvation" Jews. He was a Pharisee among Pharisees. He was earning his salvation by personal effort, knew nothing of grace, and had no use for it. He was ignorantly and foolishly on his way to hell. Then, he began to arrest and imprison this new sect of Christians. They were teaching people that salvation is a gift, that Jesus had died for their sins, and that it was impossible by Paul's method to get to heaven. However, God met him on the road to Damascus, got his attention, and opened his eyes to the riches of His grace. Soon, Paul began to preach the gospel himself. The first lesson that Paul had to learn was: *"By grace you have been saved."* (Eph. 2:8) Just so, Paul was saved, and God put him into service. Now, for lesson number 2.

PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH – Empowered By God's Grace IN AND THROUGH Him

After his salvation Paul had to learn that we must have God's empowering grace to live for Him and do what He asks of us. The Christian life is not hard – it is impossible in our own strength. In Paul's case, he was asked to go and proclaim the gospel of grace to Gentiles throughout the Roman empire. He learned and taught about God's enabling grace, surviving beatings, imprisonments, and deprivations for 20 years, after which he was given a "thorn in the flesh," perhaps affecting his eyes and disfiguring him. He asked God 3 times to remove it (2 Cor. 12:7-10). God said, "No, Paul. I want you also to be an example of the second aspect of My grace – that it is not by your strength that you are able to do My work. My enabling grace is perfected by your 'weakness.'"

"Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for (My) power is perfected in (Your) weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Cor 12:8-10

Paul learned that whatever God led him to do, he would never lack for all that was necessary to do it. Although inadequate and unable himself, by abiding in Christ, he was supernaturally able to do all God called him to be and do. *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."* Phil. 4:13 Do you have a thorn? Remember, God told Paul no. He had a reason.

OCTOBER 1

GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Matt. 6:9-10

God created mankind to be in an eternal relationship with Him, and placed us in a visible, physical universe, distinct from heaven. God providentially rules over this creation, as we have seen. But man's sin, and Satan's presence in this creation, are being dealt with over time and mankind's history, to establish and glorify God's beloved Son as the King of Kings, both here on earth and in heaven. Notice the kingdom setting of Christ's life and work.

*“He began going about from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching **the kingdom of God**; and the twelve were with Him.” Luke 8:1*

*“This gospel **of the kingdom** shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14*

*“Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see **the kingdom of God**.” John 3:3*

*“Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to **the kingdom of His beloved Son**, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Col. 1:12-14*

*“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, Who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and **His kingdom**: preach the word!” 2 Tim. 4:1-2*

*“And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True...And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses....And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, **“KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”** Rev. 19:11-16*

God's plan for history has three distinct phases where the operation of His rule is different:

- God's Kingdom On Earth – In The Past
- God's Kingdom On Earth – In The Present
- God's Kingdom On Earth – In The Future

We live of course, in the present. Where do we see God's rule as King in the world today? In us as we make Him our king. He will be returning soon, to rule and reign personally. But for now, His rule is in the hearts of His people, which is why He said to us:

“You are the light of the world.... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:14-16

OCTOBER 2

HEAVEN

*“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.”
Rev. 21:1*

What will heaven be like? What shall we be like? What shall our relationships be like? What will we do there? The last two chapters of our Bibles give us many details. Here are a few.

“And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.” Rev. 22:1-5

- **Heaven is an exclusive place.** This is not to be missed and is pointed out twice in these chapters. *“But for the cowardly and unbelieving... their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Rev. 21:8*
- **Heaven should be what we are living for now.** *“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Col. 3:1-2*
It is possible to be so earthly minded, as to be no heavenly good. Make sure you are not.
- **Heaven will be a big place.** God wants us to know this and gives us some of the dimensions of the huge central city where our mansions are. *“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” Rev. 21:10*
- **Heaven is a spectacular place.** Remember, this is the home of God’s own presence and glory. Jasper walls! Gold buildings and streets! Sapphire and emerald foundation stones! Huge gates made of pearl!
- **Heaven is a never closed, never night, place.** *“And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them.” Rev. 22:5*
- **In Heaven we shall serve God in His presence and reign with Him forever and ever.** *“The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and they shall reign forever and ever.” Rev. 22:3-5*

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.” Rev. 22:12-14

OCTOBER 3

“YOU ARE FORGIVEN”

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.” Rom. 4:7-8

How can we go from being unwelcome in heaven because God will not accept sinners there, to being invited to come? This story helps us remember the main elements of God’s forgiveness.

“You are no longer welcome in my store” said the owner to a young boy who had been caught trying to steal items worth about \$50.00. When the boy’s father found out, he went back with his son and met with the owner, handing him a check for \$350.00. The boy said, “I was wrong, sir, please accept my father’s gift, and forgive me of my sin.” The store manager looked at the check, and then at the boy, smiling. “Your debt has been paid in full, young man. **YOU ARE FORGIVEN.** You are welcome in my store anytime.”

1. We owed a debt to God that had to be removed if we were ever to be welcome in heaven.

*“The heavenly city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it...and **no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it,** but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.” Rev. 21:23-27*

2. Although we had a debt we could not pay, it was paid for us.

*“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.**” 1 Cor. 15:3 This was the only payment God would accept.*

3. When we confessed our sin, and offered Christ’s payment for it, we were FORGIVEN.

*“When you were dead in your transgressions... He made you alive together with Christ, **having forgiven us all our transgressions,** having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us. He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Col. 2:13-14*

4. Furthermore, we will be welcomed with smiles and much more as we enter heaven.

*“But you, beloved,...keep yourselves in the love of God... who is able to...**make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless, with great joy,** to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority.” Jude 1:20-25*

These are the main truths of God’s forgiveness of a repentant sinner: Release from sin’s penalty, removal of the sin itself, and blessing beyond imagining are part of them. It is the incredible story of God’s acceptance of us, because Christ has paid our debt. We have been forgiven by our Father Who is in heaven.

OCTOBER 4

BORN AGAIN? BORN TWICE?

“Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3

Nicodemus was puzzled when the Lord said this to him and he said,

“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he? Jesus answered,...

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” John 3:4-8

You have to have two birthdays to get to heaven and be with God for all eternity. The first of course, is when we are born of a woman. Human beings are amazing, even as newborns. But they have no spiritual capacities or attributes. They are spiritually dead. They must be born again spiritually to share life with God for *“God is, as to His nature, a spiritual being, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)* We must have a spiritual nature also. This means that we must be born again, because the spiritual part of our original nature was what died immediately when Adam and Eve sinned. Speaking of this, Paul said,

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” Eph. 2:1-3

Spiritually dead people, like we were, do not have the ability to live like God wants. They do not have the ability to live selflessly for others. We do, but we must continually “put to death the desires of the flesh,” to do this. By the strength of the indwelling Spirit, we can – but it is a continual battle, requiring continual choices of self-denial.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another...”

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... If we now live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

Gal. 5:16-25

OCTOBER 5

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR THE LOST

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” 1 Pet.4:5-7

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14

Asking God to have saving mercy on unsaved sinners is a privilege He has given to us. It is also a responsibility. We are to “do the work of an evangelist”. (2 Tim. 4:5) This work is not just preaching the gospel, sharing our testimony, and distributing gospel tracts. Indeed, praying for the lost may be the most powerful aspect of this great work.

*“For the gospel has for this purpose been preached... The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit **for the purpose of prayer.**” 1 Pet.4:5-7*

We are to pray for the lost that the gospel would reach them, that God would open their hearts to understand it, and that He would draw them to Christ and accept His free gift of eternal salvation. What a privilege! “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, has whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.” John 15:16

What lost souls could you pray for today?

- In your family. _____.
- Of your neighbors. _____.
- At your work. _____.
- Among your enemies. _____.
- Your past friends. _____.
- In your church. _____.
- In the world. _____.

OCTOBER 6

OUR FOE IN THE BATTLE

“Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about.” 1 Pet. 5:8

We first meet Lucifer (Satan) in the garden, seeking to deceive Eve into rejecting God’s clearly stated will, and to pursue what seems to make good sense. *“And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” Gen. 3:4-5*

We also have a revealing revelation of **Satan’s goals**. Notice his “I wills” to exalt himself that are exposed by the Lord. *“How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’” Isaiah 14:12-14*

What a contrast this is to the goals of our Lord Jesus, who humbled Himself, not to oppose the Father’s will, but to do it! *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” John 6:38*

What does it look like when a Christian firmly stands in this battle against Satan?

1. It means that he or she will habitually examine every idea and thought that comes to their mind, compare it with God’s Word and do what God wants. For, *“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Cor. 10:5*
2. It means that they will be remembering that they cannot stand on their own, but can by depending on God’s strength to do His will, as Christ did in his battles with our Foe. *“And Jesus, **filled with the Holy Spirit, ...was led about by the Spirit...and returned...in the power of the Spirit.**” (Luke 4:1,14)* Jesus was not full of Himself, as are Satan and fallen men, but had yielded His life to the Father’s will, which allowed the indwelling Spirit to lead Him and empower Him in the battle. So must we.

This is what Paul prayed, for those he knew were on the battlefield for their Lord.

“I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.” Eph. 3:14

What does it look like when we aren’t standing?

OCTOBER 7

THE UNFATHOMABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” Rom. 11:33

Sailors measure the depth of water in fathoms. One fathom is 6 ft. They attempt to “fathom” the depth of the water they are sailing in. Sometimes they can. Sometimes the depth is “unfathomable” because it is beyond their ability to measure. Such are the unfathomable riches of Christ to us. Paul was marveling at this when he said, *“To me... grace was given, to preach... the unfathomable riches of Christ.” Eph. 3:8* They are so deep, so unsearchable, that we cannot fathom them completely. But many of Christ’s riches are known, to some depth, by us. We shall further explore their depth for all eternity. They include,

- **God’s mercy to us in Christ.**

Mercy is NOT giving someone what they deserve. *“What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy,”...even us. Rom. 9:22-24. Yes, even us. Unfathomable.*

- **God’s grace to us in Christ.**

Grace continues even deeper. While mercy means that we will not get the punishment we deserve as sinners, grace is the giving to someone what they don’t deserve. We get to rule and reign with Christ. We get to share His life in oneness. We shall be enabled to *“stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy.” Jude 1:24* For all eternity. **Unfathomable.**

- **God’s love for us in Christ.**

The word used to describe God’s love for us is “agape,” which means *“to consider another more important than yourself, to the point of dying for them” (see Phil. 2:3-8)* It describes the wonder of God giving His life, and dying, so that we could live. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16* He loved you, and died for you. Now, He desires that you *“may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.” Eph 3:18-19* **Unfathomable.**

OCTOBER 8

EXCEPT FOR GOD – IT’S TRUE

“Work out your salvation, with a proper sense of awe and responsibility. For it is God who is at work within you, giving you the will and the power to achieve His purpose.” Phil. 2:12-13

God’s plan for us usually includes doing things we cannot do. Not only do we need to seek and pursue the works He has prepared for us that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10), but we need to reject some ideas that seem correct and logical. They would be true except for God’s power working in us and through us. Much of what God asks us to do is impossible in our own strength. But we can do the impossible, through Him who strengthens us.

Our enemy, using the people in our lives, can say things like the following. Ever heard them?

- You should not be trying this.
- You are incapable of ever doing this.
- What you are thinking of doing is not possible.
- What you need to do this is not available.
- You are wasting your life on this.
- This is a mistake.

Except for God – they would be right. But God did not choose you to do His work in the present age because of your ability to save other people by your ability to share the gospel. You can’t save anyone. But you can. Neither did God choose you because of your knowledge and experience to help people transform their souls and thus their lives. You can’t. But you can.

Many of the stories we have in God’s word illustrate this. Do you remember Peter’s venture to leave the boat and walk on the water? He was commanded by Christ to do something impossible. And he did – until he “began to doubt” that he could do it. He then began to sink. It is the same with us. When we accept the logical thought that WE cannot be doing this thing, and forget that God has called us to do it – we look at the “the wind and waves” that we face and begin to sink. We give up doing what God has called us to do.

“And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Matt. 14:28-31

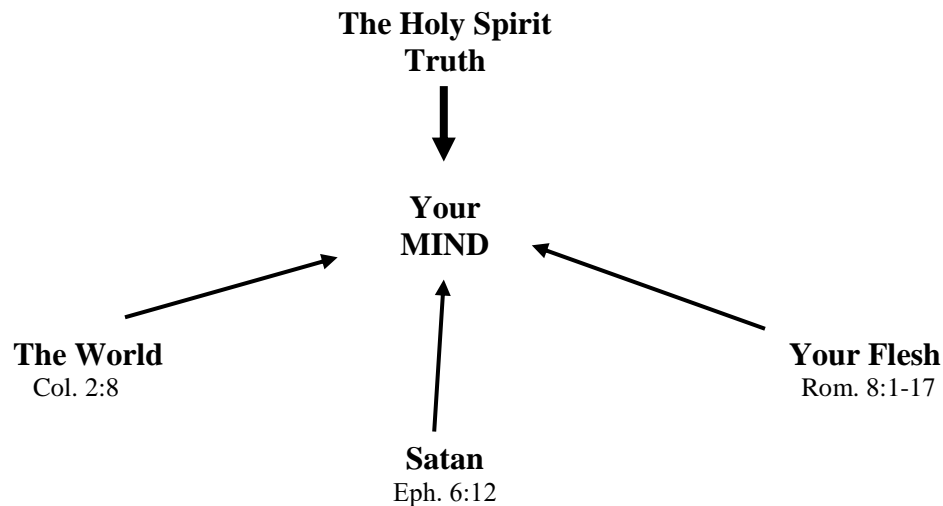
What God has called you to do in life – is not hard. It is impossible in your own strength. You can’t do it. But you can.

OCTOBER 9

THE BATTLE FOR YOUR MIND

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Rom 12:2

This devotional has been written to influence your mind, so that your mind will influence what you do today – for the Lord. But you also face three enemies that are seeking to influence and control our mind – to reject the Lord. You are in a continual, life long battle conducted in your mind.



“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Col. 3:2

*“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. **Therefore, take up the full armor of God**, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins **with truth**.”*
Eph 6:12-14

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Col 2:8

“For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
Rom. 8:6-8

Got your sword? Don't forget your shield.

OCTOBER 10

THE 2-FOLD BLESSING AT THE END OF THE STORY

*“And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends,
and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold.” (Job 42:10)*

Job lost all ten of his children in a single day. He had served God as well as anyone on the planet (1:1). Why did this happen to such a man? Satan had asked to bring this about and God allowed it. Why? To teach him things about God and life? To develop his character? Yes, we are told God uses these things for these purposes. But beyond these purposes for suffering, our HOPE is built on knowing that **at the end of the story** of our life, all of the hard things will be gone and the blessings that God will pour out upon us will be much more than we can even imagine now.

*“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of **His inheritance** in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.*

*And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, **the fulness of Him who fills all in all.**” Eph. 1:18-23*

*“But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, “In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.” These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, **waiting anxiously** for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”*

Jude 1:17-21

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus **we shall always be with the Lord.** Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*

1 Thess. 4:16-18

*“He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. **Come, Lord Jesus.**”*

Rev. 22:20

OCTOBER 11

THANK YOU LORD FOR OUR PASTOR

*“You learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant,
who is a faithful servant of Christ.” Col. 1:7*

During Paul’s 3-year ministry in Ephesus, during his third missionary journey, a man from Colosse (about 100 miles from Ephesus) arrived, was saved, and when he returned home, he started a church there. As he devoted his life to the saints there, he became a minister to them of the Word and their Pastor. Several years later a heresy arose in Colosse teaching mystical experiences contrary to Scripture and was ruining lives. Epaphras was so concerned that he made the long journey to Rome to visit Paul, in order to clarify the issues biblically. This journey was at great cost and risk, and Epaphras was put in prison while there. It was during this time that Paul’s letter to the Colossian church was written, telling us about Pastor Epaphras. Seven different statements are made about his work, goals, heart, and efforts on behalf of his church family, and his faithfulness to the Word of God. They tell us what faithful Pastors do.

- **He was a “beloved, faithful, fellow bond-servant of Christ.” 1:7**
These statements came from Paul, who has been sharing the gospel ministry with Epaphras for years, and had now been joined in prison by him for speaking and standing for Christ. Thank you for your sacrifices for us Pastor.
- **He was a “fellow-prisoner” with Paul. 1:23**
Why was he in prison? Because he had devoted himself to ministering to the saints who had been allocated to his charge. He knew the risks, but the church was being attacked. Thank you Pastor, for your love for us.
- **He had lived his life selflessly – for others. 1:7**
“Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf.” He was others oriented, a selfless lover of others. Thank you, Pastor.
- **He was a committed teacher of God’s Word. 1:5-7**
Paul exhorted the Colossian church regarding the truths they needed saying: *“Of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, just as you learned it from Epaphras.”* Thank you for teaching us the truth Pastor.
- **His goal in life was to see his people mature. 4:12**
Epaphras...is...always laboring ...that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.” His passion and efforts in life were to see his people grow, and mature, and become complete in Christ. Thank you, Pastor, for investing in us.
- **He was always laboring in prayer for his people. 4:12**
“Epaphras...is... always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers.” Thank you, Pastor for your prayers for us.
- **He was also deeply concerned for Christians he knew in other towns. 4:13** *“For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.”* These were towns many miles from Colossae, but Epaphras had come to know the Christians there, and sought to help them also. Thank you, Pastor for your caring heart.

OCTOBER 12

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR OUR AUTHORITIES

“As a matter of first importance, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority.” 1 Tim. 2:1-2

There are 5 different authorities that are identified in the NT. Governmental authorities are the focus of our text. The others (elders, parents, husbands, masters) will be addressed later. The primary reason we are to be praying for those who run the government of our particular nation is clearly stated.

“... in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 2:2-4

The “all men” that God desires to be saved would include BOTH those who are in governments, and those people that governments have authority over. Being able to live a “*tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity*” would mean little persecution and opposition from our government to share the gospel and stand for Christ. Being a good citizen in the eyes of our government officials, to the extent that we do, would be a good witness to them also.

Few committed Christians have been able to enjoy the freedoms and support of their government as have Americans. But this has rapidly diminished over the last 50 years. The costs of standing and speaking boldly for Christ are now significant. How should we, and must we, now pray?

1. That our standing for Christ would not be silenced, either by threats or by law.
2. That our living and speaking for Christ would not lead to harm from the government.
3. That our government officials, at all levels, would hear the gospel and many get saved.
4. That the light of Christ through us and His church would bring many to salvation.
5. That we and other Christians would not become spiritual cowards as the costs increase.
6. That the examples of those who have gone before us, and were both willing to die for their faith, and exhibited good attitudes toward their government authorities, would guide us.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:14-16

Light shines the brightest in the darkness. It is turned on, and increases in intensity, by prayer.

OCTOBER 13

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." John 10:11

To clarify our new relationship with Him, Christ used a number of analogies to help us grasp the wonder of it. Are you familiar with the nature and vulnerability of sheep? I grew up with sheep and lived for a time near ranches with large flocks of sheep, shepherds, and wolves. Sheep are weak creatures, defenseless, prone to wander, and have a proclivity to make wrong decisions. They are foolish. We are the sheep in the analogy. *"All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own (foolish) way."* Isaiah 53:6

Sheep need a Shepherd. They need to fully trust and obey their Shepherd, lest they fall prey to wolves, weeds, and worse. Sheep learn their Shepherd's voice and to follow him, but he must carry a rod and a staff to guide and discipline them. They are safe with him, but they get lost quickly and die when they either have no shepherd or have a poor one. But...

1. If Christ is our Shepherd, then our Shepherd is God Himself!

This is a most wonderful truth. If we grasp this, it changes how we think. **David** was so taken by it that he wrote the 23rd Psalm and must have sung it with passion. *"The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He leadeth me beside....His rod and staff they... Yea though I walk thru...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever!"*

The apostle **Paul** was so taken by this truth that he wrote:

"If God is for us, who is against us?...For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:31,38,39

2. Furthermore, if Christ is our Shepherd, then our Shepherd is our SAVIOR.

Our Shepherd shall not lead us to the Savior – He is the Savior, and He has laid down His life for us. *"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."* John 10:11

3. Unfortunately, many people are not Christ's sheep. They do not believe that they need a Savior.

"But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." John 10:26-28

Are you one of Christ's sheep? Sleep well. Are you not one of His sheep? He invites you to become one. Only those in His flock will be in heaven. Those who have rejected Him will have wandered into the eternal lake of fire.

OCTOBER 14

THANK YOU EZRA

“The good hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Ezra 7:9-10

Have you ever been to a week long, 8 hours per day, Bible conference where mature men of God taught you God’s word and principles of life? Did the Holy Spirit then bring conviction and motivations to live in “newness of life”? Was there perhaps some grief, some repentance, and some commitments, along with new hope and a sense of being loved by a forgiving, wonderful God? Ezra was the vessel God used to lead this type of a revival as the people assembled and listened to God’s word in that very difficult time.

Nehemiah had come and led the people to separate themselves from their godless world and its ways by rebuilding the walls and gates into Jerusalem where they lived. Now they had to learn to live by God’s principles and instructions about life. Ezra was prepared to do this, for he had “*set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel*”. He had given his life to this.

The same pattern is actually given to each of us, with the expectation that God will use us to help others rebuild their lives in the midst of our godless world. Notice the three steps of this pattern expressed by Peter: 1) our salvation, 2) our spiritual growth, and finally 3) our usefulness and fruitfulness in the lives of others.

1) “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

*2) Now **for this very reason also, applying all diligence**, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For 3) **if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”*
2 Pet. 1:2-8

Are you an example of moral excellence? Are you diligently studying God’s word and increasing in your knowledge of God’s principles and ways? Are you persevering even when it is costly? Are you growing in kindness, patience, and gentleness? Are you living your life for others? Ezra was. And if these qualities are yours and are increasing...

“The good hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Ezra 7:9-10

OCTOBER 15

THE “D”s OF THE DEVIL

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” 1 Pet. 5:8

The moment Jesus began His public ministry (*Luke 4*), He was immediately opposed by Satan, who sought to DECEIVE Him and eliminate His usefulness as our Savior. Now that God has sent you to lead people to Christ, by your words and your life, you are a target of Satan’s to make you as useless and as fruitless as he can. He does this by using a number of “D”s. Be on the alert.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. He would DISTRACT you. | Don’t get involved with things that you shouldn’t. |
| 2. He would DIVIDE us. | Unity is what God emphasizes. <i>Eph. 4:1-3</i> |
| 3. He would DISILLUSION you. | Doubting what God has said is condemned. <i>Jam. 1:6</i> |
| 4. He would DECEIVE you. | Satan deceives by counterfeiting the truth. <i>1 Pet. 5:8-9</i> |
| 5. He would DEMORALIZE you. | When you have left God out, he has won the battle. |
| 6. He would DISQUALIFY you. | The world and our flesh are his means in pursuing this. |

Knowing these things about how Satan operates, what are we to do? Apply the “R”s.

1. **RESIST** him mentally, firm in your faith.

*“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But **resist him**, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”*
1 Pet. 5:8-9

2. **REJECT** him, using God’s Word. (*Luke 4, Eph. 6:10-17*)

*“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days; and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “**It is written**, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”*
Luke 4:1-4

3. **REQUEST** that God would protect you against Satan and all his fallen angels.

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let **your requests** be made known to God.”*
Phil. 4:6

Remember the “D”s. Be on the alert. Resist. Reject. Request.

OCTOBER 16

RECLAIMING SURRENDERED GROUND

“The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” 2 Cor. 10:4

How does Satan gain control of our mind? How does he build and expand false mental ideas that gradually control more and more of our thinking and responses to life? Deceptive lies are the answer. He uses what is not true to deceive us about three things: ourselves, what we have done, and what has been done to us. Getting God’s perspectives in these three areas and imposing them on our thinking and our circumstances is our only hope of escape. These three areas are:

1. What we think of ourselves.

“You are a failure.” “You are a nobody.” “You can’t do anything.” “Nobody will want somebody like you.” “Compared to others, you are no good.” “You don’t and won’t amount to much.” When these ideas are repeated, and we continue to hear and accept them, we begin to believe them, and act accordingly. We reject who we are, we withdraw, we get discouraged and depressed, and worse. The remedy is to learn that all these thoughts are false. Of all the things God could have made for Himself, He made you! That incredible concept is the absolute truth. Of all the things God could have given His life for, He gave it for you! He loves you and delights in you as His beloved child. You will be ruling and reigning with God soon for the rest of eternity.

2. What we have done in the past.

We have sinned in the past – sometimes these are horrible and are used by Satan who brings them to mind as the negatives that they are. God wants us to take these grievous things and clear our conscience of them and in doing so, we let Him glorify His Son. Paul had overseen the persecution and murder of Christians before his salvation. But he soon was able to say, *“I thank God, whom I serve **with a clear conscience.**” (2 Tim. 1:3)* A clear conscience means that I have asked those I have wronged in the past to forgive me, and made restitution as needed. It means that no one can now say “He wronged me, and has never tried to make it right.” When we have a clear conscience, Satan’s ability to use our past failures to control our mind is gone.

3. What has been done to us in the past.

How do we eliminate these hurts and wrongs as an avenue for Satan to control our mind? We forgive those who have wronged us. *“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble.” (Heb. 12:15)* *“Let all bitterness...be put away from you, along with all malice... and be forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Eph. 4:31-32* When memories come to mind, let God use them for good.

OCTOBER 17

THE REVELATION OF THINGS TO COME

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place, and He sent and signified it by His angel.” Rev. 1:1

The church age, then the rapture, then the seven year tribulation, then the return of Christ, then the millennium, then the creation of new heavens and earth, and then eternity with Christ. What God wants us to know about these **things to come** are written for us in the Book of Revelation given to us as the church age began. We have been told, in prior Scriptures, of God’s view of history since the creation (OT), of Christ’s coming and work of redemption (Gospels), and then, why we are still here, what we face, and how we are then to live (NT epistles).

We are now about 2000 years into **the church age** and approaching the rapture and the tribulation, the next events. *“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thess 4:13-18*

The **seven year tribulation** at the end of the church age, after the gospel has been preached throughout the whole world to every tribe and tongue and people and nation, will begin with all of its horrors and death. The progression of God’s wrath on unsaved mankind is described in detail from chapter 4 through chapter 19, just as Christ predicted it. *“For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created, until now, and never shall. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved.” Mark 13:19-20*

Following this great judgment we are told of **Christ’s coming to rule on the earth** with His saints for 1000 years. *“And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war, and His name is called The Word of God...And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses...and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Rev 19:11-14, 20:4*

When the 1000 years are complete there will be a short rebellion as Satan is released from his prison. It quickly ends and then comes **the creation of a new heaven and earth**. All of us who are saved shall live there in God’s presence, sharing His life, for all eternity. *“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away; and there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.” Rev. 22:3-4*

Why has God waited so long to get to these final things to come? He has been waiting – for you.

OCTOBER 18

THE ONE ANOTHERS

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God.” 1 John 4:7

Be warned. This is convicting.

1. Be devoted to one another. *Rom. 12:10*
2. Give preference to one another in honor. *Rom. 12:10*
3. Be of the same mind toward one another. *Rom. 12:16*
4. Let us not judge one another anymore. *Rom. 14:13*
5. Build up one another. *Rom. 14:19*
6. Accept one another. *Rom. 15:7*
7. Greet one another. *Rom. 16:1*
8. Wait for one another. *1 Cor. 11:33*
9. Have the same care for one another. *1 Cor. 12:25*
10. Serve one another. *Gal. 5:13*
11. Show forbearance to one another. *Eph. 4:2*
12. Speak truth to one another. *Eph. 4:25*
13. Be kind to one another. *Eph. 4:32*
14. Forgive one another. *Eph. 4:32*
15. Speak to one another in psalms and hymns. *Eph. 5:19*
16. Be subject to one another. *Eph. 5:21*
17. Regard one another as more important than yourself. *Phil. 2:3*
18. Do not lie to one another. *Col. 3:9*
19. Bear with one another. *Col. 3:13*
20. Teach one another with wisdom. *Col. 3:16*
21. Admonish one another. *Col. 3:16*
22. Abound in love for one another. (14 times) *1 Thess. 3:12*
23. Comfort one another. *1 Thess. 4:18*
24. Encourage one another. *1 Thess. 5:11, Heb. 3:13*
25. Build up one another. *1 Thess. 5:11*
26. Live in peace with one another. *1 Thess. 5:13*
27. Never repay one another evil for evil. *1 Thess. 5:15*
28. Seek after that which is good for one another. *1 Thess. 15:15*
29. Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. *Heb. 10:24*
30. Do not speak against one another. *James 4:11*
31. Do not complain against one another. *James 5:9*
32. Confess your sins to one another. *James 5:16*
33. Pray for one another. *James 5:16*
34. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. *1 Pet. 4:9*
35. Employ your spiritual gift in serving one another. *1 Pet. 4:10*
36. Clothe yourself in humility toward one another. *1 Pet. 5:5*

OCTOBER 19

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR THE MEMBERS OF MY CHURCH

*“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” James 5:13-16*

Paul told the Ephesians church that *“the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (Eph. 4:16)* He then exhorted them at length regarding how they were to work together as a church. He ended with this great emphasis on praying for one another, saying... *“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”*

Eph. 6:18

What members in your church could you pray for today? What members need prayer?

- The elderly
- Those with health needs
- Moms
- Dads
- Kids
- The Widowed
- Singles
- Divorced
- Those needing clear direction
- The worldly
- Church leaders
- Wives
- Husbands
- Those with work and material needs
- Ministry leaders
- Students
- The handicapped
- The immature, rebellious, self-oriented
- The hardworking and faithful
- Those needing reproof and admonition
- Those needing encouragement and comfort

OCTOBER 20

THINKING AND WALKING AS A MEMBER

“When you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you.” 1 Cor. 11:18

Christianity as to its nature is more corporate than individualistic. After teaching about salvation from the penalty of sin, and becoming saved as individuals, the focus and work of the apostles was on our membership and responsibilities in a local church. (see Rom. 12 / Eph.4) God places us in the body as MEMBERS and our usefulness to Him depends upon our understanding and focus on being a functioning member of a local church. We are to:

- 1. Think like a member.** *“So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (Rom. 12:5)* This understanding of being a member is then the basis for many of the exhortations God has given us. For example, *“Consider others more important than yourself, defer to weaker members, love one another.”*
- 2. Walk like a member.** The list is long. Some examples: *“As each has received a gift, employ it in serving **one another**, selflessly love **one another**, encourage, accept, care for, be kind to, bear with, comfort, stimulate to good works, pray for, build up, admonish, serve, be devoted to, give preference to, teach, help, and many other such “**one another**” commands.*
- 3. Submit like a member.** We are to submit as a member to those who are appointed by God to lead us as our elders and Pastors. *“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13:17*

What happens when we do not think, walk, and submit correctly about membership in the church God desires us to be a member of? Division in the church. So, remember:

*“God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, whereas our seemly members have no need of it. **But God has so composed the body, ... that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.***

*And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. **Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.**”*
1 Cor. 12:18-27

OCTOBER 21

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL COWARDICE

“God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and sound judgement.”
2 Tim. 1:7

Paul and Timothy had been working together in serving Christ for many years by the time 2nd Timothy was written. Both of their situations had both become increasingly difficult as they stood for Christ now in different places. Paul was in prison and false teachers had crept into Timothy's church. Have you ever reflected on how standing for Christ in a culture and church that was increasingly hostile had impacted Timothy? He was becoming **a spiritual coward** – at least that is what Paul thought. He used the word *deilia* which can mean **timidity, fear, and cowardice**. Spiritual cowardice can come when we begin to face what we do not want, or want what we no longer have. Timothy had done well, but his standing boldly for Christ (*Mt. 16:24*) had waned in the face of growing opposition against him and his ministry. Paul's letter reveals to us three things about **how spiritual cowardice develops in a Christian**:

1. It **BEGINS** as we **view our difficult circumstances incorrectly**. We begin to think: “this cannot be God's plan for me” or “this is beyond God's control” forgetting *Rom. 8:28, John 15:16*, etc. It begins when we do not impose God's truths on our circumstances.

*“I remind you to **kindle afresh** the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of **timidity**, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but **join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God**, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling.”*
2 Tim. 1:6-9

2. It **GROWS** when we **respond to rejection and opposition incorrectly**. We can develop a plan of “self-preservation” vs. a plan of self-denial. We can become angry and bitter. We can be strong in “common sense” vs. God's grace which gives us the desire and power to do **His** will.
3. Spiritual cowardness **IS EVIDENCED** in **5 progressive ways**.
 - 1) We drop our ministries (vs. 2).
 - 2) We violate biblical principles we once embraced. (vs. 3)
 - 3) We pursue entanglements to justify what we want. (vs. 4)
 - 4) We manipulate and play emotional games. (vs. 5)
 - 5) We act as if there is nothing to oppose. (vs. 6).

Have you become Timid? Fearful? Cowardly? Timothy was, so it can happen. So what are you to do? Be strong in the grace that you have in Christ Jesus. Rededicate your life. Join with the saints who have gone before you in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.

OCTOBER 22

DEMAS HAS DESERTED ME...BUT THE LORD STOOD WITH ME

"Demas...has deserted me...but the Lord stood with me." 2 Tim. 4:10,17

"Deserted" says Paul. "By my friend. He deserted me. I miss him, but he is gone." As he continues to tell Timothy how it is going for him there in prison, he uses the word "deserted" a few verses later. *"At my first defense **no one** supported me, but **all deserted me.**" (4:16)* So, this was a time when, not only his close friend, but most everybody had abandoned him – but not the Lord. Have you been "deserted"? Have people you have counted on, who have supported you, gone away from you– selfishly perhaps, like Demas and the others in Paul's life? If not, you are a rare exception. But when it happens in life, when our family and friends desert us, sometimes by death, God is standing with us.

*"**But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me**...The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom." 2 Tim. 4:17-18*

*"For He Himself has said, **'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you...**' Heb. 13:5*

We find the same promise in Scripture given to Moses, Joshua, David and others when they found themselves alone as they chose to serve and obey God.

*"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. **He will not fail you or forsake you.**" Deut. 31:6*

*"Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; **I will not fail you or forsake you.**" Joshua 1:5*

*"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for **Thou art with me**; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me **all the days of my life**, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Psalm 23:1-6*

When our mind goes to what others have done to desert us, we must remember what followed in Paul's mind – that God will never leave or forsake us.

*"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, **that He may be with you forever**; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because **He abides with you, and will be in you.**" John 14:16-17*

OCTOBER 23

COMMITMENTS, NOT PREFERENCES

“Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path. I have sworn, and I will confirm it, that I will keep Thy righteous ordinances.” Psalm 119:105-106

To be a strongly committed Christian means you have made life changing commitments in the areas that God has given you from His word. But there is a dilemma. Clearly taking a stand for Christ usually brings opposition and pressure to compromise or change. Weakly committed Christians don't stand for long. They often quit, and then actually turn away from those who are standing for Christ. *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth.” 2 Tim. 4:3-4*

A preference is something I intend to do – as long as the cost is not too high. A strong commitment is something I purpose to do – whatever the cost. It is purposing to love God with all of my heart, and by His enabling grace to live in submission to His revealed will.

Here, by way of example, are 5 commitments that some have made. Have you made them?

1. The Bible is the inspired Word of God and I make it the final authority for my life.

This is where we must start. Failure here is to fail in the Christian life. Weak in the battle, we become rather useless when the tests of life come. Building our life on the principles of God's Word make us both useful and fruitful. There is no other way.

2. The church is Christ's delight and priority. I commit to make it mine. He died for her.

How much of your life have you committed to building God's church?

3. God designed marriage. I am committed to God's design for marriage.

Over 50% of Christians in America who say “For better or for worse, until death do us part” get divorces. They give excuses and adjust God's design to fit their situation. They had strong marriage preferences.

4. My children belong to God. I commit to teach them God's word and ways and walk.

America's schools teach them the opposite. Many Christian schools, at all levels, teach them preferences.

5. God has established human authorities to recognize and honor. I commit to honoring the authorities in my life according to God's principles.

There are biblical lines here that we must clarify and heed, for all of these authorities. Do you know what they are? Are you committed to honoring them?

OCTOBER 24

REWARDS ARE WAITING

“And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.”
Gal. 6:9

If we have trusted in Christ and are saved, why are we still here, and not in heaven with Christ? The bottom-line reason is this: God loves you! He wants to share His life and saving work with you, along with the glory and rewards that go with it. Notice how this is stated for us.

- Jesus declared that He was the light of the world while on the earth (*John 9:5*), but now... ***“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”*** Matt. 5:14-16

- Christ is also building His church, but He is building it through us! *“I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”* Matt. 16:18 But...

“The whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Eph. 4:16 And each of us has been given abilities and talents, so that...

*“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that **in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.**”* 1 Pet. 4:10-11 And also remember...

*“God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, it is much truer that **the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.**”* 1 Cor. 12:18-22

- There are rewards waiting for us that we would not receive without our good works! *“Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for **your reward in heaven is great,** for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* Matt. 5:11-12
“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions.” Col. 1:24

Why are we still here? God loves us and is sharing His life with us. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. May your reward be great.

OCTOBER 25

“LORD, I’M NOT WILLING TO DO THIS.”

“But Jonah rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord.” Jonah 1:3

There came a time in Jonah’s life when what God wanted him to do was a great struggle for him mentally, emotionally, and relationally. He did not agree with it, and decided not to do it. He would not give in.

1. What We Do When What The Lord Says To Us Is Difficult Mentally And Emotionally.

- We “flee from the presence of the Lord”. He went in the opposite direction from what God wanted. The Ninevites had slaughtered his people.
- Notice that the costs and consequences of this fleeing did not bother him. He paid the fare all the way to Tarshish. The costs of disobedience did not concern him. “*They threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep.* (vs. 1:5) He didn’t care. It got worse.
- Jonah was willing to die, rather than do this particular thing the Lord had told him to do. “*And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea.” (1:12)* He should have said, “I repent and will obey”, but he kept rejecting the clear direction of the Lord. Do you know any believers who have come to a place of disagreement with God, dug in their heels, and seem willing to die rather than yield themselves to God?

But let us notice – this story is not only about Jonah. What God does is the real story.

2. What Does God Do When We Do This?

- **He does not let those He loves just go their own way.** If we are faithless toward Him, He remains faithful towards us. God first kept after Jonah by bring **the huge storm** to turn him around. But Jonah still refused, even though the message was clear to him.
- Furthermore, **He is persistent and patient** with us when we are like this and does not give up on His plans for us. Jonah thought that he had been able to get his own way when he told the sailors to throw him overboard. But no, **the great fish** God had prepared for this very time was waiting there in the water for Jonah. But then, He finally repented in the belly of the fish and found himself not only forgiven, but put right back to the tasks God had planned for him all along.

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.” Jonah 3:1-2

Why is this story in God’s Word to us? It deals with His patience with a man He asked to play a part in His forgiving and saving work for sinners, but didn’t want any part in it. God is loving, merciful, patient, and forgiving. Jonah wasn’t. But God was to him. Amazingly so. And to you.

OCTOBER 26

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR ALL THE SAINTS

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” Eph 6:18

“Saint” is the most common word in the NT for a Christian. It literally means “set apart ones”. Tens of millions of saints live on the planet, spread across more than 200 countries and thousands of people groups and languages. This exhortation, which ends Paul’s discussion of our weapons of truth, that we must use in our battle against the Satanic forces we face, shows the importance of our prayers. Notice the four “alls” in the passage. “All prayer...at all times...with all perseverance...for all the saints”!!! The scope of this is incredible. The privilege of it is wonderful. The potential fruit of it is eternally immense. It is directed toward you. Time to pray.

We will return to this command every month as a reminder of its importance. But how can we pray for so many like this? One way is to set aside time to pray for those saints that you know, who are ministering around the country, or around the world. Another way is to intercede for the many you don’t know, either generally, or systematically based on the many continents, countries, and other divisions of our world. Today you are encouraged to pray for the saints who live and minister in EUROPE.

There are 44 countries in Europe with a total population of 745 million. This represents 9% of the world’s population. Over 200 indigenous languages are spoken as well as scores of non-European language groups that have come through migration. Less than 5% of the population are thought to be practicing evangelicals.

You may know the challenges that some of the saints are facing there, and perhaps even some of the saints themselves. The work of reaching every tribe and tongue and people and nation is reaching its completion. We are a part of this as we pray *“with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”* Someday soon we will know what fruit has been produced through our intercessions and petitions.

OCTOBER 27

PROCLAIMING THE RICHES OF CHRIST. HOW?

“To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.” Eph 3:8

Paul was very probably a much more unlikely person for God to enlist and use to advance the gospel than you. He had given himself to destroying it and as many followers of Christ as he could. But God’s grace and power worked in him and through him to reach many for Christ and build His church. He has a plan for you too. *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” John 15:16*

How are we to do this? God tells us, in the verses that follow our text. There are many concepts here, but we can emphasize the three main points. We are to:

- 1) ***“bring to light...the wisdom of God...***
- 2) ***now... made known through the church,...***
- 3) ***being strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.” Eph. 3:9-16***

If we do not know the truths God has revealed in His Word, or are not active members of the church He has chosen for us, and are not pursuing these things by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we will not be as useful or fruitful as we could be and should be. (*1 Pet. 1:5-8*)

- 1) *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Tim. 2:15*
“Proclaim the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” 2 Tim. 4:2
- 2) *“But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” 1 Cor. 12:18*
“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” 1 Pet. 4:10
- 3) *“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit.” Luke 4:1*
“And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.” Luke 4:14

Knowing God’s Word. Being A Member Of His Church. Walking In The Power Of The Spirit.

To you,...this grace was given...to proclaim the unfathomable riches of Christ.

What’s your plan for today?

OCTOBER 28

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE ELIJAH?

“Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 1 Kings 19:9

Where was Elijah? Hiding in a cave. Before this time, he had been serving God and others in self-denial. Now he was only thinking about himself. He had grown weary in well doing. He had become fearful and had abandoned God’s calling to stand for Him in a tough day.

Soon after this abandonment God came to him and asked him what he was doing. *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”* Elijah responded by talking all about himself. **“I alone** am doing Your work. **I alone** have stood for You.” He had done well, but he was wrong. There were 7000 others who had also been standing firm! What did God do? The same thing He did with Peter after he denied Christ publicly three times to avoid the cost. Surprisingly, God put him back into a significant place of ministry.

“And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram, and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet.”” 1 Kings 19:15-16

Are you weary in well doing? Understandably so, if you have stood and spoken for Christ in our day. But at some point, you can expect to hear the Holy Spirit ask you about what you are doing. If you have lost God’s perspective, like Elijah and Peter, you may justify where you are by what you have done, comparing yourself to others and thinking about the good things accomplished. But remember what Paul said to Timothy when he got to a similar place. He had also done well, but ministry had gotten tougher than he had ever known. What then did God lead Paul to say to him?

*“But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, ...**fulfill your ministry.**”* Then, using his own life as an example, he said, in effect, **“fight the good fight, finish your course, keep the faith-like I have.”** (2 Tim. 4:5-7)

Perhaps you know an older Elijah, or a young Timothy who has backed off or even run away from where the Lord has placed them to serve Him and others. Paul wrote letters to encourage his friend and child Timothy in the faith. Personal words of blessing, encouragement, and correction are often needed. If your brother sins...

We don’t know what Elijah did after God called him back to give his life for others. We will find out one day. Hopefully we will discover that he went on to finish his course and fight the good fight, keeping the faith and fulfilling the ministries God had prepared for him. Are you?

OCTOBER 29

WARNING: SOME FOLKS IN CHURCH NEED TO BE SILENCED

“For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers...who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach.” Titus 1:10-11

If someone at church is sinning as described by Paul in his letter to Titus, and causing trouble among the members, go to them. (Mt. 18:15) If they persist, go tell the Elders that there is a problem. Families are being upset and false doctrines about salvation and how God wants us to live are being taught. But if the church leaders are disregarded or opposed, and then these people are not silenced, then the entire church is in serious trouble.

*“The overseer must be above reproach as God's steward...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. **For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers...who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain...For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith...They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.**”* Titus 1:7-16

Paul identifies **10 characteristics** of people who can destroy the potential of any church if they are not dealt with – and how to deal with them.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. They struggle with authority, rejecting it. | Titus 3:1/Jude 1:8/2 Pet. 2:10 |
| 2. They serve only when it serves them. | Titus 3:2 |
| 3. They give bad reports about others. | Titus 3:2 |
| 4. They “nit pick” irrelevant issues. | Titus 3:2 |
| 5. They are exclusive in their relationships. | Titus 3:3 |
| 6. They are harsh and hard. | Titus 3:3 |
| 7. They raise foolish controversies. | Titus 3:9 |
| 8. They create rivalries and divisions. | Titus 3:10 |
| 9. They have non-biblical authorities. | Titus 1:14 |
| 10. They dispute decisions and standards. | Titus 1:15 |

What are we and our leaders instructed to do when they come into our lives and church?

1. AVOID reacting or even responding to their focus.

*“For men will be...holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power. **Avoid such men as these.**”* 2 Tim. 3:5

2. REMIND AND TEACH THEM biblical truths and principles. Titus 3:1

3. REMOVE THEM quickly if they do not respond to authority with right attitudes. Titus 3:10

OCTOBER 30

GOD'S GOODNESS IS KNOWN BY HIS PROVISIONS

"With a pillar of cloud Thou didst lead them by day and with a pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go." Nehemiah 9:12

God in His goodness has provided for His people Israel throughout their long history. A short list of 7 is found in Nehemiah 9:12-15. God was very good to them, but not because of anything they did. He provides for us in the same ways He provided for them. He is so good.

- **God came personally to be with them.**

"Then Thou didst come down on Mount Sinai, and didst speak with them." Neh. 9:13 God is good to us like this, for Jesus told us that *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever."* (John 14:16) and, *"He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'"* Heb. 13:5

- **God led them in life.**

"Thou didst lead them by day, and with a pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go." So with us... *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things."* John 14:26

- **God gave them the laws of life.** (Neh. 9:13)

It was good of God to do this, because this told them what was good to do and what was not. *"Dad, why am I to stay away from that cliff over there? Because it is good for you to do so."*

- **God gave them times of needed rest.**

"Thou didst make known to them Thy holy sabbath." Neh. 9:14 There were other times of rest besides every seventh day. There were feasts and even sabbath years of rest, for which God provided all that was needed, double in the sixth year.

- **God gave them Moses.** (Neh. 9:14)

God in His goodness had given them a Servant/Leader who would give up his entire life for them. A man of God, given to them by God in His goodness. Strewn in our path are men and women of God. Where would we be without these parents and pastors, teachers and friends, authors and examples? I wonder if they thanked Moses. I wonder if they thanked God for him?

- **God met their needs.**

"Thou didst provide bread from heaven for them for their hunger, Thou didst bring forth water from a rock for them for their thirst." Neh. 9:15 Every day, all they needed, whatever it took, every day of their lives, God provided. How many meals have you missed in your life? God in His goodness provides all of our needs. *"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* Phil. 4:19

- **God brought them to a better place.**

"Thou didst tell them to enter in and possess the land which Thou didst swear to give them. But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly. They became stubborn and would not listen." Neh. 9:15-16 They could not visualize that this land would be good for them. They did not accept what God had told them. They did not believe that God was good. Always good. Very good.

OCTOBER 31

AN EXTRAORDINARY SPIRIT

“Daniel began distinguishing himself... because he possessed an extraordinary spirit.” Dan. 6:3

Although an O.T. saint, Daniel’s extraordinary relationship with the Holy Spirit contained the same 3 elements we see in the N.T. for believers, both by example and instruction on being **filled, led, and empowered** by the Holy Spirit. For example, Jesus *“filled with the Spirit, was led of the Spirit...and returned...in the power of the Spirit.” (Luke 4)* The extraordinary Spirit that men saw in Daniel was the Holy Spirit working in him and through him. Daniel’s part in that relationship, as is ours, was to be 1) yielded to, 2) led by, and 3) empowered by the Holy Spirit, to accomplish the plans and will of God for us.

1. Daniel’s communion with God let others see God working in him and through him.

During his long life, Daniel’s seeking and yielding to God’s will, which involved him being a lifelong slave in the service of godless barbarians, was seen by them, as God demonstrated His power and knowledge through him. Several times it was reported to the leaders of the nation he was enslaved in that: *“There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him.” Dan. 5:11*

May our yieldedness to God, regardless of what His plans are for us, and where we serve Him, result in *“letting our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.” Matthew. 5:16*

2. Daniel’s wisdom came because the Spirit led Him to know and speak God’s Word.

“Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight, and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you.” Dan 5:14

God’s plans and ways, His principles of life, and His revelations about salvation from the penalty, power, and presence of sin, and things to come are taught to us **by the Holy Spirit**, Who opens our eyes and hearts to God’s inspired Word – just like He did with Daniel. May we also be known as “people of the Word,” possessors of extraordinary wisdom, insight, and illumination from God.

3. Daniel had power that others did not because the Holy Spirit was working through him.

It is not possible for us to do, in our own strength, what God wants to do through us. The Christian life is not hard – it is impossible in our own strength. Daniel illustrates this so well for us. You know the story. *“Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom....But...Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions’ den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.” Dan 6:16* He did. And do you think Nebuchadnezzar will be in heaven? I do. Because Daniel was filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It was God’s work done through God’s man.

NOVEMBER 1

BEING USEFUL TO GOD AS A PRIEST

*“But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Pet. 2:9*

One of the analogies that God uses to help us understand our role and duties as a member the church He is building is the priesthood. The duties of an O.T. priest all related to man's sinfulness and his or her access, as a sinner, into the presence of our holy God. A priest was a **mediator** for the sinner verifying that his sacrifice was acceptable and bringing it as God had commanded. Are you a priest for Christ? The Hebrew word for priest (*cohen*) refers to “one who stands up for another and mediates his cause”. A priest is to say “here is how you come to God” and “you must do this, this way to come.” The church performs this essential function in the present age, first in showing and helping everyone who is seeking to come to God for justification, and second in helping the brethren who have already come for salvation to continue in fellowship, be reconciled after sinning, and be useful and fruitful to their God. (*see Gal. 6:1-10, 1 Pet. 2:5*) Are you a priest?

The priestly work analogy is joined with the new temple analogy (the church) as the place where God's presence is to be found on the earth.

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into **a holy temple** in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”*
Eph. 2:19-22

Given these responsibilities and callings, why are many Christians often USELESS as mediating priests? There are several reasons. Sometimes they accept the temple analogy, but reject their calling to be priests for others. They like God allowing their presence as a forgiven sinner – but the idea that they are called and must continually be priests for others is rejected. (*see Mt. 5:13*)

Have you accepted your calling as a priest? Priests served for regular periods of time, having been trained in the biblical revelations needed to assist others, and serving together with other priests helping others be reconciled to God. God has chosen you to be a priest for Him. Do you know how to reconcile unsaved men to God, and sinning Christians to God and one another? Are you?

*“You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for **a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* 1 Pet. 2:5

NOVEMBER 2

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR YOUR FAMILY

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.”
Rom. 12:10

Our family members are our focus today. There are many relationships here that the Lord has chosen for us.

*“Husbands, love **your wives**, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”*
Eph. 5:25-26

*“Children, obey **your parents** in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you.”* Eph. 6:1-3

*“Wives, be submissive to **your own husbands** so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”* 1 Pet. 3:1-2

Added to these close family members are the extended members of our family. Siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, grandparents and others. In some of these you may be faced with the heartaches and trials of a broken or difficult relationship. There may be offenses and separations. But remember, God has been divorced. God has been rejected. But it is His responses of forgiveness, longsuffering, and love that are held up to us to imitate. Praying for your family members, in whatever status your relationships are in, is what He asks of us.

There are 35 prayers of the apostle Paul in His NT letters. They are all for others! They are good models for us to use as we make intercessions, supplications, and thanksgivings for our family members. Here are just two.

“We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” Col. 1:9-12

“We pray for you always, that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
2 Thess. 1:11-12

NOVEMBER 3

IF I PERISH, I PERISH

"I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." Esther 4:16

Faced with a choice of staying alive or serving God, Esther chose to give herself completely to God, even if it meant death. *"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned.... Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, **I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.**"* Esther 4:11,15-16

Our Lord made it clear that this is to be our way of life too. Every day, we are to follow Him, prepared to say, in whatever we face, **"If I perish, I perish."**

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it." Matt. 16:24-25

The apostle Paul's description of enduring what the Lord led him through is a testimony of this continual attitude of **"If I perish, I perish."**

"Are they servants of Christ?... I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." 2 Cor. 11:23-27

When he was warned that continuing to follow God's leading and go to Jerusalem would surely mean his death, he said in effect, **"If I perish doing what God wants me to do, I perish."**

*"And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God...**For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.**"* Acts 20:22-14, 21:13

This attitude of serving the Lord wherever He chooses to send us, and facing whatever He allows, as we do, is clearly expected of all of us:

"And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Luke 9:23

If I perish, I perish.

NOVEMBER 4

OUR KINSMAN REDEEMER

“Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a Redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel.” Ruth 4:14

When God gave His Law to Moses to give to His people, there was much that dealt with the concepts of **redemption**. These conditions and requirements, of paying a price for something that had been lost, and who was qualified to do this, established the principles that God would use to redeem both them and us from what we have lost. *“The Levites have a permanent right of redemption... What, therefore, belongs to the Levites may be redeemed.” Lev. 25:32-33*

There were **4 requirements** for these Redeemers, either of redeeming their land or themselves if they had become either indebted or enslaved. They tell us all we need to know about who can be our Redeemer. The only one who qualifies is the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. A Redeemer Must Be A Kinsman. He was.

If an Israelite was forced into indebtedness or slavery, a relative of that slave could deliver his kinsman by paying the necessary price. However, this right of redemption was reserved for a qualified kinsman. Remember Boaz? He was able to deliver Ruth from bondage because he was her kinsman. Is Christ our kinsman? Does He qualify to pay our debt? He does.

*“But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, **born of a woman**, born under the Law, **in order that He might redeem** those who were under the Law, **that we might receive the adoption as sons**.” Gal. 4:4-5*

2. A Redeemer Must Have The Personal Wealth To Pay The Redemption Price. He did.

“You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold... but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” 1 Pet. 1:18-19

3. A Redeemer Must Be Willing To Pay The Redemption Price Required. He did.

“Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” Eph. 5:2

4. A Redeemer Cannot Be In Need Of Redemption Himself. He wasn't.

*“He made **Him who knew no sin** to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:21*

Redeemed by Christ, Who paid with His life, that we might be free to go – be with Him.

NOVEMBER 5

REDEEMED! FROM THE PIT, BY THE BLOOD, TO HEAVEN

“God sent forth His Son... in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons... and if a son, then an heir.” Gal. 4:4-7

Redemption is an act of purchase. To redeem something is to pay a price to purchase it. God has purchased us and has revealed the wonder of our redemption through Christ. We are Redeemed!

1. Our redemption released us from the consequences of sin!

This would include sin's penalty (Rom. 6:23), sin's power (1 Pet. 1:18), sin's guilt (Rom. 7:21), sin's consequences (Titus 2:14), and sin's corruption (Rom. 8:18-23). Our redemption was necessary to set us free from all these consequences. We have been set free!

2. Our redemption was costly and required Christ to pay for it with His life!

*“Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but **with precious blood**, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, **the blood of Christ**.” 1 Pet. 1:18-19*

3. Our redemption is permanent. It is totally secure!

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.” Gal. 3:13 The word used here for redeemed is (exagoradzo) which is in a verb form that emphasizes the **result** of Christ's work for us. The security of the believer is being clearly stated here. An accurate translation would be “Christ has delivered us from the curse of the Law, which we shall never face again.”

4. Our redemption was by our Father in heaven to allow us to be with Him forever!

There is another word, (apolutrosis) that we also translate redemption. But this word emphasizes not what we have been delivered **from**, but what we have been delivered **to**.

*“And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, **the redemption of our body**.” Rom. 8:23*

*“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, **you were sealed in Him** with the Holy Spirit of promise, **who is given as a pledge of our inheritance**, as we look forward to **the redemption** of God's own possession (us), to the praise of His glory.” Eph. 1:13-14*

We have been redeemed – because it was necessary, secured at great cost, never to lose it, that we might share God's life forever, and ever and ever. Redeemed, oh I love to proclaim it! Redeemed and **forever**, I am.

NOVEMBER 6

WHAT ONESIMUS TEACHES US

“He often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains.” 2 Tim. 1:16

God did not take Paul out of prison. Rather, he sent Onesimus in. Why do we find this detail in Scripture? Because God wants us to know that when we are in the place God has chosen and wants us in, even though it is a hard place, that He will provide all we need. Paul was writing from prison, mostly alone, harshly chained, and awaiting his death. Still, it was the right place, and into it He sent Onesimus. We learn a number of important things from this report about him.

1. God’s place for me never lacks God’s provision for me.

*“Onesiphorus... **often** refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he **eagerly** searched for me, and **found** me.” 2 Tim. 1:16-17*

It was not God’s plan to take Paul out of that very difficult place. But it was His plan to keep his promise to provide all Paul needed as he served Him.

“But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance. I am amply supplied... And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Phil. 4:18-19

2. It is our job to get to and stay in God’s place for us, it is His to provide while we are there.

Paul could have avoided this last prison stay, but he was sure that God had led him there. He had learned over thirty years of serving Christ in hard and often horrible places that God had provided. He had provided funds. He had provided faith. He had provided enough of everything including comfort and encouragement to and stand and stay. Even on death row.

3. The FULL provision of God is only seen when we are in God’s place for us.

“I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed....Onesiphorus...often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains.” 2 Tim. 1:12,16

Paul had gotten himself in a Roman prison during the great Neroian persecution. He was in the Roman capital and the army was rounding Christians up to eliminate them. Demas, Paul’s longtime companion, had deserted him and escaped. And then Onesimus shows up. The fact that **he** got in was a miracle. It obviously encouraged Paul at this moment of perhaps his greatest test and need. God had led Onesimus to Rome, to the prison, to meet Paul’s needs and the doors had opened for him. God’s provision for Paul had arrived. Of course they did. Paul needed it.

4. When others see God’s full provision for us, in God’s place, THEY are encouraged to seek God’s place for them.

*“And **you** know very well what services he (Onesimus) rendered at Ephesus.” 2 Tim 1:18*

Paul had been in Ephesus for 2 years. We do not know what Onesimus did then, but we do know some of what Paul did, with the provision that came to him there – by Onesimus.

*“He (Paul) withdrew from (their persecution) and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this took place for two years, **so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**” Acts 19:9-11 Thank you, Onesimus.*

NOVEMBER 7

THE SECOND DEATH

“Their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Rev. 21:8

What is on your to-do list today? It is estimated that today alone, over **100 million people** will die the first death, the death of their physical bodies – to await the verdict of God when they stand before Him regarding their relationship with the Savior from the second death. Jesus said,

*“For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it... Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven... Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. **Depart from Me.**'” Matt. 7:14-23*

The angels will then cast them into **the Second Death**, which is the eternal lake of fire. From this place, where there is continual weeping and gnashing of teeth in agony and torment, there is no escape. Hell has no exits. Forevermore. Forevermore. Forevermore.

Are you an evangelist to the lost for the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you telling people what they will experience soon? Even one a day? Does your heart lead you to pray for them and ask God to give them the same mercy He has given you?

Heavenly Father, no one comes to Christ unless You draw them to have saving faith in His finished work. He has paid for the sins of all who believe in Him, trusting Him alone for their salvation from the second death. I am bringing _____ and _____ and _____ before You today to ask that You would have mercy on them as You have given me. Please open the eyes of their hearts and draw them to the cross of the Lord Jesus. Please deliver them from the Lake of Fire and the second death. Please give them eternal life with us in heaven. Amen

“And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

*And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **This is the second death, the lake of fire.***

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Rev. 20:11-15

NOVEMBER 8

CALLED TO A LIFE OF MINISTRY

"I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me... to me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given." Eph. 3:7-8

God has called each of us to give our life to the work that He has prepared for us. *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* Eph. 2:10 God's will for every believer has 4 parts of which this calling is one.

- He wants us to be yielded to Him and His will for our life. (Mt. 16:24)
- He wants us to build our lives around the principles of His Word. (2 Tim. 3:16)
- He wants us to assume responsibility for others. (Mt. 28:20)
- He wants us to accept the consequences of these first 3 – without quitting, having good attitudes, standing firmly, fulfilling our ministry, keeping the faith, finishing our course.

We have addressed this last point often as it is the measure of our maturity, usefulness, and fruitfulness in the ministries God has called us to in our family, our church, and the world. May the following quotations remind and help you as you face the consequences of loving others.

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered.

LOVE THEM ANYWAY

If you do good things, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.

DO GOOD THINGS ANYWAY

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.

SUCCEED ANYWAY

The good that you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

DO GOOD ANYWAY

Honesty and frankness will make you vulnerable.

BE HONEST AND FRANK ANYWAY

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

BUILD ANYWAY

People really need help but may attack you if you help them.

HELP PEOPLE ANYWAY

Give the world the best you've got and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU'VE GOT ANYWAY

NOVEMBER 9

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.” Heb. 13:17

Our Pastors and Elders are our focus today. These church leaders have been appointed by God to protect, teach, and disciple us as a priority in life.

“And He gave some... as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.” Eph 4:11-13

We are to acknowledge their God given authority and have right attitudes and responses to them.

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13:17

We are also to remember their teaching and example, and the investment they made in our life. We are told to remember that they gave their life to help us live for Christ.

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” Heb. 13:7

Remembering your Pastors and Elders – past and present – as you talk with God today. These prayers could include:

- 6) Thanking Him for giving them to you.
- 7) Asking Him to protect them as they are principal targets of the enemy. Their families are also.
- 8) Asking Him to encourage them and comfort them in the face of the trials that they may be facing in ministry and life.
- 9) Asking Him to give them His counsel and direction for themselves and the members in their church.
- 10) Asking the Lord regarding sending a note of thanks or blessing them personally.

NOVEMBER 10

IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS. QUITE NORMAL.

"I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need: I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Phil. 4:12-13

If you have been pursuing God's goals for your life, you have probably discovered that the things He has asked you to do are not difficult – they are impossible in your own strength! Selflessly love your enemies. Overcome your bitterness. Conquer your bad habits. We cannot do these things in our own strength. This is why Paul prayed for the disciples in Ephesus:

*"I bow my knees before the Father... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened with power through His Spirit** in the inner man...that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works within us**, to Him be the glory in the church."*
Eph. 3:14-21

And also for the disciples in Colossae:

*"We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; **strengthened with all power**, according to His glorious might." Col. 1:9-11*

It is not at all uncommon for God to place His people in impossible situations. These are normal, and planned. We can either face them alone, or we can be vessels He uses to work His power through. The examples He gives us are many. Remember little David facing 10 foot tall Goliath?

"Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands." 1 Sam 17:45-47

God delights to choose little Davids to do His work. But also remember our Lord Himself, who became a man, and came to do His Father's will. As He began His public ministry we are told that,

"After the devil had finished every temptation, ... Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district." Luke 4:13-14

The Christian life is a relationship with the Omnipotent Ruler of the universe. Don't be surprised when He asks you to do impossible things. He expects for you to ask for His help. You need it.

NOVEMBER 11

HOW TO LEAD A REMNANT IN A DAY OF APOSTACY

“And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth and He was grieved in His heart...but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Gen. 6:5-8

One of history's most amazing men, who lived in one of history's most amazing times, was Noah. He lived with dinosaurs. And, he lived in a day of great apostacy. But he found grace in a corrupt time – and so have we. What can he teach us?

1. **God gave him a task that was foolish in the eyes of everyone around him** – just like us! “Make for yourself an ark.” Why, Lord? “A world-wide flood is coming.” What did everyone say to him? They laughed. They left. He walked alone. What was his greatest challenge? Having faith in God's Word to him. It had never rained. And, He labored for 120 years on the task God had given him. How did he manage this? What was his secret? **He walked with God.** (6:9) Walking with God, day by challenging day, gives us His perspective on what He has asked of us. We are reminded of why He has given us our task – the salvation of family, and the many to come. It is worth doing. It is the most important task on the earth – isn't it. And you have been asked to give your life to the same task as Noah. We must walk with God morning, evening, and all the day long. More than once a week.

2. **God gave him a message no one wanted to hear** – just like us!

He was a preacher of righteousness. (2 Pet. 2:5) “Judgement is coming. Get right with God. Get in the ark. God has prepared a way of salvation for you. Accept it or perish.” What were the responses by all but 7 individuals out of millions? The same that we are getting from most everyone today. Either, “Don't talk to me about the ark (Christ) please.” Or “Don't work on your ark near me –please go somewhere else, but not here.”

What did Noah do? He continued to walk with God and **to give his life** to building the ark for anyone who would hear and heed and enter in before the flood came.

Has God called you to be a part of His ark building in your lifetime, to your generation of sinners? Do you know a brother or sister who has been called to this work that no one wants to hear or heed, and is discouraged in the work of the age? Perhaps they have not been walking with God this month. Putting the pitch on the ark is actually a great privilege. They need to be reminded of how important building Christ's church is. Maybe you should go walk with them a bit. “Let's finish it. Let's stay with it. The flood is coming.” *“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all the nations; and then shall the end come.”* Matt. 24:14

NOVEMBER 12

STANDING IN THE CURRENT OF OUR DAY

“The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.” 2 Tim 4:3

Who are “they” in the warning above? In this passage from Paul to his pastoral protégé Timothy, the “they” were the people God had called him to influence for Christ. We can apply this to ourselves regarding what we will all face in some form if we are seeking to live for Christ and “preach the Word” to others in the compromises of our humanistic culture and our lukewarm churches. We can summarize Paul’s letter with the word “stand.” Stand for God and His truth. Stand against compromise. Paul’s exhortations in this letter to stand in the downward currents of our day are as follows:

1. It is to be done **above all else**.

“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season.” 2 Tim. 4:1-2

It couldn’t be said more clearly. Cease to do this and you will drift with the current.

2. It is to be done **regardless of the consequences**.

What might these be for us today? Have the schools drifted? Has your church? Has your family? The greater the consequences, the fewer who will stand with you.

3. It is to be done **in response to every situation**.

*“Be ready in season **and** out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience, for the time will come when...”* 1 Tim. 4:2

4. It is to be done **in love, not condemnation**.

The current has uprooted some trees that have been standing till now and are coming with the current downstream against us. They have not put pressure on us before, but have become our enemies for remaining where we are. So, we get to learn how to handle a new challenge.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Luke 6:27-28

5. It is to be done **by teaching and living the truth**.

“Proclaim the word... when they will not endure sound doctrine.” 2 Tim. 4:2-3

Is this the job of just the Pastors and Teachers in the church. No. This is everyone’s job.

*“We are no longer to be carried about by every wind of doctrine...but speaking the truth in love, **we** are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom **the whole body**, being fitted and held together **by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part**, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”* Eph. 4:14-16

COME. LET US REBUILD, RETURN, AND REMOVE.

“Hezekiah became king...and he did right in the sight of the LORD.” 2 Chron. 29:1-2

Are you helping and leading others to maturity for God? Are you discipling others as we have been instructed? (*Mt. 28:20*) What are the basics of doing this? What Hezekiah did when God made him a leader of others for Him, has the same 3 elements that we are instructed to follow. Hezekiah became a leader of God’s people at a time when the foundations of the faith were broken, the people of God were scattered, and false Gods were worshipped. Sound familiar?

1. He restored God and His Word to its rightful place in the center of their lives.

“In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them into the square on the east. Then he said to them, “Listen to me, O Levites. Consecrate yourselves now, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place.”

2 Chron. 29:3-5

What is the equivalent for us? To rebuild our lives, with God at the center and the principles of His Word as the basis of what we do and how we love. (*2 Tim. 3:16*) Leading others for Christ and making disciples for Him involves teaching them the principles of His Word and helping them to heed them. To what extent is this a priority in your life – discipling others to maturity?

2. He led them to come together to be with God’s people, as God had directed.

“Now Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel.”

2 Chron. 30:1

What is the equivalent for us? God is building His church now in the present time, and has placed each of us in the church where He desires. We need each other for “the whole body working together, causes the growth of the body.” (*Eph. 4:16*) So, leading our own disciples to be active and mature members, and leaders, in a local church, or to return to this if they have abandoned it as Hezekiah’s people had, is to be taught. Coming all the way to Jerusalem for Passover week was quite a sacrifice of time and money. But still he wrote, “You **should** come.”

3. He led them to reject the ways and activities of their godless neighbors, friends, and family.

“Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah, broke the pillars in pieces, cut down the Asherim, and pulled down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, as well as in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all.”

2 Chron. 31:1

The equivalent for us is to lead our disciples to remove pornography in all its forms from our life. To take back their children from the humanists who have put God out in their schools and educate them in the truth. To remove the associations, activities, and identifications with people and practices that are clearly identified in God’s Word.

God was pleased with Hezekiah. He influenced many for God. But it was tough. Outwardly many followed, but many did not. Their heart was not in it. May God be pleased with us as we near the end of the church age and have been given the same task as Hezekiah, to lead some out of darkness into the light of Christ.

NOVEMBER 14

GOD'S DOOR FOR DAVID WAS GOLIATH

“Time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” Heb. 11:32-34

The Christian life is a life of faith, hope, and love. Faith in what God has said He has done to create and redeem you through the work of His Son. Hope in the promises He has made about things to come and the power you have to endure what you face. Selfless love in being willing to die for Him and those for whom He asks you to. The doors He opens for His people often require all three. If He opens doors for you that lead to hard things, will you go? If He opens a door for you into impossible things, and asks you to go, will you go in faith?

1. The door for David was Goliath.

God's plan for Him was to influence so many millions of us through his faith expressed through the Psalms that have taught and guided us. Goliath seemed to stand in his way, but he was actually the primary door to his usefulness and ministry. He walked through this door in faith.

“Then a champion came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale-armor which weighed five thousand shekels of bronze... Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands.’”
1 Sam. 17:4-5, 45-47

2. The door for Moses was Pharaoh.

Moses was raised in Egypt in Pharaoh's family and became a significant leader. However, he fled for his life out of Egypt for many years. Then God opened a door for him to lead millions of people out of slavery, into the promised land. However, the door to this was through Pharaoh.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me.’” Exo. 8:1 He went and God performed miracles.

“And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, ‘You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land; the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders.’” Deut. 29:2-3

3. The door for Christ was a Roman cross.

“Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.” Phil. 2:6-9 What might your door be?

NOVEMBER 15

PRAYING LIKE PAUL – FOR OTHERS

“We give thanks to God...praying always for you.” Col. 1:3

There are 35 prayers of the apostle Paul in his N.T. letters. Without exception, they are all prayers **for others**. This does not mean that it is wrong to pray for ourselves and our personal needs, both spiritual and physical. Paul himself asked others to pray for him and his needs, but his prayers for others, for their spiritual growth and fruitful work, is God’s guide to us regarding how to pray for others.

Consider today the six things he asked of the Father for the Christians in Colossae. May you find them helpful as you pray for those He brings to your mind to intercede for today.

- 1. That they would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will.**
- 2. That they would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.**
- 3. That they would be fruitful in every good work.**
- 4. That they would increase in the knowledge of God.**
- 5. That they would be strengthened with all power.**
- 6. That they would live in continual thanksgiving to the Father.**

“We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Col. 1:3-12

NOVEMBER 16

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR THE LOST

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” 1 Pet.4:5-7

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14

Asking God to have saving mercy on unsaved sinners is a privilege He has given to us. It is also a responsibility. We are to *“do the work of an evangelist”*. (2 Tim. 4:5) This work is not just preaching the gospel, sharing our testimony, and distributing gospel tracts. Indeed, praying for the lost may be the most powerful aspect of this great work.

*“For the gospel has for this purpose been preached... The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit **for the purpose of prayer.**” 1 Pet.4:5-7*

We are to pray for the lost that the gospel would reach them, that God would open their hearts to understand it, and that He would draw them to Christ and accept His free gift of eternal salvation. What a privilege! *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, has whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.” John 15:16*

What lost souls could you pray for today?

- In your family. _____.
- Of your neighbors. _____.
- At your work. _____.
- Among your enemies. _____.
- Your past friends. _____.
- In your church. _____.
- In the world. _____.

NOVEMBER 17

“HOSEA, I LOVE SINNERS. GO SHOW THEM”

“Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress.” Hosea 3:1

Hosea was saved when his nation, like ours, had put God out, and sin ruled the day. God asked him, like He has us, to use his life to show people what He is like. He was asked to marry an unfaithful woman who would shame Him. But he was to love her, and love her, and love her.

“Be like Me Hosea. I married Israel and gave My word that I would be faithful to her. She has played the harlot and shamed Me. But I remain faithful. That is who I am. I am love. Selfless love. When you do this, you will show the world what I am like. I will give you the strength to do this, and I will reward you for glorifying Me. Many will see. Many more will hear what you have done to show My love for sinners. By My grace, I will use what you will do to save many.

I love you Hosea. Go, love Gomer like I love Israel and let the world know what I am like. Many will read of this and I will use your life story to have them imitate you.”

“Then the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods.....”

So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley. Then I said to her, "You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you.”

For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.”

Hosea 3:1-5

“God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

1 John 4:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.” John 3:16

“But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” 1 Cor. 13:13

*“But I say to you who hear, love **your** enemies, do good to those who hate **you**, bless those who curse **you**, pray for those who mistreat **you** ...love **your** enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and **you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.**”*

Luke 6:27,35

NOVEMBER 18

ROLLING THE STONE AWAY

“They saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large.” Mark 16:4

The greatest story in the Bible, and the greatest story ever told is the account of what God has done for us in Christ to save us by becoming a man and dying in our place. What are the second greatest stories in the Bible? There are many, and they tell us The Lengths To Which God Has Gone To Ensure We Know The Greatest Story. They are all incredible and amazing.

The stone that was rolled in front of Christ’s tomb weighed several hundred pounds. It was rolled away from the opening by the angels sent to do so. But **the stone was not rolled away to let Christ out. It was rolled away to let John in!** *“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. And so she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, (John) and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they were going to the tomb. And the two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter, and came to the tomb first; and stooping and looking in, **he saw (blepo)** the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. Simon Peter therefore also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and **he beheld (theoreo)** the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb (John) entered then also, and **he saw, (orao) and believed.**” John 20:2-8*

There are three different greek words used for “to see”, as noted above, that tell this amazing story. John got to the tomb first and looked in. He **saw** the linen wrappings that had been wound around Christ’s body and also the top of his head, there on the stone slab where Christ’s body had been laid. But he did not enter the tomb. The word just means to see something. Then when Peter arrived a bit later, he actually entered the tomb and was puzzled by what he saw. The linen wrappings were there, slumped down. And somehow the body had been taken without disturbing the extensive wrappings and many pounds of spices. How was this possible? The word used for what Peter did is theoreo, from which we get our English word “to theorize”. He was theorizing about what could explain the strange things he was seeing. Then John entered and the third word is used (orao) which we, unfortunately just translate “he saw”. However, orao means “to see **with understanding**”. John now had all he needed to know that Jesus had been raised from the dead, just as He had said He would. He understood what had happened. And He believed. The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out. It was rolled away to let John and others in.

NOVEMBER 19

I THOUGHT JONAH HAD REPENTED REGARDING THIS

“But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.” Jonah 4:1

After the incredible story of Jonah’s time in the fish, and his repentance, we find him back where he was, hating to be a part of God showing mercy to his enemies. He wanted justice, not mercy for these wretched murderers. Quite understandable. Fully forgiving our enemies is not hard. It is impossible in our own strength. God alone, because Christ has given His life to allow it, can do it. We need the power of God working in us by the Holy Spirit to do this. Jonah grieved and quenched the Spirit in this matter.

We do know that the revival in Ninevah was probably among the greatest in history, involving millions of people in this capital city of the greatest empire on earth at the time. Jonah hated it and had left the city, gone to a hill to observe, hoping to still see them get what they deserved. God asked him a question concerning his continuing bitterness toward these people and his hopes that they would get the horrors they had given to others. “There are more than 120,000 little babies down there Jonah. Is not My mercy wonderful? Should I not have compassion on them?”

We do not know how Jonah responded this time. There are 3 possibilities. Jonah could have stayed to watch on the hill as the Ninevites were confessing and in sackcloth to see if the judgement would still come. Or he may have left for good. Or he may actually have gone back into the city where he was supposed to be and continue to call on the people to repent and avoid the coming judgement. We don’t know. The story ends without telling us. If he did not go back, he certainly should have. If he did, it was again by God’s grace and mercy to him.

There is a little evidence that Jonah went back to the city with a forgiving spirit, hoping from his heart that these people would repent and find mercy. About 100 years after Jonah was there Ninevah was destroyed by the Babylonians and laid in ruins. These ruins are known to us today. One of the mounds covering them is called “Nebi Yanis” which means “Prophet Jonah”. It is thought perhaps to be the place of Jonah’s grave by some. I like to think that Jonah went back, having asked God to help him accept His compassion for arguably the most wicked city in the world at that time. God certainly was willing to do so, and had waited patiently for Jonah to go.

Do you have any Ninevites in your life? Unspeakable things, unmentionable things have been done perhaps. Such is the world we live in. Through what Jesus Christ has done, God can have mercy on them and not give them what they deserve. He will forgive them if they confess and ask Him to. By His enabling grace we can forgive them too. God asks us to do this very thing, just like He asked Jonah.

“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you. ...Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Luke 6:27,36

NOVEMBER 20

LIVING IN THE MIDST

“Come, let us rebuild the wall.” Nehemiah 2:17

How do we live godly lives and raise godly children in the midst of a godless society? There are three requirements, clearly illustrated for us by Nehemiah’s leadership.

1. He led them to **SEPARATE FROM EVIL** by building an enforceable wall. (Neh. 1-4)
“I said to them, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach.”
Neh. 2:17

Our country has rejected God and destroyed our schools. The philosophy of humanism has invaded and captured our educational institutions. In response, millions of families have built a wall of separation from these to educate their children for God. In our desperate day, many separating “walls” are required to allow us to live godly lives for God. Our day requires:

- A wall around our own soul. We must clearly separate from the sin and evil in our land.
- A wall around our marriages and families. We must remove damaging influences.
- A wall around our churches. We must put out false teachers and unrepentant sinners.

This first step, if it is clear and purposeful, will engender opposition. Sanballat and Tobiah, significant leaders in his day, tried hard to stop Nehemiah’s separating efforts. You can expect that also. But wall building was only the first of three major projects. After the wall was built:

2. He gathered the people to **LEARN THE WORD OF GOD**. (Neh. 7:1-3, 8:1-9:3)
“And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate...Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding... and he read from it... from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.”
Neh. 8:1-3

This led to sincere conviction and grief. But a final step was necessary. After this:

3. He led the people to **CHANGE HOW THEY LIVED**. (Neh. 5:1-13,13:23-31)
I said, “The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God?”...Then they said, “We will do...as you say. So I... took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.” Neh. 5:9,12 A revival then began and spread.

Separate From Sin. Relearn God’s Word. Trust And Obey. There Is No Other Way.

NOVEMBER 21

THE APOSTATE CHURCHES

“So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”
Rev. 3:16

Laodicea was a rich, prosperous place. Just like America. Profitable businesses. Good medical facilities. Good most everything. People who are involved in churches like this one in Laodicea are hypocrites whether they are saved or not. They are lukewarm in their hearts toward God. Their wealth and confidence in themselves leads them to become indifferent as to whether God is the focus of their life or not. Church is not about Him. As a result, Christ’s words to them are quite strong.

“The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.’” Rev. 3:14-17

- These folks were indifferent toward Christ, being “neither hot nor cold”.
- They had a self-sufficient mindset. “I am rich, wealthy, and have need of nothing.”
- They were deceived about their spiritual state. “You are wretched...poor...blind...”
- They were nauseating to God. “I will spit you out of My mouth.”

God wanted this to change of course, so He gave them clear advice about making Him their Savior and Lord. They needed the true riches, true righteousness, and true knowledge of Christ.

“I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.” Rev. 3:18-19

Why do we have the letter to this church in our Bibles? There are at least three reasons.

1. That we would pray for the growing number of apostate churches in our day. This letter leads us to pray for individuals in these churches, but it has a broader focus than this. It leads us to pray for entire churches. There are many, most likely, near you.
2. That perhaps we need to assess the temperature of our own church and respond accordingly. Reproof, admonition, and departure are all options depending on how the Lord leads us. Reproof and admonition, if needed, first, and then leaving, if the church remains lukewarm to Christ as its Savior and Lord.
3. That we would evaluate the temperature of our own heart toward God.

*“And one of the scribes came and... asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with **all** your heart, and with **all** your soul, and with **all** your mind, and with **all** your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”* Mark 12:28-31

NOVEMBER 22

OTHERS, NOT SELF

“With humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.”
Phil. 2:3

Would you say that you are a mature Christian? It depends completely on the extent to which you are living your life for OTHERS. *“But now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” 1 Cor. 13:13* The consummate attribute of a mature Christian is selfless love of others. Unless this quality is yours and is increasing, you are self oriented, making you both useless and unfruitful to Christ, even though you know Him as your Savior.

“Applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful.”
2 Pet. 1:5-8

Love is the Greek word “agape” and means selfless love of **others**.

- *“We know love by this, that He (Christ) laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” 1 John 3:16*
- *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” John 13:34-35*
- *“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” Matt. 16:24*

Why is selfless love of others the measure of a Christian’s maturity?

1. Because selfless love of others (agape) describes the essential nature of God.

“God is love.” 1 John 4:8 is accurately translated *“God, as to His nature, is characterized by selfless love of others.”* God considers others more important than Himself.

2. Because selfless love describes what God has done for us in Christ.

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 4:10 Christ lived the life that He lived and He died the death that He died – for others.

3. Because selfless love of others describes what God wants us to do.

Who are we to live our life for instead of ourselves?

- First of all, our immediate family. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” Eph. 5:25*
- Our church family. *“If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” 1 John 4:11*
- The lost souls around us. *“And He said to them (His disciples), “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” Mark 16:15*
- Even our enemies. *“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, ... and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High.” Luke 6:27,35*

To what extent are you living your life for others?

NOVEMBER 23

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR OUR AUTHORITIES

“As a matter of first importance, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority.” 1 Tim. 2:1-2

There are 5 different authorities that are identified in the NT. Governmental authorities are the focus of our text. The others (elders, parents, husbands, masters) will be addressed later. The primary reason we are to be praying for those who run the government of our particular nation is clearly stated.

“... in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 2:2-4

The “all men” that God desires to be saved would include BOTH those who are in governments, and those people that governments have authority over. Being able to live a “*tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity*” would mean little persecution and opposition from our government to share the gospel and stand for Christ. Being a good citizen in the eyes of our government officials, to the extent that we do, would be a good witness to them also.

Few committed Christians have been able to enjoy the freedoms and support of their government as have Americans. But this has rapidly diminished over the last 50 years. The costs of standing and speaking boldly for Christ are now significant. How should we, and must we, now pray?

1. That our standing for Christ would not be silenced, either by threats or by law.
2. That our living and speaking for Christ would not lead to harm from the government.
3. That our government officials, at all levels, would hear the gospel and many get saved.
4. That the light of Christ through us and His church would bring many to salvation.
5. That we and other Christians would not become spiritual cowards as the costs increase.
6. That the examples of those who have gone before us, and were both willing to die for their faith, and exhibited good attitudes toward their government authorities, would guide us.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:14-16

Light shines the brightest in the darkness. It is turned on, and increases in intensity, by prayer.

NOVEMBER 24

HIS MASTERPIECE

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph 2:10

The Greek word for “workmanship” was used of their finest artists to refer to their greatest works – their masterpiece. You are God’s masterpiece. Of all the things God could have made for Himself – He made you.

- Your name was written in the book of life before God created the universe. *Rev. 21:27*
- You were created in His image, that you might know Him and share His life. *Gen. 1:27*
- You were lost, but have been redeemed, because He gave His life for you. *Rom. 5:9-10*
- You are a new creation, recreated in righteousness and holiness. *Eph. 4:24*
- You are His dwelling place. *1 Cor. 3:16*
- You have been chosen to share His work. *John 15:16*
- You are the light of the world. *Matt. 5:14-16*
- You are Christ’s bride. *Rev. 19:6-8*
- You are the fulness of Him who fills all in all. *Eph. 1:23*
- You shall live in oneness with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for all eternity.

*As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. **I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one. I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.***

Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.”

John 17:13-24

Who are you? Well, of all the things God could have given His life for – He gave it for you.

NOVEMBER 25

THE PERSPECTIVES WE ALWAYS NEED

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Phil. 4:13

As you face today with its duties, challenges, trials, and opposition, you will need God's perspectives on what you face. Unless you remember them, and act based upon them, you won't do well. We always need to remember...

1. The Reason That We are Still Here.

Remember that God wants to share His life and work with us, along with the glory and rewards that go with it. *"You are the light of the world...let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* Matt. 5:14-16

2. The Reasons That We Suffer Serving Christ.

Why do we suffer serving our Lord? There are several reasons. Our sins. Tests to help us grow. But we also suffer for others. Our suffering is controlled by God and is designed to help us die to self and live for others. **Remember** what Paul said regarding this. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."* 2 Cor. 1:3-4

3. The Enabling Grace That We Must Have To Do What God Asks Of Us.

Remember, doing what God asks us to do is not hard – it is impossible in our own strength! *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me... for apart from Me you can do nothing."* John 15:4-5 BUT... *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."* Phil. 4:13

4. The 3 Enemies That We Face Every Day – And Must Resist

Remember, while you still live here in this fallen world you must, by God's enabling grace, resist the temptations of the world, our Adversary the Devil, and our old fallen nature, our flesh.

5. God's Providential Rule And Overrule

Remember, *"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."* Rom 8:28, and that *"God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it."* 1 Cor. 10:13

6. Our Future Rewards And Exaltation

"God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing." 1 Thess. 5:9-11

These perspectives are also what we need to help others with what they face in life. If you are called upon for counsel or advice, these biblical perspectives will probably be what is needed.

NOVEMBER 26

GIVING THANKS TO GOD

*“It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Thy name, O Most High.”
Psalm 92:1*

Why is it good to give thanks to the Lord? Two reasons are given by the Psalmist. *First*, because God is so good **to us**. (vs. 2-4) Concerning this, His lovingkindness, His faithfulness, and His works for us are all mentioned. God’s lovingkindness (*hesed*) is a combination of His mercy and His grace: i.e. not giving us what we deserve (mercy), and then giving us what we don’t deserve (grace). Have you thanked Him for this? You should. Every day. Also, have you wandered a bit from Him? Have you been unfaithful some? Well, He has not been unfaithful to you. “When we are faithless, He remains faithful.” (2 Tim. 2:13) He has promised us unbroken love, acceptance, and forgiveness. Have you thanked Him for this? Thirdly, what has God done for you in Christ? What are His works – for you? (Phil. 2:6-8) Have you thanked God for these today? It is good to do so.

The *second* reason given to give thanks to the Lord is because it is so good **for us** to do this. Do you face hard things in life? Jesus said you would if you lived for Him. (John 6:33) As we face these grievous things, thanking God for them is good **for us** because:

1. It is the only pathway to true joy “in the midst” of life’s trials (vs. 4). It is good to thank God for the hardest things you face in life!
2. Thanking God for the hardest things you face in life is good for us because it transforms us from an angry, bitter person into a forgiving one! It is good to thank God for these grievous things. (James 1:2-4)
3. It changes my heart – from an ungrateful, complaining one – into a contented one! (Phil. 4:6)
4. It is the only path that I can take to deliver me from despair, grief, and revenge, and into songs of joy! Do you constantly remember Rom. 8:28 and impose this truth on the hardest things you face in life? Does it lead you to give thanks to God for the hard things He has allowed? Remember, God takes these grievous things and turns them, by His power, into glory for Himself and those He loves!

Psalm 92 was written by a man facing the hurts of great enemies, of great foes, of awful evildoers (vs. 11). He was not looking BACK at what had been done to him, he was looking FORWARD to the justice and wonders of what God had promised. He was still “in the midst,” but he knew that it is good to give thanks to God, and sing praises to His name. It is good to do so, because our Creator, Savior, and Lord has been so good **to us**, and also because He wondrously uses life’s most grievous things **for us**.

NOVEMBER 27

A BIBLICAL RECIPE FOR THANKSGIVING

“It is good to give thanks to the LORD.” Psalm 92:1

The phrase “giving thanks” is found 75 times in the Bible. Other forms (thankful, thanks, etc.) are found an additional 161 times! The pattern of giving thanks for what God **has done**, what God **is doing**, and what God **will do**, is found often. They provide a recipe we can use for our own thanksgiving times. Here it is. Begin with:

1. **Thanks to God for what He has delivered us from.**
Hell. Sin. Evil. Satan... Then add...
2. **Thanks to God for the heritage we have been given.**
“Our Father, who art in heaven...” Then add...
3. **Thanks to God for the personal gifts He has given to us.**
Parents. Church. Children. Spouse. Ministry. Provision... Then add...
4. **Thanks to God for those He has raised up to serve us.**
Leaders, past and present, in our country, church, and family... Then add...
5. **Thanks to God for showing us His principles of life.**
His Word. The way. The walk. Reproofs. Corrections... Then add...
6. **Thanks to God for His clear directions to us.**
Counsel. Insight. Understanding. Answers to prayer... Then add...
7. **Thanks to God for His loving discipline.**
Consequences. Authorities. Patience... Then add...
8. **Thanks to God for His promises to us.**
Guidance. Rewards. Endurance. Heaven. Then enjoy.

Yes, it’s good for me to give thanks to my Father,
Who has loved me far beyond what I can know.
Oh so marvelous His plan. Oh so wondrous are His deeds.
So much love for me, the child of His delight!

Yes, it’s good for me to give thanks to my Savior,
And to praise Him for the things that He has done.
For so great are all His works. And they make me oh so glad.
Oh I thank you Lord, you make me sing for joy!

NOVEMBER 28

WALKING HIS PATH

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” Eph. 4:1

Beginning in Eph. 4:1, and continuing through Eph. 6:9, Paul teaches us the process of maturing that each saved person must yield to. It is an ongoing “setting apart” process that involves 5 distinct aspects of “walking” as a Christian. These 5 are summarized below. We are to:

1. Walk in a manner worthy of our calling. 4:1

We are called here to two things: First, to be a member, and secondly, to use the gift we have been given as a member of our church for the benefit of the other members. Is this true of you?

2. Walk no longer as the “Gentiles” walk. 4:17

Here we are called to put off any old ways and habits, and live now as directed by God’s word. God’s power in us and love for Him is emphasized. This is often a challenge. Have you met it?

3. Walk in love. 5:2

We have been told to separate from sin, and now our calling is to accept and love immature church folks. Now we must walk in intolerance on the one hand and tolerance on the other - at the same time. We can’t be loving ourselves as much as we did. (*Mt 16:24/Luke 6:27-35*)

4. Walk as children of light. 5:8

Our walk is to be such that we EXPOSE by our life – our choices, appearance, attitudes, and words – the deeds of darkness. We are to walk as children of God’s light in the world, shining the light of God’s character and values in the darkness.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”
Matt. 5:14-16

5. Walk not as unwise people, but as wise. 5:15

This addresses what we are to invest our time and life in. How are we to spend our time? It is to be spent wisely. Wisdom is seeing life from God’s perspective. We are to be imposing His perspectives on our thinking and our circumstances. God has an opinion about everything we face in life. His Word is our guide. Walking His path is our calling. Are you on it?

NOVEMBER 29

EARNING YOUR PHD IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”
2 Tim. 3:16-17

How would you teach a course in biblical counseling to help a person live life as a Christian, building and rebuilding their lives? Helping them learn God’s Word and the four steps needed to apply it, is the answer God gives us (2 Tim. 3:16-17). All of us should be personally taking this class and teaching others what we have learned.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
Matt. 28:19-20

The Four Basic Elements of Biblical Counseling

1. Help Them Identify And Admit Their Problem(s).

Bitterness	Pride	Rebellion	Immorality
Generational Sins	Worldly Values	Negative Thought Patterns	
Sinful Habits	Occult Activities		

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

2. Help Them “Clean Out” Their Soul of Guilt and Mental Strongholds.

“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” 1 Tim. 1:5

“The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Cor. 10:4-5

3. Teach Them How To Be Victorious In Each Area.

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” 2 Tim. 2:1-2

4. Show Them How To Go Through Regular Cleansing

“That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.” Eph. 5:26-27

Ah, Doctor... There is someone here to see you. They look like they need some help.

NOVEMBER 30

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR ALL THE SAINTS

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” Eph. 6:18

“Saint” is the most common word in the NT for a Christian. It literally means “set apart ones”. Tens of millions of saints live on the planet, spread across more than 200 countries and thousands of people groups and languages. This exhortation, which ends Paul’s discussion of our weapons of truth, that we must use in our battle against the Satanic forces we face, shows the importance of our prayers. Notice the four “alls” in the passage. “All prayer...at all times...with all perseverance...for all the saints”!!! The scope of this is incredible. The privilege of it is wonderful. The potential fruit of it is eternally immense. It is directed toward you. Time to pray.

We will return to this command every month as a reminder of its importance. But how can we pray for so many like this? One way is to set aside time to pray for those saints that you know, who are ministering around the country, or around the world. Another way is to intercede for the many you don’t know, either generally, or systematically based on the many continents, countries, and other divisions of our world. Today you are encouraged to pray for the saints who live and minister in RUSSIA.

Only 2 million of the total population of 145 million identify as evangelicals. While the Russian language dominates, there are 160 distinct ethnic groups who speak an additional 120 languages.

You may know the challenges that some of the saints are facing there and perhaps even some of the saints themselves. The work of reaching every tribe and tongue and people and nation is reaching its completion. We are a part of this as we pray “*with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.*” Someday soon we will know what fruit has been produced through our intercessions and petitions.

DECEMBER 1

A PERFECT RELATIONSHIP

“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing.” John 5:20

We are relational beings, because God is a relational person. God has created us to share His life and live in an intimacy that He calls oneness. It started well, but then sin ruined it. But because God is a lover of others, a giver, a blessing, who delights to share His life with others, He is restoring these ruined relationships. He paid a debt He did not owe to remove the barriers and offenses. He has forgiven, and redeemed, and justified, so that He can have a perfect relationship with us and we can enjoy Him forever. Our Father’s perfect relationship with the Son is what we have been invited to share in. It is described for us by our Lord Jesus. Let us note how Jesus, as a man, describes His relationship with His Father in heaven.

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing.

John 5:19-20

1. He did not live independently of the Father.

“The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing.” This does not mean that He could not choose to act and live without regard to the Father – as Satan and Adam did, and we do. Instead, He chose to live in oneness with the Father. *“I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)* This is a oneness of two distinct persons living in a perfect relationship of oneness of heart, mind, and soul.

Does dependence describe your relationship with God. (I can do nothing, unless...)?

Does intimacy describe it? (I can do nothing, unless...)?

2. He lived His life imitating the Father.

“Whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” God created us to know Him, be like Him, and choose to be doing what He does, as He does. So, He gave us His Word. He gave us the Holy Spirit. He gave us His Son. *“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you.” (Eph 5:1-2)* The apostle Paul did this and he encouraged us to do the same. *“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”*

1 Cor. 11:1

3. His whole heart was focused on loving the Father.

But notice, there is a further progression in the relationship of Jesus with the Father. *“Whatever the Father does, these things the Son does.”* This reminds us of the goal of God’s restoring work of our salvation in our life. *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with **all** your heart, and with **all** your soul, and with **all** your mind.”* Are you “all in” in your relationship with God? He wants all of your heart, as He gives you all of His. God does not settle for almost everything. Ask Annanias and Sapphira.

DECEMBER 2

MORE? EXCEL STILL MORE?

*“Brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that... as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may **excel still more**.” 1 Thess 4:1*

Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonian church acknowledged that their faith and love and hope was exceptional and that he had cited them as an example to be imitated by all the other churches. Then, having said how pleased God was with them, Paul exhorted them to EXCEL STILL MORE! Wow!

*“We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your **work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.” 1 Thess. 1:2-3*

You may be much like the believers in Thessalonica – already loving and serving the Lord with some maturity and distinction. This is the most mature church in the NT and Paul praised them to all the other churches even as they lived in the midst of much tribulation. And yet the exhortation of this whole letter, is for them to EXCEL STILL MORE in their walk and service for Christ. How is this to be done? Paul proceeds to focus on three main things.

1. We must surrender more of ourself and our life. Our faith must grow yet more.

Yieldedness, submission, brokenness are words often used to describe this path. George Mueller said that this battle of going further in “having no will of his own in a matter” was 9/10 of the battle of living for God in the darkness of his day. Are you an example of this like the Thessalonians? Good job. Surrender still more. (Mt. 16:24)

2. We must excel more than we have in our love for the brethren. Our love must grow.

Remember that already “beyond their ability” and “out of their extreme poverty” they had asked to help the Christians in Jerusalem. They had become an example to all of considering others more important than themselves. (Phil. 2:4-5). They were already wonderful examples of sacrificial love. But what are they exhorted to do? Give still more of their life to others.

*“Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for **indeed you do practice it** toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. **But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more**.”*

1 Thess. 4:9-10

3. We must excel still more to live in light of God’s promises. Our hope must be stronger.

As our hope grows, God will use us to encourage and strengthen others. Paul had this in mind as he ended his exhortation to these exceptional believers:

“We urge you, brethren, 1) admonish the unruly, 2) encourage the fainthearted, 3) help the weak, 4) be patient with all men.”

1 Thess. 5:14

Who have you assumed responsibility for? Let’s excel still more.

DECEMBER 3

GOD HAS NO GRANDCHILDREN

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” John 1:12

The term grandchild is never used in the NT to refer to someone who is saved. Rather we are all God’s children. *“See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are...Beloved, now we are children of God.” 1 John 3:1-2* What is the point? It is not uncommon for someone to have saved parents and grow up in a Christian home, and go to a doctrinally solid church – and not be saved. Their parents were children of God, and they think God has grandchildren. This is why one of the seven letters written to God’s churches that we have in Revelation 2-3 is to a church filled with spiritually dead members. Many of these members thought they were saved, but were not. They were morally sound, went to church, and sang hymns of praise to the God of heaven. They most likely celebrated easter, communion, and had fellowship as a member. They were continuing in the outward forms of their Christian heritage, but they had no personal relationship with God. Here is what the Lord said to them:

*“I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.... Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. **He who overcomes** shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.” Rev. 3:1-5*

What is an “overcomer”? This refers to a person who becomes a true Christian, by trusting in the finished work of Christ for his salvation from the penalty of his sin. *“For whatever is born of God **overcomes** the world; and this is the victory that has **overcome** the world-- our faith. And who is the one who **overcomes** the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” 1 John 5:4-5*

Are you perhaps a grandchild in the faith? Perhaps you are a person of character and good works. You do read devotional studies about the Christian life. But you have not confessed that you are a sinner and cannot go to heaven unless the penalty for your sins is paid for. *“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me.'” Matt. 7:21-23* You must become an OVERCOMER! You must become a true Christian, one of God’s children.

If you are a child of God, perhaps you know of some “grandchildren” in your church or life. Will you commit to praying for them and speaking to them about these things?

DECEMBER 4

THE REASONS THAT WE SUFFER

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result.” James 1:2-4

There are a number of these that we must remember. We suffer as disciples of Christ because of...

1. Where We Live, in a fallen world. *“Then to Adam He said, “Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you. And you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Gen. 3:17-19*

2. Our Father’s Training, leading to our maturity and usefulness.

“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” Heb. 12:11

3. Our Savior’s Work and Glory.

“For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Phil. 1:29

These are all important.

But there is another reason that is often not recognized by us until we are a good ways down the road to spiritual maturity. Paul clarifies this as he describes his own suffering as an apostle:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

*For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. **But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation;** or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.”*

2 Cor 1:3-6

A Pastor was devastated by the sudden loss of his wife of 40 years. But, after a few months, he said that, surprisingly, it had enhanced his ministry to others in a way nothing else in his many years of serving Christ had. His sensitivity toward others in their suffering, and his ability to help them, was greater now than it had ever been. He said, holding back tears, that without the loss of his dear wife he would not be as useful as he is now. This is the perspective that Paul is describing above for himself. The affliction he suffered, and the comfort he received in it from God, increased his compassion and caring. He became more gentle and lowly, like His Savior.

So, let us remember - why do I suffer as I serve Christ? For others. For others. For others. Thank you Lord, for these hard things.

DECEMBER 5

LIVING FOR CHRIST IN A POST CHRISTIAN AMERICA

“But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” 2 Tim. 4:5

*“Realize this, that **in the last days difficult times will come**. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, as also that of those two came to be...”*

*“**Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” 2 Tim. 3:1-13*

What has happened in America since the end of World War II? America has gone from the greatest nation of biblical values ever to exist, to a people who reject God, absolute truth, and do what is best for them. It has followed the Romans 1 road to evil and wickedness with surprising rapidness. Virtually all of our educational institutions have been lost to humanism and relativism, rejecting God and exalting man. They have produced the generation of our current leaders. There is no proclamation of God’s perspective, His principles of life, His enabling grace and power, and no exhortation and example to impose God’s revealed truth on our circumstances in life.

Where is the salt and light of the church in this decline through immorality, sodomy, depraved thinking, to all manner of evil? The great majority of the church has been influenced by the culture and not vice versa. The lifestyles and the demographics of the vast majority are the same. The salt has lost its savor and the light is so dim as to be missed in the growing darkness. America has turned its back on God, is now under His judgement, and providing justice, freedoms, and life, less and less. It has begun the persecution of those who would live for Christ.

We are told not to be surprised by this (*1 Pet. 4:12*). We are told that living as a Christian is going to get tougher and tougher (*2 Tim. 3-4*). We are told to be salt and light (*Matt. 5:13-14*).

What are we to do?

There are several things, but one is perhaps the most important. Remember that the days are numbered for millions that are not saved, and that we are still here to shine the light of Christ into their darkness.

*“And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end...**This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.**”*

Matt 24:6-14

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Matt. 5:16

DECEMBER 6

LIVING NOW IN LAODICEA – WITH THE MIXED CHURCH

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”
Rev. 3:15-16

When Christians are not committed to denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following Christ, they will speak and stand for Christ only when it doesn't cost them much. And if the country they live in is on the downward Romans 1 road, as America has been for 75 years, they will drift along with it rather than stand firmly as a witness against it.

The downstream drift of the mixed Church begins when:

1. They cease to be wholly committed to live for Christ. (*1 John 1:6-7*)
2. They begin to accept little compromises in every area of life. (*1 Cor. 5:9*)
3. They are ok with spiritual mediocrity and are no longer bothered by it. (*Rom. 16:17-18*)

It gets worse as:

4. They are no longer willing to suffer at all for Christ. (*2 Tim. 1:8*)
5. They cease to be salt and light. (*Mt. 5:13-16*)
6. They open the door to the world for their children. (*Eph. 6:4*)

They become nauseating to God when:

7. They have changed their theology to fit the mix. (*Mt. 6:24*)
8. They have eliminated all standards, accepting anyone and tolerating anything. (*Rev. 3:15-22*)

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth, because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Rev. 3:15-22

To the lukewarm churches in lukewarm America.

DECEMBER 7

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR THE MEMBERS OF MY CHURCH

*“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” James 5:13-16*

Paul told the Ephesians church that *“the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (Eph. 4:16)* He then exhorted them at length regarding how they were to work together as a church. He ended with this great emphasis on praying for one another, saying... *“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”*

Eph. 6:18

What members in your church could you pray for today? What members need prayer?

- The elderly
- Those with health needs
- Moms
- Dads
- Kids
- The Widowed
- Singles
- Divorced
- Those needing clear direction
- The worldly
- Church leaders
- Wives
- Husbands
- Those with work and material needs
- Ministry leaders
- Students
- The handicapped
- The immature, rebellious, self-oriented
- The hardworking and faithful
- Those needing reproof and admonition
- Those needing encouragement and comfort

DECEMBER 8

IF YOUR BROTHER SINS

“If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you...” Matt. 18:15-16

There are **five steps** given in God’s instructions to us on how to respond to a brother or sister in Christ who is “missing the mark” and sinning. They need to be reprovved. Reprove is a positive word, as are rebuke, exhort, admonish, and correct. They are all used to describe how we can help one another walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord. Have you helped anyone lately who is obviously doing something that the Lord considers wrong? Why not?

*“If your brother sins, **go and reprove him** in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.”*
Matt. 18:15-17

1. First, clarify your God- given responsibility and authority, and then go.

Personally. Privately. Kindly. Gently. Appealingly. Clearly. (2 Tim. 2:24-25)

2. Then, discern the person’s commitment to heeding God’s word.

Tell him his fault in the context of God’s Word and...*“If he listens to you, you have won your brother.” Matt. 18:15* But, if he or she shows no sign of changing course, don’t quit.

3. Let the Spirit work for a time to bring conviction, repentance, and change of course.

A man at church took a job for a time out of town, got involved with a woman, and cut off relations with his family and everyone at church. Several of his friends tried to contact him, but he would not talk to them. They began taking days off to travel 2-3 hours and sit outside his office. Someone was there all day, every day, for two weeks. Finally, he was broken and made a complete repentance. The Lord used the love of his brothers to turn him back. So,

“If he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you.”

4. Tell the appropriate leaders in your church about it if he still persists in his sin.

This would be the appropriate way to “tell it to the church”. But if there is still no change...

5. Change your relationship with him, until he changes his attitude toward God.

What does it mean to *“Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer”*? These are descriptions of folks who are not saved. So, going forward, after all this rejection of God and no evidence of conviction, don’t assume that this brother is saved. Pray for his salvation.

Are you being used by the Lord to help other members of your church in their battles with the world, their flesh, and the Deceiver?

DECEMBER 9

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Luke 6:27-28

People Are Unreasonable, Illogical, And Self-Centered.
Love Them Anyway.

If You Do Good, People Will Accuse You Of Selfish, Ulterior Motives.
Do Good Anyway.

If You Are Successful, You Will Win False Friends And True Enemies.
Succeed Anyway.

The Good You Do Today Will Be Forgotten Tomorrow.
Do Good Anyway.

Honesty And Frankness Make You Vulnerable.
Be Honest And Frank Anyway

What You Spend Years Building May Be Destroyed Overnight.
Build Anyway.

People Really Need Help But May Attack You If You Help Them.
Help People Anyway.

Give The World The Best You’ve Got And You’ll Get Kicked In The Teeth.
Give The World The Best You’ve Got Anyway.

DECEMBER 10

AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT IN A CHRISTIAN

“Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?’” Matt. 18:32-33

These are Christ’s final words in His answer to Peter’s question regarding how much forgiveness he was to give to those who were sinning against him. *“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?” Matt. 18:21* His answer was – “Even as I had mercy on you!” A forgiving heart comes from a forgiven heart. It can forgive, and should, but it often doesn’t.

Mercy is NOT giving someone what they deserve. Forgive them instead. God has not given us what we deserve. Instead, He has forgiven us for our sins. He now asks us, to accept His power to forgive those who wrong us. *“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Eph. 4:32*

What Are The Consequences To Living For Christ With An Unforgiving Spirit?

- **Bitterness begins to control our thoughts and lead us in life.**
“See to it that no root of bitterness... springing up, causes trouble.” Heb. 12:15
Do you struggle with any bitter thoughts?
- **Offenses test our responses. An unforgiving spirit fails the tests God allows.**
*“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that **the testing of your faith** produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete.” James 1:2-4* Have you passed your recent tests in the classroom of wrongs and offenses?

Does Our Forgiving Spirit Completely Resolve The Effects Of The Offense? No.

When we as Christians sin, and we do, this grieves God. (*Eph. 4:30*) But when we do, He is still standing fully ready to forgive us. There is something we must do to clear up the matter between us.: *“If we **confess** our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)* This is not referring to our salvation, it is referring to our fellowship with God after our salvation. **Until we confess** and admit our sin, our relationship with God **as a Christian** is not what it should be.

The same need for confession is true for those who have wronged us. We must stand ready with a forgiving spirit, and forgive them, but without confession of sin by them, we cannot alone fully repair the damage done to our relationship by them. How many times are we to forgive them? Seven times? That should be enough. No, it isn’t. Seventy times seven.

Don’t be unforgiving today. Remember, God is forgiving of you. Seventy times seven.

DECEMBER 11

CONFRONTING THE LIE

*“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God...
for they exchanged the truth of God for the Lie.” Rom. 1:21-25*

THE LIE is the devastating idea that man can be equal with God. When children say by their behavior that “My ideas, my desires, and my opinions are as good as yours, Mommy”, they are demonstrating that their whole nature has been injected with THE LIE. When a people say by their behavior that, “Our ideas, our desires, and our opinions, are as good as Gods, that people is promoting THE LIE. Our nation is promoting THE LIE, having put God out almost completely. To introduce His opinions, instructions, desires, and commands is not only left out – it is actively opposed and increasingly forbidden. *“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God...for they exchanged the truth of God for THE LIE.” Rom. 1:21-25* THE LIE of modern humanistic thinking is that there is no God, therefore, man himself is the measure of all things. What is best for me is all that matters.

But now, as God’s people, we are to... *“laying aside THE LIE, speak truth, each one of you with his neighbor.” Eph. 4:25* This means confronting THE LIE that man is the measure of all things, not God. This is our great challenge personally, and in our churches, exposing THE LIE for what it is, by shining the light of God’s Word on it by what we say and do. Tolerating THE LIE exposes our compromised thinking and lack of commitment and is strongly addressed. We have many examples. *“I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold **the teaching of Balaam**,... you also have some who in the same way hold **the teaching of the Nicolaitans**.” Rev. 2:14-15*

Balaam claimed to be a prophet of God, but was a man who lived more for personal gain than for God (2 Pet. 2:15). The Nicolaitans were false teachers who claimed that what they said was to be regarded higher than what God said in His word. Today we would call these men humanists and false teachers. They have, in reality, put God out, and have put themselves and their thinking at the center of life as the correct and final measure of all things. Life is all about them, not God.

THIS LIE is the truth for so many in our day and tolerating THE LIE is the practice of many Christians. Many of our forefathers sought to subject themselves to God. His will, as expressed in His Word, lived by selfless sacrifice by His power, was their way and goal in life. The present generation, which believes THE LIE, is replacing all of these things to fit what they want and think is best for them. The great danger they see is from Christians who say: *“Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God,...emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, **that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow**, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and **that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil. 2:3-11*

To what extent are you tolerating, rather than confronting, THE LIE?

DECEMBER 12

GOD'S FINAL PLEA

"Take the water of life without cost." Rev. 22:17

Salvation from the wrath of God to come is free. It is without cost. God does more than offer this to fallen man. He pleads that we accept what the Son has done for us. *"It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life **without cost**. He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son...take the water of life **without cost**."* Rev. 21:6, 22:17

Take the Son without cost.

Take a restored relationship with Him without cost to you. It is free.

Come home, there is no cost.

Take the gift of life eternal without cost.

Take what Jesus has won for you, by giving His life for you. There is no cost.

How amazing that our Sovereign, Eternal God should ask men to do anything. Yet this is even more than an invitation. It is a plea! "Come and be saved. My Son has given His life for you, that you could be with us in glory and share our life. There is not cost to you! Take the water of life. It is **without cost** to you."

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is **the gift of God**; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."* Eph. 2:8-9 Salvation is a gift!

*"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified **as a gift** by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."* Rom. 3:23-24 Without cost!

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have **eternal life**. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him."* John 3:16-17 It is free!

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come." Matt. 24:14

To what extent are you making this "good news" known? To what extent are you doing evangelistic work for your Lord? He is coming back soon and that will be the end of any opportunities for men to have eternal life without cost.

*"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches...Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one come who wishes take the water of life **without cost**."* Rev. 22:16-17

DECEMBER 13

THE ENEMIES THAT WE FACE EVERY DAY – AND MUST RESIST

“Take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” Eph. 6:13

We face 4 primary enemies in our work for Christ here, in this fallen world, awaiting His return. They are:

1. Our Adversary, Satan and the Fallen Angels

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to **stand firm against the schemes of the devil**. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” Eph. 6:10-13*

2. Our Own Flesh, The Unredeemed Part of Our Fallen Nature

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For **the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit**, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Gal. 5:16-17*

3. Our Fallen World, With Its Material, Sensual, and Relational Temptations

*“Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For **all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life**, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” 1 John 2:15-17*

4. False Teachers and Brethren In The Church

“There will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.” 2 Pet. 2:1-3 But....

*“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you **contend earnestly for the faith** which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, ungodly persons... who turn the grace of God into licentiousness.” Jude 1:3-4*

So let us remember - to take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ, to put to death the deeds of our flesh, to contend earnestly for the faith, and to flee from the temptations of the world.

DECEMBER 14

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR YOUR FAMILY

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.”
Rom. 12:10

Our family members are our focus today. There are many relationships here that the Lord has chosen for us.

*“Husbands, love **your wives**, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”*
Eph. 5:25-26

*“Children, obey **your parents** in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you.”* Eph. 6:1-3

*“Wives, be submissive to **your own husbands** so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”* 1 Pet. 3:1-2

Added to these close family members are the extended members of our family. Siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, grandparents and others. In some of these you may be faced with the heartaches and trials of a broken or difficult relationship. There may be offenses and separations. But remember, God has been divorced. God has been rejected. But it is His responses of forgiveness, longsuffering, and love that are held up to us to imitate. Praying for your family members, in whatever status your relationships are in, is what He asks of us.

There are 35 prayers of the apostle Paul in His NT letters. They are all for others! They are good models for us to use as we make intercessions, supplications, and thanksgivings for our family members. Here are just two.

“We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” Col. 1:9-12

“We pray for you always, that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
2 Thess. 1:11-12

DECEMBER 15

WHERE IS GOD WORKING TODAY?

“Work out your salvation, with a proper sense of awe and responsibility. For it is God who is at work within you, giving you the desire and the power to do His will.” Phil. 2:12-13

God is personally on earth in the present church age - in the heart of every Christian. Read what Paul said about what God was doing through him, and all of us who are now born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

*Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of **this mystery** among the Gentiles, **which is Christ in you**, the hope of glory.*

And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” Col. 1:24-29

If Paul was with us, he would surely be asking us two questions about what we just read.

1. Are you personally letting the Holy Spirit lead and empower you in life, or not?

Paul was an exhorter, so we could expect that he would be exhorting us to examine our goals and commitments, and then, whether we are striving to do them in God's power or ours.

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” Eph. 4:1 Are you? Can the Lord use you as an example?

“Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.” Eph. 6:10 Do you know how?

2. Are you serving the Lord as an active member of His church where He has called you?

In both Romans and Ephesians, Paul begins the “how to live for Christ” sections with the doctrine of being a member of a local church, using our gifts and giving our life in selfless love to the other members of the church God has placed each of us in. (1 Cor. 12:18)

“So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly...Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor. Rom. 12:5-10 Are you? Do you?

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift... And He gave gifts to men...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” Eph. 4:8-13 You have been given a gift to use for others. Are you?

DECEMBER 16

GOD'S GRACE TO YOU TODAY

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Rom. 16:24

Grace is used to describe God's unmerited work FOR US, IN US, and THROUGH US.

1. God's grace FOR US is revealed by many elements, most of which are beyond our total comprehension.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast... but now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household... you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Eph 2:8-22

Christ's work for us also means that we are part of the church He is building... *"which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all." Eph. 1:23* How do we comprehend that!

2. God's grace IN US transforms our soul to desire, know, and do the will of God.

"You therefore, beloved, ...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." 2 Pet. 3:17-18

"I bow my knees before the Father, ...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; ...that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." Eph 3:14-21

3. God's grace THROUGH US produces God's fruit in others.

Notice how the first 2 aspects of grace that we have noted lead to this third aspect of being used of God to do His work in the lives of others.

"Grace and peace be multiplied to you... applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, selfless love (of others).

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Pet. 1:2-8

What might be the greatest hinderance today of God working for you, in you, or through you?

DECEMBER 17

HONORING GOD'S DESIGN BEFORE MARRIAGE

"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe." 1 Tim. 4:12

Purity and virginity before marriage is commanded by the Lord for His people. Wise standards, principles of dating, accountability to others, and personal convictions, are essential if improper and immoral relationships before marriage are to be avoided and we are to be kept from guilt, have joy, and be most useful and fruitful.

Singleness is a calling and major part of God's plan for all of us for part of our life, and for some Christians it is a special calling for all of their life. In addition, singleness is a status that is encouraged above marriage for some, because it frees a person from the responsibilities of marriage and family to give more of one's life to others."

*"One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I say for your own benefit; **not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.**" 1 Cor. 7:32-35*

What guidelines and counsel would you give to a young woman regarding invitations to pursue a "casual," dating relationship with a man? How would you advise a young man regarding his relationships with young women? What should be their goals, approach, cautions, and commitments regarding 1) dating, 2) engagement, and 3) marriage? What are the biblical principles involved? If you have not clearly defined these, trouble is inevitable. If you have, you will be pressured to ignore them, by all three of our enemies. Our sensual, immoral world is full of temptations, our own fallen nature is lustful to excess, and the Deceiver is brilliant at leading us astray. We can defeat them, but it is a major, lifelong battle, requiring the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit. The standards are high, and it is increasingly hard to find Christians who are committed to them, both in their personal life and in helping others in this battle.

"But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints." Eph. 5:3

*"**Flee immorality**...or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body." 1 Cor. 6:18-20* TV anyone? Cell phones? Internet?

*"I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, **modestly and discreetly.**" 1 Tim. 2:9* This has almost disappeared in our land. Even at church.

DECEMBER 18

GOD IS SO GOOD

“So they...reveled in Thy great goodness...in their own kingdom, with Thy great goodness, which Thou didst give them.” Nehemiah 9:25,35

The longest prayer in the Bible is found in *Nehemiah 9:5-38*. It is a review of the history of the Jewish people and praise and thanksgiving to God for all His goodness to them through all of it. If we were to summarize these 33 verses in one sentence it would be: “O Lord, You are so good!” The point of this entire chapter is – God is good. It reveals, not only what is the central point of the entire book, but also, it can be argued, the principle revelation of the entire Bible.

- **God’s goodness is revealed in His creation.**

“Thou alone art the LORD. Thou hast made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them.” Neh. 9:6 God did not need to create the Universe and fill it with life, putting man in it, made with the capacity to enjoy it. He was without need of it for Himself. So why? Because God is good. The grandeur and expanses of His goodness are so vast. He not only gave us eyesight in His goodness, but things of beauty to see and behold. God is so good. He not only gave us the sense of smell, but created fragrances, like roses. God is so good. He not only created hearing, but laughs and giggles and music. God is so good.

Some will say, “But wait, there are bad things. Some things I see and hear are bad.” How do you answer that? Well, if it is bad...God did not do it. God is good. In His goodness, He tolerates evil for a season, but He is not the author of anything bad. God is good. In all He does. In all He has made.

- **God’s goodness is revealed in our deliverance from sin.**

*“Thou art the LORD God, who chose Abram **and brought him out** from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham, and didst make a covenant with him to give him the land... and Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise, for Thou art righteous.” Neh. 9:7-8*

Abraham was not a man of influence or lineage. It was not something in Abraham that caused God to choose him. He was chosen solely because God is good. So it is with all of us. We are saved, not because we do good things. We are saved only because our God is good. He chose you first, that is why you chose Him. He sought you first – that is why you sought Him. He loved you first, that is why you love Him. Our God is so good!

- **God’s goodness is revealed by what He has prepared for us.**

“And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.” Rev. 22:1-5 **GOD IS SO GOOD!!**

DECEMBER 19

YOUR INHERITANCE

“We have obtained an inheritance.” Eph. 1:11

Sometimes we live life in the perspective of **the past**. We can struggle with past hurts and offenses. Bitterness can be a telling symptom of this. But more often our focus is on **the present**, without much consideration of things to come. The symptoms are usually worldliness and sensuality, the pursuit of pleasure and experience, and the love of money. But we must learn about **our future inheritance**, and live in this perspective, if we are to bear much fruit at all while we are here.

Our inheritance includes God’s entire domain, for we are “*fellow heirs with Christ*.” God, who owns everything, delights to give it all to His children. We shall inherit His nature, His character, His power, His authority, and His entire domain. “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*.” (Rom 8:16-17) Living in hope of our coming inheritance is a repeated exhortation to us.

*“If you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your mind on the things above**, not on the things that are on earth. For...your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” Col 3:1-4*

Note the primary truths stated regarding our inheritance in Paul’s letter below to the Ephesians:

1. It is God’s will, plan, purpose, and predetermination.
2. It is a “done deal” for those in Christ. We have already obtained it.
3. It shall glorify God to give it to us. So, it is a blessing beyond our imagining.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.... In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight...In Him we also have obtained **an inheritance**, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will...In Him, you also...were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of **our inheritance**, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.” Eph. 1:3-14*

It cannot be bigger, cannot be better, and it cannot be lost. Soon, very soon.

DECEMBER 20

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

"I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil... and it was very displeasing to me... So I contended with them... Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties... each in his task. Remember me, O my God, for good." Nehemiah 13:7-31

God had appointed Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem and lead the people in rebuilding their lives for God according to His word. He was very successful, and then returned to Babylon. When he returned, he found them violating God's word. His renewed leadership shows us:

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS

1. The Word of God is the basis and focus of all they do.

Every Christian is to be a leader in this sense. We are to be the light of the world. Our leadership is not measured by our position, but by the purity of our light.

2. They lead by example.

What happens when we are not examples of living by the Word? Then we are not very useful, and that is why church leaders are to be tested before they are given authority as leaders.

"An overseer, then, must be above reproach... He must be one who manages his own household well... and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach."

1 Tim. 3:2-10

3. They have assumed responsibility to influence others in God's word and ways.

This is work. It often consumes much of a leader's time and life. This is expected. It is also often thankless work. How many young children thank their parents for spanking them, reminding them of sin, and requiring them to be kind, and selfless in what they do? How many of Nehemiah's people thanked him for giving his life for them? How many church members, going the wrong way, thank the correcting efforts of their elders? How many going the right way?

"Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Heb. 13:17

4. They identify and deal with sin, error, ignorance, and rebellion in those they lead.

"And the Lord's bond-servant must... be... correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." 2 Tim. 2:24-26

Have you thanked your leaders recently? Or asked them if they have any correcting thoughts?

DECEMBER 21

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.” Heb. 13:17

Our Pastors and Elders are our focus today. These church leaders have been appointed by God to protect, teach, and disciple us as a priority in life.

“And He gave some... as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.” Eph 4:11-13

We are to acknowledge their God given authority and have right attitudes and responses to them.

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13:17

We are also to remember their teaching and example, and the investment they made in our life. We are told to remember that they gave their life to help us live for Christ.

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” Heb. 13:7

Remembering your Pastors and Elders – past and present – as you talk with God today. These prayers could include:

- 1) Thanking Him for giving them to you.
- 2) Asking Him to protect them as they are principal targets of the enemy. Their families are also.
- 3) Asking Him to encourage them and comfort them in the face of the trials that they may be facing in ministry and life.
- 4) Asking Him to give them His counsel and direction for themselves and the members in their church.
- 5) Asking the Lord regarding sending a note of thanks or blessing them personally.

DECEMBER 22

THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING

“Behold, I am coming quickly.” Rev. 22:12

God repeats this promise of His coming five times in the final verses of Revelation. Why is it so important? Why this emphasis on His coming quickly? There are three reasons that He speaks to.

- 1. Because it does not seem that He is coming quickly.** How are we understanding this? Here is His explanation.

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation.”

2 Pet. 3:9-15

- 2. Because we need the comfort of this promise.** Many have left us through death without His coming. How are we to deal with this? Here is the explanation.

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Therefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thess. 4:13-18

- 3. Because God wants us to “hasten” the day of His coming.**

“What sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?” 2 Pet. 3:11-12 Longing for and eagerly expecting His coming is the sense of the word hasten here. Rather than living in dread of what is happening in the world and living in fear rather than hope, we are to be looking for His coming.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 15:58

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.” Rev. 22:12

DECEMBER 23

HOW TO BE A BRIGHT LIGHT FOR CHRIST

*"You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light."
Eph 5:8*

Jesus said, "I am the **light** of the world." (John 8:12) because by His coming He both revealed the glory of the Father, and exposed the darkness of fallen man and his world. Yet He taught His disciples, now, "You are the **light** of the world." (Mt. 5:14-16) They were to "let their **light** shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven." Glory is the visible, physical manifestation of something. Amazing. Humbling.

How can we be bright lights for our Lord? We are told that we must do four things. We are to:

1. Grow in Christ-like character to be like Him.

If you want to be a light for Christ in this world, you must be like Him. **Sins are the lies we tell about God.** "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence,... knowledge... self-control... perseverance... godliness... brotherly kindness...and selfless love of others. For **if these qualities are yours** and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-8

2. Grow in our knowledge of God's Word. Get the Word IN.

Would you use a car with only one headlight? What are the truths revealed in the NT about Christ, salvation, the church, things to come, how to share the gospel, and many more. Study hard and learn them well so God can use you to reveal them to others. Get the Word IN.

3. Learn how to get the Word OUT – and do it.

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... **teaching them** to observe all that I commanded you. Matt. 28:19-20*

*"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." 2 Tim. 4:1-2*

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, **for training in righteousness**, that the man of God may be adequate, **equipped** for every good work. 2 Tim. 3:16-17*

Are you making disciples – who can then make disciples themselves? Do you know how?

4. Offer ourselves to the Lord – and GO SHINE where he sends us.

*"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that **you should go** and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." John 15:16*

Let's go. He has a place, and a plan for you, somewhere in the darkness of this world.

DECEMBER 24

HOW DID THE SHEPHERDS KNOW? THE MAGI? YOU?

“There were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them.” Luke 2:8-9

The lengths to which God goes, to ensure we know what He has done for us in Christ, is beyond amazing. Remember **Thomas**, after the resurrection. Many had seen Christ already, but he had not. *“The other disciples therefore were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ And after eight days His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” John 20:25-28*

He gave Thomas what he needed to trust Him for his eternal salvation. It is the same for each of us. To what lengths did God go to ensure **the shepherds** knew? He sent angels.

“And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” Luke 2:8-11

How did **the Magi** know to travel 600 miles to see the Jewish Messiah, recently born? This is another incredible story. Somehow, they had learned the gospel from the names of the stars and had been told by them that the Jewish Messiah had just been born. Of course they went.

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.’” Matt. 2:1-2

What did the apostle John need to believe? Evidence. Sufficient evidence to convince him that Christ had risen and really was the Savior and Messiah. We all need sufficient evidence. What did God do for **John**? He rolled away the huge stone and allowed John to go in and “see” the linen wrappings that could only have been as they were if there had been a resurrection.

“(John) came to the tomb first; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. Simon Peter therefore also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he beheld the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. So the other disciple (John) who had first come to the tomb entered then also, and he saw with understanding and believed.” John 20:4-8

The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out. It was rolled away to let John in. The evidence John needed to trust in Christ for his eternal salvation was given to him. So it is with all of us. **Our stories** are as amazing as these. Oh the lengths God has gone to ensure we know!

DECEMBER 25

THE CONTRASTS OF CHRISTMAS. A STORY ABOUT YOU.

*"For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."
Luke 2:11*

In an amazing, wondrous sense, Christmas is a story about you. Notice what Jesus did for you.

1. Jesus endured a human birth, that you might receive a spiritual birth.

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us...but as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12,14

2. Jesus became part of a human family, that you might become part of God's family.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:26

3. Jesus became poor, that you might become rich.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." 2 Cor. 8:9

4. Jesus laid aside His glory, that you might be given glory.

"And we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality... but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15:52, 57

5. Jesus was given a common name, that you might be given God's name.

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God." Rev. 3:12

6. Jesus was separated from His Father, that you might be One with the Father.

"I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one."

John 17:20-22

7. Jesus was ignored by men, that you might be received by God.

"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

John 14:1-3

8. Jesus subjected Himself to the law, that you might be free from the law.

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

Rom. 8:2

Jesus emptied himself for us. He laid aside his glory to help us. He asks us to do the same for others, in His name. Christmas is a lonely time for many around us. Shall we be like Jesus. Tell them the Christmas story.

DECEMBER 26

THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” John 1:14

What child is this in Bethlehem’s manger, born of a virgin? (Lk. 2:7)
What man is this on Calvary’s cross, rejected and forsaken, even by God? (Mt. 27:46)
What person is this who has risen from the dead, ascending into heaven? (Acts 1:9-11)

This child, this man, this risen person is Jesus Christ. We celebrate His birth at Christmas. It is only the beginning to the greatest story ever told.

1. Jesus Christ is the infinite, Eternal, Self-Existent, Creator and Sovereign of the Universe.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

John 1:1-4

“And He is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.” Heb. 1:3

2. Jesus Christ became a man, to live a sinless life, and become our substitute.

“Jesus, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Phil. 2:5-8

3. Jesus Christ died in our place, that we could spend eternity in heaven with God.

“For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

1 Cor. 1:22-24

4. Jesus Christ rose from the dead as proof that His sacrifice for us was accepted.

“He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”

Luke 24:6-7

5. Jesus Christ is coming back to meet all those saved in the church age, in the clouds.

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Merry Christmas!

DECEMBER 27

ALREADY, BUT NOT YET

“For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope.” Rom. 8:24

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” Col. 3:2-4

“We ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.” Rom. 8:23-25

“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” 2 Cor. 4:17-18

“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--for we walk by faith, not by sight-- we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” 2 Cor. 5:1-10

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. ...

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 15:51-58

DECEMBER 28

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR ALL THE SAINTS

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” Eph. 6:18

“Saint” is the most common word in the NT for a Christian. It literally means “set apart ones”. Tens of millions of saints live on the planet, spread across more than 200 countries and thousands of people groups and languages. This exhortation, which ends Paul’s discussion of our weapons of truth, that we must use in our battle against the Satanic forces we face, shows the importance of our prayers. Notice the four “alls” in the passage. “All prayer...at all times...with all perseverance...for all the saints”!!! The scope of this is incredible. The privilege of it is wonderful. The potential fruit of it is eternally immense. It is directed toward you. Time to pray.

We will return to this command every month as a reminder of its importance. But how can we pray for so many like this? One way is to set aside time to pray for those saints that you know, who are ministering around the country, or around the world. Another way is to intercede for the many you don’t know, either generally, or systematically based on the many continents, countries, and other divisions of our world. Today you are encouraged to pray for the saints who live and minister in MEXICO and CENTRAL AMERICA.

There are seven countries in Central America: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. More than 500 languages are spoken in Mexico and the Central American countries. Spanish is the dominant language in Central America, with English the official language of Belize. Mexico has an estimated evangelical population of over 10 million. The 7 Central American countries, with an estimated population of 180 million people, have over 15 million identifying as evangelicals.

You may know the challenges that some of the saints are facing there, and perhaps even some of the saints themselves. The work of reaching every tribe and tongue and people and nation is reaching its completion. We are a part of this as we pray *“with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”* Someday soon we will know what fruit has been produced through our intercessions and petitions.

DECEMBER 29

PAUL'S POSITIVE CONFRONTATIONAL METHOD

"To Philemon our beloved brother..." Philemon 1:1

Read Paul's lengthy introduction to his very serious and confrontational letter to Philemon, a Roman convert to Christianity, but still the owner of slaves. There are important lessons here.

"Paul, ...to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker... Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother." Philemon 1:1-7

Paul was bold enough, and cared enough to write and exhort Philemon to do three things he knew were God's will: Forgive Onesimus his thefts, accept and love him as a brother, and set him free. This was big, and risky. HOW he did it is our focus. Let's note the major things he did.

1. He put God in, making Him and His will the focus of all he would say.

"Grace to you from... God our Father. I thank God always...in my prayers to Him...because of your love and faith...toward the Lord Jesus...and I pray that... your faith...may become effective...for Christ's sake."

2. He began positively with Philemon with praises about him.

If Paul had come in person, he most assuredly would have come with a smile. He wanted Philemon to know that he was *for* him, and that he was seeking *his* best. He did this by praising his love, his faith, and his work. All this reveals his attitude toward Philemon – that he was seeking what was best for him, which he was, and not just God's will.

3. He made an appeal to Philemon to do God's will.

"Though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you-- since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus--I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me." Phm. 1:8-11

4. He argued that his appeal was God's will and he gave several reasons why it was.

We cannot address them here, but they are clearly seen in verses 15-20. Finally,

5. He told Philemon that God had a bigger plan than even what he was appealing for.

*"Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do **even more** than what I say." Phm. 1:21* What might this have been? Paul had something in mind and Philemon must surely have known what it was. So, probably, a few days after receiving this appeal, and talking to his wife and son, Philemon gave orders to bring all the slaves in from the fields and said "I am being led of the Lord to give all of you your freedom." Perhaps, he then said, "And I have asked Onesimus to tell you how all this came about."

DECEMBER 30

AND THEN THE END SHALL COME

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14

The gospel did not even begin to reach the scores of native Indian tribes on the Pacific coastal lands of America until the later part of the 1800s. It took 18 centuries after Christ died for our sins for the Gospel to reach them and the many people groups in the remote parts of every continent and the thousands of scattered islands of our planet. But today, the proclamation of the gospel “in the whole world” is nearly completed. Why has it taken so long? There are several reasons.

1. God has chosen to complete His saving work through His people – through the initial disciples, then through their disciples, then theirs, then theirs, and on to us today.

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” John 15:16

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; **and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**” Matt 28:19-20*

2. God has been waiting for you to be born!

If you are saved, your name was written in the Lamb’s Book of Life before He created the world. You are important enough for Him to wait for you, to be born and mature, hear the gospel, and be drawn by Him to accept what Christ did for you 20 centuries ago.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10

Of all the things God could have made for Himself – He made you! And...

Of all the things the Son of God could have given His life for – He gave it for you!

To what extent are you seeking to get the gospel to those born with you here near the end of the age? God used someone to get it to you. Who has God prepared for you to reach this week?

And then, perhaps, the end shall come.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

“And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” Esther 4:14

Are you facing a “such a time as this” time, like Esther? She was right where God’s plan for her life had gotten her. God has a plan for your life too.

- He has chosen your time in history, your parents, and even your physical appearance.
“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.” Eph. 1:4-5
- He has placed you among His people too. Just where He wants you.
“But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” 1 Cor. 12:18
- He has also prepared good works that He wants you to do. Just like her.
“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10
- His plan for you cannot be stopped by hard circumstances either. Just like His plan for her.
“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Rom. 8:28

But there is one thing that can hinder God’s plan for us. We can say “no.” We can quench the leading of the Holy Spirit. The most common time for this, is when we face things in life, as we are seeking to serve our Lord, that will be hard and potentially very grievous.

Esther faced such a time. To do what Mordecai was urging could mean her death. But God had placed her where she was “for such a time as this.” Do you find yourself today in a difficult place? Esther was faced with a choice. To remain quiet would be best for her. To speak to her husband the king without being summoned could result in her death. But God’s plan was becoming increasingly clear as it was contemplated. She was right where she was supposed to be, divinely prepared to do what was written in God’s plan for her in the salvation of her people.

What are you facing in life? Whatever it is today, remember... you have been “appointed” for such a time as this. God has a plan. Ask Him to confirm it, and then go. *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” John 15:16*

JANUARY 1

HAVING A PSALM 37 YEAR

“Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.”

Psalm 37:4

We are facing the continuing spiritual decline of our nation, fueled by the increasing worldliness and lukewarmness of our churches and families. So, how are we to face the coming months if the Lord tarries? Psalm 37 is a clear, direct exhortation from God to His servant David who faced similar issues. Let us note what we are told in just the first eight verses.

1. Impose God’s perspectives on your fretting. (vs. 1-2)

“Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers...Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way.” (Psalm 37:1,7) Fretting exposes that we have decided that the truth about God’s sovereignty, love, and plans do not apply to my current circumstances, however difficult they may be. Fretting is saying that my problems are beyond God’s sovereignty, His love for me, and have thwarted what He wants for me. Rather, **“Wait for the LORD, and keep His way, And He will exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.”** (37:34) Remember Rom. 8:28 – every day.

2. Get to the places where God can bless you. (vs. 4) Here are some important ones:

- Get to a clear conscience and stay there. (1 Tim. 1:5) Are you there?
- Get to a place of forgiveness of your offenders and stay there. (Heb. 12:15) Are you there?
- Get free from moral temptations and bondage. (Gal. 5:1) Are you there?

3. Turn your greatest weakness into a strength. (vs. 5-7) What is your greatest weakness? You. What is your greatest strength. Him.

*“Commit your way to **the LORD**, trust also in **Him**, and **He** will do it. **He** will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. Rest in **the LORD** and wait patiently for **Him**.”* (37:5-7)

4. Concentrate on serving others selflessly – and leave the results up to God. (vs. 8-11)

“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret, it leads only to evildoing. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there. But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. The wicked plots against the righteous, And gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him; For He sees his day is coming.”
Psalm 37:8-13

JANUARY 2

FOR US, IN US, AND THRU US

“He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” 2 Cor. 5:20

As infinitely expansive as the work of our Creator, Redeemer, and Eternal Lord is, we can accurately state it quite simply. The work of the Lord Jesus Christ is living for others! He considers others to be more important than Himself. Wonder of wonders! He is, as to His nature, characterized by self-denying love of others. He has, is, and will be giving Himself and His life to others. He died for you. He lives for you. (*Col. 3:4, 1 John 3:2, John 1:25, Phil. 3:21*)

“Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Phil. 2:3-8

Today we will focus on only two aspects of the work of our Lord, His redemptive work for us, and His present work of building His church through us. You are very special to Him.

1. He Is Reconciling Us To Himself!

“Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Rom 5:6-11

The clear teaching of the New Testament is that God has (*Col. 1:22*), is (*Phil. 2:13*), and will (*1 John 3:2*), reconcile His chosen ones completely. We need to be reconciled to God, but we cannot change ourselves. But God has made a way through our Lord Jesus Christ. How has He done this? Well, He has given believers a new nature, that they might share His (*2 Pet. 1:4*). He is transforming their character to match that of Christ (*Rom. 12:2*). He will change them into that imperishable and immortal form that can inherit eternity (*1 Cor. 15:50-53*). This is reconciliation. It is all His doing, it is all through Christ, and it is all by grace! (*Eph. 2:8-10*)

2. He Is Building His Church – Thru Us!

“I will build My church; and the gates of Hell shall not overpower it.” Matt. 16:19

We are in that period of the reconciling work of Christ in human history called “the times of the Gentiles” (*Rom. 11:25*) with its focus on the salvation of some from all the Gentile nations of the world. Every disciple of Christ is called to participate in this primary work of the present age, as the following passage reveals. God does not need us, but delights to do His work through us. ***“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God.”***

1 Pet. 2:5-10

JANUARY 3

FORGIVEN

"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven." 1 John 2:12

There are three elements to God's forgiveness of a truly repentant sinner who is trusting the finished work of Christ on Calvary's cross. Release from sin's penalty, removal of the sin itself, and blessings beyond imagining.

- **Release From Sin's Penalty**

It begins with the dismissal of the penalty associated with the transgressions of the sinner.

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." 1 Pet. 3:18

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." Rom. 5:6-9

- **Removal Of The Sin Itself**

Then, when God forgives a repentant sinner, He also removes his sin from His presence so that it can no longer be found. It no longer exists.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12 This is a very, very, long way. This is as far as they could be removed. The point is, they are gone, gone, gone.

"They shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Jer. 31:34

- **Blessing Beyond Imagining**

There is a third element of God's forgiveness of sinful man. God does not stop at what we could call the neutral position. After "release and removal" of sin, God begins to pour out upon the forgiven sinner the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward him in Christ Jesus for all eternity.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us... raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Eph. 2:4-7

God's forgiveness results in God showering every blessing in heaven upon the forgiven sinner. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Eph. 1:3* Wow!

God not only pays the debt we owe Him, Himself, so that we might be released from the penalty of our sin; He not only removes every aspect of sin from us; He also blesses us beyond our ability to imagine such goodness from His heart. Such is the forgiveness of our God. This is how our God has forgiven us because of what our Lord Jesus has done. What an incredible story. Release from sin's penalty, removal of the sin itself, and blessing beyond imagining!

JANUARY 4

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR THE LOST

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” 1 Pet.4:5-7

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14

Asking God to have saving mercy on unsaved sinners is a privilege He has given to us. It is also a responsibility. We are to *“do the work of an evangelist”*. (2 Tim. 4:5) This work is not just preaching the gospel, sharing our testimony, and distributing gospel tracts. Indeed, praying for the lost may be the most powerful aspect of this great work.

*“For the gospel has for this purpose been preached... The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit **for the purpose of prayer.**” 1 Pet.4:5-7*

We are to pray for the lost that the gospel would reach them, that God would open their hearts to understand it, and that He would draw them to Christ and accept His free gift of eternal salvation. What a privilege! *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, hat whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.” John 15:16*

What lost souls could you pray for today?

- In your family. _____.
- Of your neighbors. _____.
- At your work. _____.
- Among your enemies. _____.
- Your past friends. _____.
- In your church. _____.
- In the world. _____.

JANUARY 5

THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming...with power and great glory.” Luke 21:27

In the New Testament it is estimated that one out of twenty five verses (319) address the return of Jesus Christ in His glory to rule and to reign. Christ spoke of it frequently and at length in both His discourses (*Luke 17 and 21, Mark 13, and Mt. 24 and 25*) and in numerous parables: The Talents (*Luke 19:12-27*) The Ten Virgins (*Matt. 25:1-13*) The Dragnet (*Matt. 13:47-50*) The Unjust Judge (*Luke 18:1-8*) The Closed Door (*Luke 13:23-30*) The Tares And The Good Seed (*Matt. 13*) and The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (*Luke 12:35-36*).

Why Is Jesus Christ Returning? Jesus Christ shall appear to complete His work:

1. **To Deliver His Own**

“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”
Luke 21:27-28

2. **To Judge The World**

“The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day.”
2 Thess. 1:6-10

3. **To Establish His Eternal Reign Of Justice And Peace**

“To Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.”
Dan. 7:13-14

What are the signs of His coming? Of the many signs of Christ's return that are revealed to us in Scripture, we will note here only 2 of the most prominent.

1. **The gospel shall be proclaimed** to every tribe and tongue, and people, and language.

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14 Every distinct people group (over 16,000) has been identified, and the proclamation work is either done or very nearly so.

2. **The Jews shall have returned** to the land of Israel.

On May 15, 1948, nearly nineteen centuries after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish nation, the miracle of Israel's rebirth occurred. Today, over 7 million Jews live in the nation of Israel. The prophecies of Israel's rebirth, the return of the Jewish people, and the rebuilding and prospering of the nation are being fulfilled. Soon, and very soon.

JANUARY 6

THE CORRUPTING INFLUENCES WE FACE

“But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” 2 Cor. 11:3

What is a corrupting influence? Eve faced one in the wonderful garden where God had placed her to live for Him. Satan’s goal was to corrupt her thinking and influence her away from God’s will and ways. He did. What a challenge God has given us by asking us to live for Him in the midst of a world that is full of corrupting influences that seek to turn our mind and hearts away from God, His will, and His ways. **A corrupting influence is a person or thing that influences us to devote less of our life to following and serving Christ.** If we are not actively avoiding and opposing these godless influences that abound in our world, we are in great danger of being led astray from our devotion to Christ just as Adam and Eve were. What corrupting influences do we face? The four primary ones addressed to us in God’s Word are:

1. Corrupting Philosophies of Life

For the last 50 years in America, humanistic thought has increasingly dominated the secular educational institutions in our land. These schools aggressively teach that “life is all about you.” Self-fulfillment, self-interest, and self-happiness is the goal of life. These institutions are a corrupting influence. Self, self, self.

2. Corrupting People

“Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge.” Prov. 14:7

“Do not associate with a man given to anger, or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself.” Prov. 22:24-25

“The companion of fools will suffer harm.” Prov. 13:20

3. Corrupting Activities And Material

“I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart. I will set no worthless thing before my eyes... My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me. He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me. He who practices deceit shall not be found within my house.” Psalm 101:2-7

4. Corrupting Christians and Churches

It is hard to find a body of believers who are standing steadfast, immovable for the truth, in the face of a culture that is selling out to wickedness and evil. It is hard to find church leaders who are fully committed to Christ and proclaim His Word as inspired and inerrant.

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”

Rev. 3:15-16

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Col. 2:8 Whatever it takes.

JANUARY 7

A BLAMELESS CONSCIENCE

"I do my best to always maintain a blameless conscience before both God and men." Acts 24:16

A blameless conscience is one that allows me to be free of guilt, knowing that no one can point a finger at me and say, "you wronged me and you have never tried to make it right!" How many people stand between you and a clear conscience? Our need for a clear conscience before God and man is addressed 27 times in the New Testament. It is essential to our usefulness and fruitfulness in serving our Savior in the work of the age.

*"The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and **a good conscience** and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion." 1 Tim. 1:5-6*

Many believers have weak, calloused, or guilty consciences. This GUILT in their souls, if not cleared up by gaining and keeping a clear conscience, diminishes their capacity to love God and others, which is the consummate attribute of a mature disciple of Christ. Such a guilty conscience can bring doubt, fear, and depression and keeps them from the confidence, assurance, and power that should and can be theirs in Christ. *"I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men." Acts 24:16*

Paul used the Greek word "*aproskopos*" which is translated "blameless" here. It means "void of offense". It is a conscience that is not troubled or distressed by the guilt that must be removed if we are to be most useful to our Lord. The guilt that has come is to be removed by confession and asking for forgiveness. Christians who do not clear their consciences experience hindrances in their life, which is why the Lord said to his disciples, *"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first, **be reconciled to your brother**, and then come and present your offering."* Matt. 5:23-24

How can I remove guilt and gain a clear conscience?

1. Ask God to bring to your mind what needs to be dealt with. Make a list.
2. Commit to ask forgiveness, and then think through the following with the Lord:
 - Do I have a genuine spirit of repentance and grief?
 - The appropriate wording to use, e.g. "I wronged you when ..., will you forgive me?"
 - Consider whether restitution is required.
 - Ensure it is done privately. Don't embarrass the other party.

"This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith."

1 Tim. 1:18-19

JANUARY 8

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“That He would grant you...to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”
Eph. 3:16

Are you trying to live for God without a clear understanding of the relationship He wants you to have with the Holy Spirit? Without this, God cannot lead you, or empower you, to do what He has prepared, and asks you to do.

- *“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”*
John 14:16-17
- *“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things.”*
John 14:26
- *“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you.”*
John 16:13-14
- *“I bow my knees before the Father...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.”*
Eph. 3:14-19

What is required to be in a proper relationship with the Holy Spirit? There are three adjustments that we must make regarding our new Teacher, Guide, Enabler, and Authority. There must be:

1. A CONSCIOUS DEPENDENCE on Him to know and do God’s will. (John 16:13)
2. A CONTINUAL SEEKING of His teaching and leading. (Rom. 8:5)
3. A COMPLIANT YIELDING to Him. (Rom. 8:14)

Taken together, these three adjustments are what is required to be “filled with the Spirit.” This is what it means to “abide in Him”. (John 15:4-5) This is to be our new way of life, a life of depending, seeking, and yielding to the Holy Spirit. *“Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”* Eph. 5:18-20

However, we can both grieve and quench the Holy Spirit. Grieving is caused when we sin and do not repent of it. Quenching the Spirit is caused by saying “no” to God regarding what He is asking of us.

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Eph. 4:30
“Do not quench the Spirit.” 1 Thess. 5:19

Instead, respond to the Holy Spirit as you should to your closest friend, your finest teacher, your most important counselor, your heavenly Father, and your Savior and Lord. When you sin, whether in a little or a grievous way, go and ask forgiveness. He will be waiting.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
1 John 1:9

JANUARY 9

CALEB'S LIFE OF FULLY FOLLOWING

"But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land." Num. 14:24

Nearly all the men of Israel (600,000 of them) were glad to follow the Lord partially. But only Caleb and Joshua were willing to follow Him fully. Everyone had followed the Lord out of Egypt and across the Red Sea up to the border of the land the Lord had promised them. But to follow the Lord into this land, against the fearsome giants and armies that were there, was only accepted by Caleb and Joshua. Caleb was a rare man, from whom we learn a number of lessons about what God really wants us to do in life.

1. We Learn That God Wants Us To Follow Him "Fully."

"And he who does not take his own cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Matt. 10:38
Carrying our own cross means we are willing to die following our Lord, if it comes to that. Many are willing to go a good ways following our Lord, giving up everything. But few there be that are willing to follow Him fully. There are not many Calebs. Are you one?

2. We See The Desert Where Following "Fully" Can Lead Us.

Caleb finally entered the promised land at the age of 85. But for 45 years and most of his adult life he had been in the Sinai desert. It had taken that long for the 600,000 men of Israel, who had not been willing to follow God into His promised land, to die. *"I followed the LORD my God fully... And now behold, the LORD has let me live, just as He spoke, these forty-five years... Now then, give me this hill country about which the LORD spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the LORD has spoken."* Joshua 14:8-12

Even though his obedience had meant 45 years of living in a desert, he was still a man fully committed to following God's plan for his life. What an example he is to us! Has fully following Jesus led you into a desert for a time? That should not surprise you.

3. We Can Marvel At The Results That Come From Following The Lord "Fully".

"But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land." Num. 14:38

"None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, except Caleb... and Joshua..., for they have followed the LORD fully." Num. 32:11-12

When it was time to go in to conquer the land, 85 year old Caleb was led to ask for the hardest part of the land to capture. *"Now then, give me this hill country about which the LORD spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim (the giants) were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the LORD has spoken."* Joshua 14:12

He did. Because he fully followed the Lord.

JANUARY 10

JUSTIFIED BEFORE A HOLY GOD

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom 5:1

Justification (*dikaiosis*) is a legal term meaning “*acquittal based upon the facts*”. The Word of God declares that a person in Christ has been declared to be no longer guilty before a holy God. “*Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?... But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but **you were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.*” 1 Cor. 6:9-11

- **Our Justification Reverses God’s Wrath And Brings Acceptance.**

Justification is the opposite of condemnation. The wrath of an angry God toward sinners has been changed into total acceptance for those who are in Christ. “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*” Rom. 8:1-2

- **Our Justification Requires Our Imputed Righteousness.**

There is nothing we can do to change either what we have done or who we are in God’s sight. We cannot extinguish past sin by present repentance. But God has imputed the righteousness of Christ to us. Our unrighteousness has been given to Christ and His righteousness has been given to us. “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” 2 Cor. 5:21

- **Our Justification Results In The Forgiveness Of Our Sins.**

God’s holiness will not allow a forgiveness that merely excuses our sins. Somehow, our sins must be removed from us so that we can stand blameless in God’s presence in the judgement to come. This is what God has done for us through Christ. “*For as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*” Psalm 103:12
That is a very long way!

- **Our Justification Brings With It Many New Things.**

We are new creatures, in a new family, with new powers, new privileges, and a new future!

“And you were... by nature, children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Eph. 2:1-7

JANUARY 11

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR OUR AUTHORITIES

“As a matter of first importance, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority.” 1 Tim. 2:1-2

There are 5 different authorities that are identified in the NT. Governmental authorities are the focus of our text. The others (elders, parents, husbands, masters) will be addressed later. The primary reason we are to be praying for those who run the government of our particular nation is clearly stated.

“... in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 2:2-4

The “all men” that God desires to be saved would include BOTH those who are in governments, and those people that governments have authority over. Being able to live a “*tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity*” would mean little persecution and opposition from our government to share the gospel and stand for Christ. Being a good citizen in the eyes of our government officials, to the extent that we do, would be a good witness to them also.

Few committed Christians have been able to enjoy the freedoms and support of their government as have Americans. But this has rapidly diminished over the last 50 years. The costs of standing and speaking boldly for Christ are now significant. How should we, and must we, now pray?

1. That our standing for Christ would not be silenced, either by threats or by law.
2. That our living and speaking for Christ would not lead to harm from the government.
3. That our government officials, at all levels, would hear the gospel and many get saved.
4. That the light of Christ through us and His church would bring many to salvation.
5. That we and other Christians would not become spiritual cowards as the costs increase.
6. That the examples of those who have gone before us, and were both willing to die for their faith, and exhibited good attitudes toward their government authorities, would guide us.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:14-16

Light shines the brightest in the darkness. It is turned on, and increases in intensity, by prayer.

JANUARY 12

SANCTIFIED!

“But you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 6:11

Sanctification (*hagiadzo*) means “to set apart”. There are three very different aspects of this “setting apart.” It is first used of God’s work to set us apart unto Himself. This is called our *positional* sanctification. Secondly, it is used of a believer’s ability and duty to set himself apart unto God in response. This is referred to as our *progressive* sanctification. The third use has in view our *ultimate* sanctification when we are set apart from the presence of sin.

- **Positional Sanctification**

Paul makes a shocking statement as he opens his letter to the immature, fleshly, and worldly Christians in the church at Corinth. *“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling.” 1 Cor. 1:2* Notice, he says these immature believers are “saints”. This is actually the most common word in the NT used to refer to Christians. These folks were called saints, not because of their efforts to set themselves apart for God and live for Him, but because God had set them apart for Himself, by the work of His Son. They were set apart, *“in order that in the ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.” Eph. 2:7-9*

- **Experiential Sanctification**

The second use of sanctification concerns the acts of the believer to set himself apart to God from all else. For example, Peter exhorted, *“Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” 1 Pet. 3:15* A believer who has been set apart positionally is exhorted to let his experience conform to his position in Christ. He is a child of God. Now he is exhorted to live like one. *“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God (i.e. in light of you having been set apart by God for Himself), to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” Rom 12:1*

- **Ultimate Sanctification**

The final setting apart will come when we are separated from the presence of sin unto the presence of God.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality... The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 15:51-57

HONORING GOD'S DESIGN OF MARRIAGE

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." Rev. 19:7

Marriage is God's idea. His institution and design of marriage dominates human life and is used to explain God's relationship with Israel and Christ's relationship with His bride, the church. Unless we understand this design, we cannot fully understand our God, human history, our redemption, and the things to come. *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." Rev 19:7*

There are four primary characteristics in God's design of all marriage relationships: His to Israel, Christ's to His bride and ours to one another as man and wife.

1) **PERMANENCE** describes these relationships.

If, in a normal contract between two parties, the agreement is broken by one of the parties, this frees the other from his obligations in the contract. Not so with a covenant agreement. In this type of relationship, a covenant promise of one party is to be kept, even if the other party does not keep his. For example, when we sin, do we lose our salvation? Are the promises of eternal life voided? No, not if we are really saved. God has promised. The word covenant is found 320 times in the Bible. The word contract not at all.

2) **ONENESS** describes these relationships.

Our marriages as Christ's disciples are, by God's enabling grace, to reflect this "oneness."

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; So husbands ought also to love their own wives...For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." Eph. 5:25-32

3) **FRUITFULNESS** describes these relationships.

No man can have children on his own. His children are conceived, mature, and are born in and through his wife. As husbands and wives live as "one", they bear fruit together. The wife must agree to conceive and bear the children of the husband, just as we must yield to the leading, and power of the Holy Spirit Who is present and at work for us, in us, and through us. Apart from the Spirit's work in us and through us, God's fruit is not produced in our lives.

4) **SELF DENYING LOVE** describes these relationships.

"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:9-11

Permanence, Oneness, Fruitfulness, Self Denying Love. Because He loves you.

JANUARY 14

OPPOSING CORRUPTING INFLUENCES

“Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” 2 Tim. 4:2

As followers of Christ, we are to avoid the corrupting influences around us. But as leaders of others for Christ, we have a larger responsibility. We are to protect those under our care by opposing these godless influences and people.

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; And from among your own selves’ men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to **admonish each one** with tears.” Acts 20:28-31*

*“The Lord’s bond-servant must be...kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness, **correcting those who are in opposition**, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.” 2 Tim. 2:24-26*

*“You have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be **removed** from your midst.” 1 Cor. 5:2-7*

Notice the four primary action verbs that are used in the above verses. They summarize what we are to do, to protect and lead those we are responsible for.

1. Be on guard!

Notice the analogy here of a shepherd and his flock. Savage wolves will come. They will look for unguarded sheep. They will attack if they see shepherds missing or sleeping. They will test the courage and commitment of leaders, and attack if they see weakness and timidity.

2. Admonish!

Admonish is the word *noutheteo*, which means to give strong counsel with a warning. It means to bring the truth to the mind of another person. We are to clearly speak the truth when it is needed.

3. Correct!

Using the word of God, to clearly expose the errors of those that are a danger to those we are responsible for, is the concept here. Notice the presence of the devil. Deceptions have captured the minds of those involved. This is the “snare” that is mentioned. Helping them know and apply the truth is our job. Clearly, strongly...as well as kindly, patiently, and with gentleness.

4. Remove!

If there is no response or possibility of accepting and applying God’s truth and principles, then strong and purposeful steps are to be taken to remove wrong people and wrong influences. This may mean leaving their presence. Or, it may require for them to be put out of yours. Or both.

It is not a question whether we will have to face godless influences and people and take these steps. We will. The question will be, when we are at the Bema, how we faced them.

JANUARY 15

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper,
that He may be with you forever.” John 14:16*

We have been justified, reborn, and indwelt to restore our ruined relationship with God. The Christian life is a relationship with God that we must learn about and adjust to. Our future is to be in heaven, but God has a plan that He is pursuing with us until then. He is building His church, and we have a calling to participate in this plan. (*Eph. 2:10*) The Holy Spirit has come to teach, lead and empower us in this work God is sharing with us. The Holy Spirit works for us, in us, and through us. It is good to remember these three aspects of His Work.

- **His work FOR us.** Because of the coming of the Holy Spirit, every Christian...
 1. is a NEW PERSON.
“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” John 3:3-6
 2. has a NEW PRESENCE.
“For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper.” Heb. 13:5-6
 3. has NEW POWER.
“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Phil. 4:13
- **His work IN us.** Because of the coming of the Holy Spirit, every Christian...
 1. is being FILLED with the knowledge of God and His will.
“...that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Col. 1:9
 2. is being ENABLED to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.
“...to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man...according to the power that works within us.” Eph. 3:16-20
 3. is being TRANSFORMED into the likeness of God’s character.
“But we all...are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” 2 Cor. 3:18
- **His work THROUGH us.** Because of the coming of the Holy Spirit, every Christian...
 1. can be THE LIGHT of Christ in the darkness of our world.
“You are the light of the world.” Matt. 5:14
 2. can go and MAKE DISCIPLES
“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matt. 28:19-20
 3. can be AN ESSENTIAL MEMBER where God places us in His church.
“...according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Eph 4:16

We can be light, disciple makers, and active church members. But are we? Remember, you can do all things through Him who strengthens you. Apart from the Holy Spirit, you can’t.

JANUARY 16

GRIEVE NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT

*“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”
Eph. 4:30*

As Christians we grieve the Holy Spirit when we sin knowingly, but do not deal with it as we should. The Holy Spirit never leaves or forsakes a Christian, but our communion and fellowship is diminished, as is the Spirit’s working of power in us and through us, if He is grieved. Our manner of life is in view here, which is determined by our yieldedness to God’s will and ways. The immature and worldly Christians in Corinth are examples of this. Paul reproved them, saying, “*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for **you are still fleshly**.*” 1 Cor. 3:1-3

These Christians were not in a good relationship with the indwelling Holy Spirit, and so were not being led or empowered to do God’s will. What is the remedy for this? What are we to do when we grieve the Holy Spirit like this? **Confession** is the answer. “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” 1 John 1:9 When we do sin, as Christians, and confess it, our relationship with the Holy Spirit is restored and He can now work in us and through us to do what God has prepared for us.

It is good to reflect on the place of true sorrow and repentance in this matter of confessing our sins as believers. Just asking God to forgive us, and then continuing to engage in the sin is not the idea. It is our heart that must be changed. Perhaps our best example of this is found in David’s sorrow and repentance and confession we find in Psalm 51. He was grieved that sin had damaged his relationship with God.

A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba: “*Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness. According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Thy presence, and do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. **A broken and a contrite heart**, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”
*Psalm 51:1-17**

When the prodigal son returned to ask his father for forgiveness, what did he find as he came near? His father, who had been anxiously watching and welcomed him with open arms.

JANUARY 17

THINKING AND LIVING AS A CHURCH MEMBER

“For the body is not one member, but many.” 1 Cor. 12:14

Do you think of yourself as an essential member of your church? Do you use your time and gifts from God for the other members? Would your absence weaken at least some other members? Would it weaken you? Thinking and walking as a member in the church God is building, serving where He chooses to place us to do this, and giving our lives, as a priority, to our church family receives a great emphasis in God’s Word to us.

“For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

Rom. 12:3-5

“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Eph 4:15-16

- **Some Common Misconceptions.**

There are two common misconceptions regarding membership in a church. The first is that we get to choose our church and our shepherds. This is refuted in *1 Cor. 12:18* and *Eph. 4:11*. We are not to seek a church where we go to get what we need, but where God wants us to go to serve others. The second is to think that we really don’t need a church and/or the other members. This is not true either. For, *“There are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, ...the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.” 1 Cor. 12:20-22*

- **Using Your Gifts to Serve the Body.**

We are told to *“Employ our God given gifts to serve one another.” (1 Pet. 4:10)* You must know the basics of these spiritual abilities and motivations that God has given you, if you are to actively employ them for your church. *“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if **prophecy**, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his **serving**; or he who teaches, in his **teaching**; or he who exhorts, in his **exhortation**; he who **gives**, with liberality; he who **leads**, with diligence; he who shows **mercy**, with cheerfulness.” Rom. 12:6-8* We are all gifted in some way. Are you using yours?

- **Responding With Right Attitudes Toward Church Leadership**

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13:17

- **Giving Your Life To Your Church**

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples.” John 13:34-35

JANUARY 18

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR THE MEMBERS OF MY CHURCH

*“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” James 5:13-16*

Paul told the Ephesians church that *“the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (Eph. 4:16)* He then exhorted them at length regarding how they were to work together as a church. He ended with this great emphasis on praying for one another, saying... *“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”*

Eph. 6:18

What members in your church could you pray for today? What members need prayer?

- The elderly
- Those with health needs
- Moms
- Dads
- Kids
- The Widowed
- Singles
- Divorced
- Those needing clear direction
- The worldly
- Church leaders
- Wives
- Husbands
- Those with work and material needs
- Ministry leaders
- Students
- The handicapped
- The immature, rebellious, self-oriented
- The hardworking and faithful
- Those needing reproof and admonition
- Those needing encouragement and comfort

JANUARY 19

ASSEMBLING TOGETHER...AND ALL THE MORE

“Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”
Heb.10:24-25

Ok. How could you stimulate the others in your church to selflessly love others and pursue the things God has prepared for them to do in life? The basics of the answer are found in today's passage. There are three parts to it, all involving investing in the spiritual growth of the other members of your church. How much of your time are you giving to these things?

1. “Assembling together” for fellowship and encouragement in love and good deeds.

Notice that this is addressed to the whole church. “Let us consider how...” Staying away from church gatherings, and even going but not really engaging others is being pointed out here as something we are not to do. Even further, the sense here is to be an INITIATOR in engaging others in your church. “Consider how...” Going to activities others are holding, practicing hospitality yourself, writing notes of encouragement, volunteering to help, and calling and checking on people are all ways that our fellowship with one another can be strengthened. The early church gathered together for four things: the apostles doctrine, fellowship, meals and communion, and prayer. (Acts 2:42) The Greek word for “fellowship” is literally “mixing it up”. They spent time together, living life together as much as they could. They needed the support and encouragement of one another. If you say, “I don’t need them,” you are missing the point. They need you to be...

2. “Stimulating” and “encouraging” them to love and “good deeds”.

You are gifted by God, not for yourself, but for the others He wants you to invest your life in. *“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” 1 Pet. 4:10* If you are not sure how, a good idea would be to talk to the leaders of your church and ask how they think you could help the church. You will be rewarded for your efforts – but perhaps not until the Bema. Thirdly, we are exhorted to be...

3. Giving more and more of our life to this, because “the day is drawing near.”

Notice also, the “and all the more.” How much of your life are you to be giving to this? Eph. 6:18 is very helpful in answering this question. *“With **all** prayer and petition pray at **all** times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with **all** perseverance and petition for **all** the saints.” Eph. 6:18* And all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

JANUARY 20

REWARDS ARE WAITING

“We ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” Rom. 8:23

What is God doing on our earth? Where have we come from and where are we going? Why are we still here? Does history have a goal and why has it gone the way it has?

Asking and answering these questions is essential for two reasons. First, it helps us find and clarify the true meaning and purpose for our lives. Second, it reveals the conflict of the ages between God and Satan, that spiritual warfare which requires us to know our great enemy, prepare ourselves for battle, and become skilled in the use of our weapons.

Welcome to Christianity until the Lord returns to change things for the better! When He comes, He will put Satan away for 1000 years and eliminate injustice and all the bad things we now face. But until then, we live in the midst of the long war against God in a world ruled by a demonic superpower who is our Adversary.

When did God enlist you as a soldier, to fight in this awful war we are in until Christ returns? When were you saved and transferred from the kingdom of darkness to be a citizen of Christ's Kingdom? Perhaps you are a veteran. Thank you for your service and example to the rest of us. But perhaps you are a new citizen of Christ's kingdom and have been largely unaware of the war you are in, particularly the unseen aspects of what God has told us we face and why.

“Join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God...as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” 2 Tim. 1:8, 2:3 “Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Eph. 6:11-12 “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” 2 Cor. 10:3-4

Why is God tolerating this? Why not immediate judgment? Why thousands of years of human history allowing this to exist? Why are we living in the midst of this Satanic rebellion, in this fallen, immoral, depraved, wretched world of suffering and death? Why are we, God's children and God's beloved, still living here?

It is not because God is weak. It is not because God is surprised. We are living in the midst of a crooked and perverse race and world still after all these centuries because **He has been waiting for you**, and others – to be born and to hear what He has done to set you free from the judgment and wrath to come. Because your name was written in His Son's book of life before the foundation of the world. *“For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved.” Rom 8:22-24*

JANUARY 21

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN US

“...strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.” Eph. 3:16

After our new birth, we are still immature spiritual children. We must be taught and led to maturity by our Teacher, Helper, Comforter, and Guide – the Holy Spirit. Our maturing, to usefulness and fruitfulness, is a process that requires time and training. It also requires a lifetime of yielding and perseverance on our part.

*“We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you **may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**, so that you **may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work.” Col. 1:9-11*

There are three aspects of our training into maturity. The Holy Spirit is at work in us:

1. TO ENLARGE OUR UNDERSTANDING – of everything.

- It is to know our God, His will, His ways, and His plans. *1 Cor. 2:16, James 1:5-12*
- It is to know who I am, what to do, and how to do it. *Eph. 1-6*
- It is to know God’s acts and purposes. *Eph. 1:18-19*
- It is to know what to ask, think, and do, as we face what life brings. *Phil. 4:4-13*

Our study, understanding, and application of God’s Word is the means of our growth. For...

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for 1) teaching, for 2) reproof, for 3) correction, and 4) training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim. 3:16-17

Notice that there are four elements here. The concepts (doctrines) in God’s Word must be learned. But without the next three steps, there is no spiritual growth and usefulness. We learn the truth to compare our life with it, to learn what we must do, if change is required, and then learn how to make these changes. When we have, and are, going through this process ourselves, we can disciple others. The word disciple means “imitator.”

2. TO ENABLE AND EMPOWER OUR WALK for Christ.

“...so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work...strengthened with all power.” Col. 1:10-11

The Christian life is not hard. It is impossible in our own strength! But we can do everything that God asks of us – provided that we have learned how to live life yielded and led by the Holy Spirit. Our great example of this is the Lord Jesus Himself, as we are told at the beginning of His ministry. *“And Jesus, **full of the Holy Spirit**, returned from the Jordan and **was led about by the Spirit** in the wilderness...and...**returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit**.” Luke 4:1, 14*

3. TO TRANSFORM OUR CHARACTER AND HEART to be Christlike.

“But we all, ...are being transformed.” 2 Cor. 3:18

“So then, my beloved, ... work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” Phil. 2:12-13

JANUARY 22

UNDERSTANDING LIFE'S DETOURS

“Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” 2 Cor. 12:8-9

From self to grace. This is the goal of God's “detours” in the lives of His people. No longer traveling the road of self, and finding the highway of grace, is the goal. Paul is perhaps the best described illustration of this in the Bible. God had a plan. But Paul was so full of himself, in what he thought was the service of God, that God could not use Him. He could not fellowship with Him. He was, actually, with all his energy and zeal, an enemy. So, God began to use “detours” in Paul's life to get him to live by grace and put self aside. His goal was to get him to say: *“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” 1 Cor. 15:10*

Paul said this in his latter years, but it took many detours to get him started and to complete the transition. Here are the major ones we know about. They started with:

- **The detour of blindness.**

“Now Saul...as he journeyed...suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him...and he was three days without sight...But the Lord said, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.” Acts 9:1-16 Soon after this Paul accepted God's grace and was saved.

- **The detour to the desert for three years.**

“I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem.” Gal. 1:16-18

Paul was not mature enough to begin his apostolic ministry. It required that he be an example of “walking by means of the Spirit,” “living by faith,” and “walking by grace.” It took this detour for him to “get self out” and become a man who was living by the grace and power of God.

- **The many detours of affliction and suffering.**

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” 2 Cor 4:8-11

- **The detour of physical weakness.**

“And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for (My) power is perfected in (your) weakness.” 2 Cor. 12:7-9

Our greatest trials become the path to our greatest usefulness for Christ. Thank you Lord.

JANUARY 23

FALSE TEACHERS AND FALSE BRETHREN

“For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, ...ungodly persons.” Jude 1:4

False teachers, false teaching, and false brethren are often to be found in our churches and among God’s people. We find this addressed clearly, with dire warnings, and extensive descriptions of what we will face, and precise instructions on what to do. False teaching and self-oriented church members, contradicting the truths revealed to us in the Scriptures, have always sought to infiltrate and influence the people of God. They can deny the inerrancy of God’s Word, the deity and work of Jesus Christ, salvation by grace, and that life is to be lived loving self instead of God. The list is extensive.

Jude lists 23 characteristics of such people, warning us, and telling us to “contend earnestly” with them. Our Lord, Peter, Paul, John, and James, all warn us of them and give instructions regarding them. They are the entire focus of **Peter’s** second epistle. *“There will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words” 2 Pet. 2:1-3* He lists over 20 of their actions and motives and ends his letter with this warning: *“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness.” 2 Pet. 3:17*

Paul addressed their insidious work of teaching false doctrine and self-oriented living several times in his letters. *“There are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain.” Titus 1:10-11*

John warned of those who were teaching a false faith, both by their words and their lives. *“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished.” 2 John 1:7-8*

Jude’s entire letter is devoted to warning us about false teachers and how to respond to them. *“I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Jude 1:3* While exhorting us to both be on guard and contend with them personally, Jude also identifies three categories of folks in our churches that we are to help. They are 1) those who are confused, 2) those who are convinced by false teaching, and 3) those who are committed to false teaching.

“But you, beloved, be building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keeping yourselves in the love of God, and waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life...And have mercy on some, who are doubting (they are confused), save others, snatching them out of the fire (they are convinced); and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh (they are committed).” Jude 1:20-23

Who does Jude say is to do this? His letter was to everyone in the church.

JANUARY 24

THE DESIRE AND THE POWER TO DO GOD'S WILL

"It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Phil. 2:13

The word grace appears 114 times in the New Testament. We need to distinguish which of these refer to "saving" grace and which refer to "enabling" grace. **Saving grace is God giving to us what we do not deserve.** We did not deserve eternal life, but the Father sent the Son that we might have it. Christ died in our place that we might have eternal life. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."* Eph. 2:1-10

Enabling grace is the desire and power to do God's will and is used in reference to living for God in a proper relationship with Him who supplies this grace to us. For example, the following verses all refer to the enabling grace given to a Christian.

*"God is able to make all **grace** abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."* 2 Cor. 9:8

*"You therefore, my son, be strong in the **grace** that is in Christ Jesus."* 2 Tim 2:1

"For God is at work in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure." Phil. 2:13

*"In any and every circumstance I have learned **the secret** of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. **I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**"* Phil. 4:12-13

This enabling power to do God's will, in God's way, is available and sufficient for every believer. (John 15:7) However, every Christian must learn how to be strong in enabling grace. We must learn to abide, pray, put on the armor of God's Word, and apply these truths in continual self-denial. We must learn to properly adjust to the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is not hard. It is impossible in our own strength! We can do all things through Him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13), but apart from Him we can do nothing. (John 15:5) God does not give us what we can handle. He enables us to handle what we are given! We must continually apply these truths as we pursue the good works God has prepared for us.

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." John 15:16 But remember how this works:

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5

JANUARY 25

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR ALL THE SAINTS

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” Eph 6:18

“Saint” is the most common word in the NT for a Christian. It literally means “set apart ones”. Tens of millions of saints live on the planet, spread across more than 200 countries and thousands of people groups and languages. This exhortation, which ends Paul’s discussion of our weapons of truth, that we must use in our battle against the Satanic forces we face, shows the importance of our prayers. Notice the four “alls” in the passage. “All prayer...at all times...with all perseverance...for all the saints”!!! The scope of this is incredible. The privilege of it is wonderful. The potential fruit of it is eternally immense. It is directed toward you. Time to pray.

We will return to this command every month as a reminder of its importance. But how can we pray for so many like this? One way is to set aside time to pray for those saints that you know, who are ministering around the country, or around the world. Another way is to intercede for the many you don’t know, either generally, or systematically based on the many continents, countries, and other divisions of our world. Today you are encouraged to pray for the saints who live and minister in ISRAEL.

There are estimated to be 52,000 Christians in Israel and 210 Christian churches and places of worship. The Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, which is part of the Baptist World Alliance, represents a significant part of the Protestant presence, with 18 churches and a community of 3,000 people. Other Protestant denominations also exist, but exact numbers are not readily available.

You may know the challenges that some of the saints are facing there and perhaps even some of the saints themselves. The work of reaching every tribe and tongue and people and nation is reaching its completion. We are a part of this as we pray “*with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.*” Someday soon we will know what fruit has been produced through our intercessions and petitions.

JANUARY 26

SAVED BY GRACE

“For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Eph. 2:8

Grace is used to describe the unmerited favor of God that has been given to meet our need for salvation from the penalty of sin. Separated from God by our sin, and facing the awful specter of His wrath, we are eternally lost without His grace, which led Him to send Jesus Christ to give His life for us.

But we need to be careful to distinguish how the word grace is also used to describe the work of God in us after our salvation, to live the life He asks of us. It is impossible to live the Christian life in our own strength, but we can by God’s grace, which, when it is used in this regard, we can define as the “desire and the power to do God’s will”. Today our focus is only upon God’s grace to meet our need from the penalty of sin. Tomorrow we shall focus on His enabling grace to overcome the power of sin. Let us therefore remember that...

- **God’s grace from the penalty of sin is undeserved.**

*“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.” Psalm 103:10-11 “For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while we were yet sinners**, Christ died for us.” Rom. 5:7-8 We deserved otherwise.*

- **God’s grace from the penalty of sin is free.**

*“For the wages of sin is death, but **the free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 6:23 What did it cost us to be set free from sin’s penalty? Nothing. What did it cost our Savior? Everything. “He...emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Phil. 2:6-8*

- **God’s grace from the penalty of sin is necessary.**

*“And **you were dead** in your trespasses and sins...But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (**by grace** you have been saved).” Eph. 2:4-5 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh.” 1 Pet. 3:18*

- **God’s grace from the penalty of sin is sufficient.**

*“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not so short that it cannot save.” Isa. 59:1
“Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.” Heb. 4:16
“Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God.” Rom. 5:9
Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin...*

JANUARY 27

HE THAT IS SPIRITUAL

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Gal. 5:25

How would you explain the concept of "abiding" to someone? How would you illustrate it? A child in the womb is helpful. This eternal being is sharing life with another, distinct eternal creature. They are somehow connected in life. In some sense they are "one." Where one goes, so does the other. Another illustration that our Lord uses is of a grape vine and its branches.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5

Abiding with the indwelling Holy Spirit requires that we do three things if we are to be fruitful.

1. Yield and Obey.

The Lord Jesus is our example here. We are told that as He began His public ministry, He, being "filled with the Spirit" was "led of the Spirit". He did not go out on His own, living life apart from the Holy Spirit. He had completely yielded His life to do the will of the Father. The Spirit was leading Him in that will. He was fully abiding, and the Holy Spirit was therefore able to lead Him where He wanted. Have you ever wondered why we are told to pray without ceasing? Praying is talking to God. Abiding in the Holy Spirit means that we will be devoted to prayer. Obedience obviously follows yielding. Where the Spirit leads us, we must go, or we are no longer abiding.

2. Learn and Apply.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested. We are told of three of the false ideas that Satan used to try and get our Lord to sin, taking Scripture out of context. But He had learned the Word and had built his life around its truths and principles. He was committed to live, abiding in the Spirit regardless of the cost.

"And Satan led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You to guard You', and, 'On their hands they will bear You up, Lest You strike Your foot against a stone.''" And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" And when the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. **And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.** Luke 4:9-14

3. Go and Love.

The goal of the Holy Spirit is that the selfless love of the Father and the Son would be seen in us. *"Be imitators of God, as beloved children and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." Eph. 5:1-2* *"Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart." 1 Peter 1:22-23*

Doing this does not require that we give a lot. It requires that we give everything. By the Spirit.

JANUARY 28

WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE

*“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”
Prov. 18:21*

Are you a verbal blessing? God is. He not only loves you, forgives you, accepts you, and appreciates you, but He has told you so. When we gather on Sunday we read His love letters to us together. We hear His wonderful words of how much He cares for us, His deeds for us, and His plans for us. Do you write letters of affirmation to your children or other family members? Do you tell them that they are special, appreciated, and loved? If you do, well, good job! Well done! Excellent work! Way to go! What a good example to us all!

If we do not speak positive words to others, we are either silent, or we speak words of criticism, dislike, and condemnation. Even when we must address sin and speak words of correction we are to: *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.” Eph. 4:29* and *“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.” Col. 4:6* This “seasoning” would be to include God’s love, affection, concern, and affirmation in our words and with our attitudes as we speak. *“The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all... patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition.” 2 Tim. 2:24-25*

Do you purposefully use words of affection, appreciation, and assurance, like these:

- Words of APPRECIATION for their deeds and character.
“That was well done, ...”
“It pleases me when I see you...”
“It delights me when you...” “Do you tell others you appreciate them?”
- Words of ASSURANCE of your love for them.
“I am fully committed to you no matter...”
“I will never leave you or...” Do you express your assurance verbally?
- Words of AFFECTION for them personally.
“I love you!”
“I like you!”
“Will you come be with me ...” Do you speak words of affection?
- Words of BLESSING that visualize their success.
“You can do this...”
“The Lord has a special plan for you...”
“You are very gifted when it comes to...”
“I will not be surprised at all if the Lord asks you to....” Are you a verbal blessing?

Of all the things God could have made for Himself, He made you!

Of all that God could have given His life for, He gave it for you!

Of all the people God desires to spend eternity with, He wants to spend it with you!

JANUARY 29

HONORING GOD'S DESIGN IN MARRIAGE

"Let marriage be held in honor." Heb. 13:4

The marriage vows spoken in Christian ceremonies have, for many centuries, been chosen to reflect God's covenantal design for our marriages. They have usually included words like the following: "Do you...covenant to...for better or worse...for as long as you both shall live?" In America, until recently, attempts to terminate a marriage have been strongly opposed by our judiciary because of these Christian concepts. A divorce had to be granted by a judge and that was rarely sought, or granted, until recently. Now it is permitted for any cause.

Now, even the words of our marriage vows have changed, because 50% of those saying these original words over the last 40 years have not kept their word and are divorced. Today, the words of these "vows" are now often "for as long as love shall last". The desire and power to do God's will has waned. Marriage is God's idea, but our nation no longer cares. Neither do many in our churches. Divorce is now granted for any cause, not just by our culture, but by nearly all of our churches. People are living for themselves, not God. His opinions and commands regarding marriage are of secondary importance. What really matters is what is best for "me."

*"The LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife **by covenant**...Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.*

*"For **I hate divorce**," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." Malachi 2:14-16*

For both husbands and wives the standards are clear, and they have a dominant place in God's instruction to us on how to live for Him.

*"**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church** and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church." Eph. 5:25-29*

*"**Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.** For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives, ought to be to their husbands in everything."*

Eph. 5:22-24

"For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband." Eph. 5:31-33

JANUARY 30

HOW TO PUT SELF ASIDE

"Let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." Phil. 2:3

Our battle against self-interest dominates our earthly life as Christians. Dying to self is Christlike. Living for myself is not. Fallen men live for themselves, which is all they can do. Born again Christians are called to love God and others in self-denial. They can, but it is a daily, moment by moment battle. How are we to win this life long battle to put self aside, and consider others more important than ourself?

- **Remember Christ's Selflessness And What He has Done For You.**

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."
Phil. 2:3-5

- **Remember That You Are To Be The Light Of Christ In The Darkness Of This World.**

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."
Matt. 5:16

- **Remember What You Always Need To Win This Battle With Your Natural Selfishness.**

- i. Help from the Holy Spirit, which is always sufficient. Rom. 8:14

- ii. Help from one another. 1 Thess. 5:14

- iii. Faith than you can. *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."* Phil. 4:13

- **Remember To Focus On Honoring Others, Not Yourself.**

The biblical concept of honor (*timao*) describes an act of loving self-renunciation. We are called to devote our lives to this. *"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."* Rom. 12:1 *"Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God."* 1 Pet. 2:17

- **Remember What To Do When You Fail.**

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

- **Remember To Especially Love Those Who Selfishly Mistreat You.**

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way. And if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." Luke 6:27-35

JANUARY 31

THINKING AND LIVING BIBLICALLY

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is.”
Rom. 12:1

Why Is It Essential For A Christian To Think And Live Biblically?

- **Only biblical thinking and living allows us to grow spiritually.**
“Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” 1 Pet. 2:2
- **Only biblical thinking and living transforms us.** Making the principles of His Word absolute transforms our decisions, our relationships, our circumstances, and our soul.
*“And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Rom. 12:2*
- **Only biblical thinking and living makes us useful to God.**
*“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth...Therefore, **if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.**” 2 Tim. 2:15-21*
- **Only biblical thinking and living allows us to love God.** We cannot worship God in spirit and in truth unless we have learned the truths of His word.
“He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father.” John 14:21
- **Only biblical thinking and living allows us to be obedient to God’s commands to us.**
See to it! (Col. 2:8)
Guard! (2 Tim. 1:14)
Set your mind! (Col. 3:2)
Press on! (Phil. 3:12-14)
Persevere! (1 Tim. 4:16)
Be steadfast and immovable! (1 Cor. 15:58)
Run with endurance! (Heb. 12:1)
- **Only biblical thinking and living makes us fruitful.**
*“Applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For **if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful** in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Pet. 1:5-8*
For...
“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim. 3:16-17

FEBRUARY 1

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR YOUR FAMILY

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.”
Rom. 12:10

Our family members are our focus today. There are many relationships here that the Lord has chosen for us.

*“Husbands, love **your wives**, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”*
Eph. 5:25-26

*“Children, obey **your parents** in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you.”* Eph. 6:1-3

*“Wives, be submissive to **your own husbands** so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”* 1 Pet. 3:1-2

Added to these close family members are the extended members of our family. Siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, grandparents and others. In some of these you may be faced with the heartaches and trials of a broken or difficult relationship. There may be offenses and separations. But remember, God has been divorced. God has been rejected. But it is His responses of forgiveness, longsuffering, and love that are held up to us to imitate. Praying for your family members, in whatever status your relationships are in, is what He asks of us.

There are 35 prayers of the apostle Paul in His NT letters. They are all for others! They are good models for us to use as we make intercessions, supplications, and thanksgivings for our family members. Here are just two.

“We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” Col. 1:9-12

“We pray for you always, that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
2 Thess. 1:11-12

FEBRUARY 2

YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED

"In Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them." Psalm 139:16

The time of both your stay and your departure from the earth was established long ago by your Creator and Redeemer. There are many aspects regarding this numbering of our days revealed to us. They reveal how much we are valued and loved by God, and what He desires for us to do until our days are complete. Here are the major ones.

- **God wrote the number of your earthly days in His book before He created the universe.**
"Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance, and in Thy book, they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them. How precious also are Thy thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" Psalm 139:14-17
Regarding the heavenly city to come, we are also told that... *"Nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." Rev. 21:27*
- **Your days have been included in God's plans for the work of the present age.**
"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." John 15:16 *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10*
- **Knowing these things, you are to give your days to God and use them to serve Him.**
"So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12 "Numbering our days" is not a call to count them. It is a call to organize and plan them to serve God. Do you have a plan that has come because you have sought the Lord and are following His leading? *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you." Psalm 32:8* Do you begin each day with the Lord in fellowship and yieldedness? *"In the morning, O LORD, Thou wilt hear my voice. In the morning, I will order my prayer to Thee and eagerly watch." Psalm 5:3* Do you end each day's activities and work with a time of prayer with the Lord and in His Word? *"But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself. The LORD hears when I call to Him... Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still." Psalm 4:3-4*
- **Because these days will soon be over, you are exhorted to excel more and more in them.**
"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Tim. 4:7-8 *"Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that you may excel still more." 1 Thess. 4:1*

FEBRUARY 3

LEARNING TO LIVE BY GOD'S ENABLING GRACE

"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Matt. 14:32

The Christian life is a restored **relationship** with an unseen, supernatural, spiritual Being. He desires to live with us, for us, and through us. Our usefulness and fruitfulness to our Lord in the work of the age is a function of learning and heeding what His grace enables us to do for His glory in our battles in this fallen world. Timid Timothy, gifted Paul, and impulsive Peter help us to see this. Which of these three is perhaps most like you?

Timid Timothy, was focused on his personal LACK of ability to do what God was calling him to do and was not "pressing on" with diligence and confidence in his service for Christ. God led Paul to write him a personal letter of reproof and exhortation. *"I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For **God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power** and love and discipline... You therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**" 2 Tim. 2:1-3*

Gifted Paul was not, like Timothy, focused on his personal inability, but on his extraordinary abilities. This led him to pursue God's will without a constant dependence on God's enabling grace and provision. God used a bolt of lightning and some blindness to begin to get this point across to him. Then, as he began to serve Christ in ministry, he also needed a "thorn in the flesh" to learn that **the power of enabling grace** comes when we are "weak", which is when we recognize our need for God's enabling grace and depend on it. *"Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" 2 Cor. 12:7-9*

Impulsive Peter is a third example illustrating this essential lesson of learning to live by the enabling grace of God. His faith in God's power to enable him to walk on the water seemed impressive at first. But it was soon exposed as quite weak. Later he said he would never deny the Lord. But he did three times. Despite his sincere intentions, Peter was unable, in his own strength, to do even what he genuinely wanted to do. He needed **enabling grace** to deny himself and love his Savior and Lord. *"And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' Matt. 14:30-32*

FEBRUARY 4

10 REASONS WE NEED TO BE EXHORTED TO STAND FOR CHRIST

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son.” 2 Tim. 1:1-2

Paul’s second letter to Timothy was written as much for us as it was for him. We have the same challenges, the same nature, and the same enemies as he had. And we need the same exhortations to stand for Christ as he did. Timothy’s strong and excellent stand for Christ had begun to weaken. Paul addressed the main reasons that could have caused this. These ten truths from chapter one should be reviewed often, because...

1. **It is our tendency to be hesitant and timid when on our own, without our “Paul”. (2 Tim. 1:2-4)**
“Timothy, my beloved son... I thank God... as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears.”
2. **It is our tendency to forget the wonder of our salvation. (vs. 5)**
“For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.”
3. **It is our tendency to stop yielding our life. (vs. 6-7)**
“And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.”
4. **It is our tendency to forget we are in a war. (vs. 8)**
“Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.”
5. **It is our tendency to forget the preeminence of Christ. (vs. 9-10)**
“Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”
6. **It is our tendency to forget our calling. (vs. 11)**
“For which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.”
7. **It is our tendency to forget when our reward shall come. (vs. 12)**
“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”
8. **It is our tendency to forget the methodology of living life for Christ. (vs. 13-14)**
“Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”
9. **It is our tendency to forget that few persevere under trial. (vs. 15)**
“You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.”
10. **It is our tendency to forget that God provides all we need for what we face. (vs. 16-18)**
“The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me, and found me-- and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.” Thank you Paul for reminding and exhorting us in the truth.

FEBRUARY 5

WE OUGHT TO

“He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” 1 John 3:16

The heart of an unsaved person has a singular motive, desire, and goal. It is to live life entirely for itself. It is a heart incapable of anything but self-interest. In contrast, the new heart of a born again Christian exists in conflict with this old nature within him with new capacity and desire to live life in self-denial for others. The great battle of the Christian life is between these two opposing “selves,” the old self and the new. *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another.” Gal. 5:16-17*

We have a choice, every moment, with every decision, either to yield to the “old man” or to the “new man”. It is clear what God wants. *“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.” Matt. 16:24-25*

These choices take a central place in the examples and instructions that God has given to us. They determine our usefulness, fruitfulness, and rewards. **We ought to be living for others.**

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35 The word used here for love is agape, which is not simply affection for others, it means “self-denying love of others.” **We ought to be living for others.**

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.” Phil. 2:3 **We ought to be living for others.**

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:12-13

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven... For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” Matt. 5:43-48

“You are the light of the world...Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:14-16

*“He laid down His life for us; and **we ought to lay down our lives** for the brethren.” 1 John 3:16*

FEBRUARY 6

THE SEVEN MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another.” 1 Peter 4:10

One evening 7 Christians, each with a different gifting, were sitting around the dinner table after the meal waiting for dessert to served. The hostess came in with dessert on a large plate, but as she was about to set it on the table, she dropped it on the floor, breaking the plate and ruining the dessert. Here is how everyone responded:

The Server: “Here, let me help you clean this up!”

The Mercy: “It’s ok honey, it could have happened to anyone!”

The Teacher: “The reason that fell is because it was too heavy on one side!”

The Prophet: “That’s what you get when you are in a hurry!”

The Giver: “It’s ok honey, I’ll buy you another dessert!”

The Exhorter: “Lets serve the dessert with the meal next time, and avoid this!”

The Organizer: “Frank, will you clean this up, Sally, can you sweep the floor and Jerry, will you go to the kitchen and get another dessert?”

Using **1)** the meaning of the word used to describe each of these 7 gifts and the brief exhortation associated with each (in *Rom. 12:6-8*), and **2)** a person in Scripture who seems to exhibit each gift, let us note the major characteristics and weaknesses of each of these gifts, listed in Romans 12.

Are you an **EXHORTER**? Are you motivated like the Apostle Paul to see people grow in their faith and commitment to the Lord’s will and ways? You like to exhort. It is necessary.

Or - perhaps you are a gifted **TEACHER** like Luke. You are motivated to ensure that the truth is taught accurately and thoroughly. The details are important to you.

Or – perhaps you are able to sense when a person is hurting and are motivated to comfort him like John did at the last supper. He was full of **MERCY** and comfort for hurting people.

Or – perhaps you are a gifted **ORGANIZER** and can lead a group of people to work together to achieve a common goal. You can see what needs to be done, how to do it, and, if asked, can coordinate things quite efficiently. Like Nehemiah. Wow. In 53 days.

Or – perhaps you are a gifted speaker who hates “sin”, things that are not right, and wants them corrected, sooner, rather than later, like Peter. You are also pretty good at communicating and making your point. You are perhaps gifted as a **PROCLAIMER** of truth, a prophet.

Or – perhaps you are motivated to meet practical needs like Timothy seemed to be. He was a wonderful **SERVER** to Paul and many, many others. He loved doing this, it appears, rather than to organize new churches, teach, exhort, or even preach. (see Paul’s exhortations to him to also do these important things also as a leader, in 1 and 2 Tim.)

Or – perhaps you get delight in being a **GIVER**, usually anonymously, to help meet the financial needs of God’s work. Matthew seems to have this gifting, with wise discernment and encouragement to motivate others to give, as found in the Gospel he wrote.

FEBRUARY 7

LEARNING AND IMPOSING

“Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.” Psalm 119:11

The entire revelation of our God to us concerning how we are to live for Him in this fallen world is built around an essential 2-part method. Here it is. First, we are to **GET GOD’S PERSPECTIVE** on life from His Word. We are to learn God’s opinions, His commands, His principles, His will, and His plans – all from His Word. Then, we are to **IMPOSE THESE** on our mind, our will, our emotions, and our circumstances in life, by God’s enabling grace. This is what it means to live by faith (*Heb. 11*). This is what it means to take up the whole armor of God. (*Eph. 6*) This is what it means to let the Word of God richly dwell within you. (*Col. 3:12-17*) This is what it means to be steadfast and immovable. (*1 Cor. 15:58*) This is the method by which Christ lived. (*Luke 4:1-13, John 6:38*)

The Christian life is to be lived by the renewing of our minds with God’s truth, revealed in His Word, for the purpose of imposing the truths learned in this process on all aspects of our lives, by God’s enabling grace. This is the prescribed methodology of living for Christ and becoming useful to Him in the work of the age. (*2 Pet. 1:5-8, Col. 2:8, Rom.12:1-2, John 15*) So, how does your methodology of living life compare with this required method?

- Let’s begin with **how you think**. We are to “*take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*” (*2 Cor. 10:5*) We are to be transformed “*by the renewing of our mind.*” (*Rom. 12:2*) An effective way to live by these essential mental disciplines is to continually ask ourselves, when confronted by a thought or a concept, “**what is the biblical basis of that idea?**” or “**what does God say about that?**” This is required if we are to become useful to the Lord in the work of the age. (*Col. 1:9-10, 2 Pet. 1:5-9, 2 Tim.2:15*) If this is not where our mind goes quickly, how can we be taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ?
- Secondly, let’s evaluate **what you actually do** after you do know God’s opinion. Obeying God can be costly. We have been told it would be. (*John 16:33, 1 Pet. 4:12*) This is why few excel at it, and why we must be encouraged and exhorted to pursue and be steadfast in it. (*2 Tim. 4:1-5*) The apostle Paul, spiritual giant that he was, lamented his own failures and inadequacies in serving Christ in the midst of life’s battles and costs. Although he knew God’s perspective, he often struggled, as we all do, with yielding to God’s will when we learn it (*Rom. 7:19-25*). His New Testament instructions to us from our Lord are always accompanied by strong exhortations and appeals to **apply the truths God has revealed** to us about how to live life for Christ.

Learn God’s opinions and principles, and impose them on yourself and your circumstances. Trust and obey. There is no other way.

FEBRUARY 8

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.” Heb. 13:17

Our Pastors and Elders are our focus today. These church leaders have been appointed by God to protect, teach, and disciple us as a priority in life.

“And He gave some... as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” Eph. 4:11-13

We are to acknowledge their God given authority and have right attitudes and responses to them.

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13:17

We are also to remember their teaching and example, and the investment they made in our life. We are told to remember that they gave their life to help us live for Christ.

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” Heb. 13:7

Remembering your Pastors and Elders – past and present – as you talk with God today. These prayers could include:

- 1) Thanking Him for giving them to you.
- 2) Asking Him to protect them as they are principal targets of the enemy. Their families are also.
- 3) Asking Him to encourage them and comfort them in the face of the trials that they may be facing in ministry and life.
- 4) Asking Him to give them His counsel and direction for themselves and the members in their church.
- 5) Asking the Lord regarding sending a note of thanks or blessing them personally.

FEBRUARY 9

AN EXTRAORDINARY CHURCH

“You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.” 1 Thess. 1:7

Paul would often use the church in Thessalonica as an example of what we should strive to be. They were the most mature church in Paul’s extensive ministry. What is a mature church? Paul summarizes the life of this extraordinary church by citing three things.

*“We give thanks to God always for all of you...constantly bearing in mind your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thess. 1:2-3*

Their **faith** had matured because it began and then grew in the midst of “much tribulation.” Their corporate response to this intense opposition and persecution was the joy of the Holy Spirit.

“You...became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.” 1 Thess. 1:6-7 Extraordinary.

Their **selfless love** had matured as they did two things. First, they turned to God and stopped living for idols. Second, they lived to be an example to all believers, purposely assuming responsibility for them. They began to give their lives in evangelistic efforts and ministries to people “in every place”. Extraordinary. What an extensive labor of love!

Finally, their **hope** had matured, for reports about their clear expectation of Christ’s return was part of the comments made about them by those in every place that Paul traveled in their region.

What an extraordinary church, to even be known in the first century beyond their borders, when persecution was great. Then, to be spoken of in every place as an example of extraordinary faith, love for God and others, and hope in the return of Jesus Christ from heaven. Then, to be used by the apostle Paul himself as an example of what a mature church should be like. Extraordinary.

God has ensured that this letter from Paul has gotten to us.

“For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

1 Thess. 1:8-10

Could your church be used as an example by Paul for its “work of faith, steadfastness of hope, and labor of love”?

FEBRUARY 10

OUR UNFORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

*“And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,
just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Eph. 4:32*

By the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we can forgive others just as God has forgiven us. But Christians do not always do this. When we are unforgiving, a number of negative things happen.

- **Unforgiveness keeps us from what we could be doing.**

Unforgiveness renders a Christian unusable to some degree. *“Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, (which includes unforgiveness (see vs. 23-25), he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.” 2 Tim. 2:21* A poor witness of Christ’s forgiving nature, of His self-denial which pays debts He does not owe, of His blessing of those who curse Him, is hardly useful among other unforgiving creatures. Learning to forgive, “just as God in Christ has forgiven us” opens up the doors for us to those places of ministry God has prepared beforehand. (*Eph. 2:10*)

- **Unforgiveness results in bitterness which can harm both our body and our church.**

Bitterness is known to be a major cause of tension, high blood pressure, indigestion, and other problems. In addition to our physical body, unforgiveness can cause our church to be weakened and sick. *“You come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you...For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.” 1 Cor. 11:17-30*

- **Unforgiveness is a poor witness for our Lord.**

“And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Acts 1:8 Forgiveness is a living illustration of Christ when it occurs. However, when a believer refuses to forgive and lives in bitterness, it suggests there is nothing supernaturally different about being born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. To err is human. To forgive is exclusively divine. To be an unforgiving Christian is to lie about Christ.

- **Unforgiveness grieves the Holy Spirit, and damages our relationship with God.**

When we refuse to forgive an offender as a Christian, we are willfully disobeying the Lord. This grieves the Holy Spirit and has the effect of damaging our fellowship with God. This is the reason Jesus said, *“For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” Matt. 6:14-15* He is not speaking here of us losing our salvation, but that we have damaged our sweet fellowship with God and have lost the joy of our salvation. Confession and repentance are the channels for this to be remedied. The penitent Christian is assured of finding his unforgiveness forgiven, and his fellowship with God restored, for *“If we (Christians are being addressed here) confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9*

Are you bitter toward anyone? By the enabling power of the Holy Spirit...

FEBRUARY 11

DRAWING GOD'S LINES IN MY RELATIONSHIPS

"We are not going to serve your gods." Dan 3:18

When does a wife say to an abusive husband, "You cannot, you will not" and, as necessary, "I cannot, I will not"? When does she leave for safety and get help? There is a time. When do we say "No, I cannot, I will not" to the governing authorities that we are to obey? There is a time. When do we say, "No, you cannot, you will not" to a friend? There is a time. When do we say "I cannot, I will not" to our church leaders that we are to hear, heed, obey, and submit to? There is a time. What are these times? When do I draw a line in a relationship, and say, "No" ?

#1. When we are asked, or told, to do something God has instructed us otherwise.

Peter and John's response to their civil authorities is a good illustration of this. They had been preaching the gospel and Jesus as the Messiah. The response of the people was seen as a threat by the Romans, and they called them in and told them to stop. Their response was, in effect, "We respect your authority, but we must draw a line here. God has commanded us to do this, so we will continue." *"And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.'" Acts 4:18-20*

Another clear example is the line drawn by Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in response to King Nebuchadnezzar when told to worship his Gods and him. *"If you will not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire." Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, ... "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us ... But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." Dan 3:15-18*

#2. When we have made a personal commitment to God regarding something.

Daniel is a good example of this when he was a slave. We have two clear examples, and there were probably many others. The first is when he was young, the second is when he was old.

"But Daniel made up his mind (as a youth) that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself." Dan. 1:8 He drew a line he believed God wanted. God honored it, and used it to make Daniel an effective witness there in Babylon.

Then, when he was old, *"All the commissioners of the kingdom, ... consulted together ... that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house ... and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." Dan. 6:7-10* Drawing God's lines and making commitments were a way of life for Daniel, even as a slave. God used him mightily.

FEBRUARY 12

RECONCILED

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” 2 Cor. 5:19

Reconciliation is an amazing concept. The Greek word means “to be conformed to a standard”. When we reconcile the checkbook each month, we are conforming it to the records of the bank. When the battery in a clock runs down, we replace it, and adjust the time on the clock to conform to standard time. To be reconciled with God is to be conformed to His nature, His Word, and His life. The word is never used in reference to God. He never need adjust to us, or anything. He is holy, we are not. We must be reconciled to Him, and, wonder of wonders, we can be through what Christ has done for us. The word is used to reveal the four basic elements of our salvation.

1. It Reveals Man’s Dilemma Before A Holy God.

We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We must be reconciled to share His nature and His life. *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Rom. 3:23*

2. It Reveals God’s Holiness.

God is the standard. All things are measured against Him. *“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matt. 5:48*

3. It Reveals God’s Gracious Acts Of Mercy, Forgiveness, And Love.

It is God who reconciles us to Himself. He *has* reconciled us (Col. 1:22), He *is* reconciling us (Phil. 2:13), and He *will* reconcile us completely. (1 John 3:2)

“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

2 Cor. 5:18-21

4. It Reveals Our Responsibility To Accept Christ’s Work On Our Behalf.

Trying to make ourselves acceptable to God, apart from Christ, is an impossible task. Somehow, we would need to deal with our past sins and remove them from the records of the Judge of the universe. We must have a perfectly clean slate on judgement day. Only God can do this, and He has!

“And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Col. 2:13-14

FEBRUARY 13

PROPTIATION

“...whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.” Rom. 3:25

Propitiation is understood only in the context of a broken relationship. It describes an act that makes one favorably inclined toward another. It is an act that changes the anger of one offended into the favor of a friend. An owner of a flower shop once commented that women, by far, are the ones who buy flowers in his shop. They buy them for special occasions to express congratulations and sympathy. But when men come into his shop, they are usually looking for a propitiating gift – one that will change the ill feelings of the woman in their life into more favorable ones. There is a poster hanging in his shop showing three flower arrangements for purchase. There is a single rose in a vase. Next to that there is a medium sized potted flowering plant with a pretty bow on it. The final arrangement on the table is a large bouquet with three dozen roses in an elegant vase. The caption on the poster reads. “How mad is she?” When men purchase the large bouquet, he will often comment, “That mad, huh”?

The Bible is the story of a propitiation in the relationship between man and God. How mad is He? Well, the only thing that will cause God to look favorably on you is the gift prepared by His Son. The act of Jesus Christ, going to the cross of Calvary was a propitious act. It turned the wrath of God away and causes Him to be favorably inclined to all who would accept it on their behalf.

- **God must be propitiated because of our sin.** *“For the wrath of God is revealed...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” Rom. 1:18*
- **God is favorably inclined toward us, only by the propitiation of His Son’s death.**
“We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 2:1-2

When Christ’s blood was shed at Calvary, what happened? *“Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” Matt. 27:51* The barrier between an angry God and sinners was removed. God demonstrated that His wrath had been turned away, and that He was now favorably inclined toward all who have faith in Him. We can try other methods to appease God, but nothing but the blood of Christ will do. *“But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Eph. 2:13*

- **God’s wrath has been turned into favor. He has been propitiated!**
“When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.” John 19:30

The propitiating act is finished, and the wrath of God toward the believer has been changed into the utmost favor. This is the precious, wonderful news of the gospel. Jesus Christ has done it, and we are accepted in Him.

“But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” Heb. 10:12-14

Is this your propitiating gift? Or will you be bringing something else to turn away God’s wrath?

FEBRUARY 14

WHY CHRISTIANS WITHOUT A CHURCH FAMILY HAVE LESS FRUIT

“Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.” 1 Cor. 12:27

1. They Are Trying To Operate Outside Of God's Design

“For the body is not one member, but many... And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.” 1 Cor. 12:14, 22-24

Imagine a man's leg trying to go to the store by itself without the rest of his body. Or an eye deciding to do the same thing on its own. Without the rest of their body, doing this is not possible. When Christians try to live without being a member of the church God has chosen for them (1 Cor. 12:18), it is not possible for them to do all He has prepared for them to do.

2. They Do Not Have All They Need To Be “Successful”

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.”

1 Cor. 12:26-27

No individual person or family has all the gifts, strengths, or resources necessary to accomplish all that God has planned for them. God does not supply what is needed the way we want Him to. He supplies what is needed for His purposes according to His design for the church He is building. He wants us to be dependent, interdependent, and fruitful.

3. They Are Exposed To Strong Deceptions

“He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”

Eph. 4:11-12

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

Heb. 13:17

Church leaders provide God-given protection when they are properly honored as part of God's design, just as fathers and mothers do for their children. When this protection is missing or rejected, it exposes us to deception and weakens the whole church.

4. They Find Themselves Resisted By God

“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

1 Peter 5:5

An independent spirit comes from pride in oneself. God is opposed to such pride, because, *“God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” 1 Cor. 12:18*

Are you such a member?

FEBRUARY 15

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR THE LOST

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” 1 Pet.4:5-7

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” Matt. 24:14

Asking God to have saving mercy on unsaved sinners is a privilege He has given to us. It is also a responsibility. We are to “do the work of an evangelist”. (2 Tim. 4:5) This work is not just preaching the gospel, sharing our testimony, and distributing gospel tracts. Indeed, praying for the lost may be the most powerful aspect of this great work.

*“For the gospel has for this purpose been preached... The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit **for the purpose of prayer.**” 1 Pet.4:5-7*

We are to pray for the lost that the gospel would reach them, that God would open their hearts to understand it, and that He would draw them to Christ and accept His free gift of eternal salvation. What a privilege! “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, has whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.” John 15:16

What lost souls could you pray for today?

- In your family. _____.
- Of your neighbors. _____.
- At your work. _____.
- Among your enemies. _____.
- Your past friends. _____.
- In your church. _____.
- In the world. _____.

FEBRUARY 16

ARE THEY SAVED OR NOT?

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 7:21

Do you know any folks you had no doubt were believers, but who are no longer standing strong for the faith because of hard times? Do you know folks who profess to know God, but deny Him by how they are living life? Do you know some who accept the truths about salvation, but give no outward evidence that they have made Christ their Lord? Are these folks saved? There is a good chance they are not. The warnings to Christ and the apostles to them are many.

“What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ...Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead.” James 2:14-17

“They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.” Titus 1:16

“The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.” 1 John 2:4-5

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” 1 John 4:20

*“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
John 13:35*

“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ‘And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” Matt. 7:22-23

“He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach, if indeed you continue in the faith... 1) firmly established, and 2) steadfast, and 3) not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” Col. 1:22-23

These verses teach us that: if a person has not grown to be firmly established in the faith after a considerable time; or has not been steadfast in the faith after facing difficulties in life; or has moved away from their hope in Christ's promises; then we have convincing evidence that the reconciling work of Christ has not been done in their life. We should not assume that they are saved. The evidence suggests otherwise.

If you wonder about someone's salvation, it would be wise to assume they still need Christ. Their time is running out. Pray for them.

FEBRUARY 17

DISCOURAGEMENT

"We were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life." 2 Cor. 1:8

Discouragement, for a Christian, is the result of facing life with a weak faith, an absent hope, or a love of self. We all face it, either because we have things to learn, or we have lost perspective.

1. Understand That Discouragement Is A Life-Long Battle.

"But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good." 2 Thess. 3:13

2. Realize That Discouragement Has Various Stages. (Ps. 51:10-13)

Mild (no longer steadfast) Severe (no longer confident) Debilitating (no longer willing)

3. Know The Primary Causes Of Discouragement. We Can Be...

1. Discouraged by personal failure. (David)

"A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." (Ps. 51:17)

2. Discouraged by weariness in "well doing". (Paul)

*"We were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life."
(2 Cor. 1:8)*

3. Discouraged by a "thorn in the flesh". (Paul)

*"Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me."
(2 Cor. 12:8)*

4. Discouraged by the vanity of investing in this life. (Solomon)

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity." (Eccl. 12:8)

5. Discouraged by the success of evil men. (Habakkuk)

"Why dost Thou make me see iniquity and cause me to look on wickedness?" (Hab. 1:3)

6. Discouraged by personal loss. (Job and his wife)

"Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9, 3:1)

7. Discouraged by opposition in ministry. (Elijah)

"It is enough, now, O Lord, take my life." (1 Kings 19:4)

8. Discouraged by the cost of holiness. (Demas)

"Demas...has deserted me." (2 Tim. 4:10)

9. Discouraged by the impossibility of the task. (Saul's army)

*"When all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid."
(1 Sam. 17:24)*

10. Discouraged by the rejection of those important to us. (David)

"It is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it." (Ps. 55:12)

11. Discouraged because things are not going as we expected. (Mark)

"...who had deserted them...and had not gone with them to the work." (Acts 15:38)

FEBRUARY 18

GIVING THANKS

“Joyously giving thanks to the Father.” Col. 1:11-12

There are three levels of maturing in this area of giving thanks to God.

1. Giving Thanks to God for His Goodness.

Here is Christianity 101. This is our natural response when we come to know God and His love, mercy, and forgiveness for us through Christ. *“It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Thy name, O Most High.” Psalm 92:1* The trouble is, this is where thankfulness stays for immature Christians. They thank God for good things, but when a bad thing comes along, the idea of giving thanks for them makes no sense.

2. Giving Thanks to God for the Hard and Hurtful Things in Life.

The perspective of God’s providential rule and overrule, and the commands related to it, take us to this next level of maturity and its thankfulness.

- *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Rom 8:28* Until we learn and apply this perspective, as we live in this fallen world of sin and death, we will not be thanking God for allowing and causing the bad things that we experience in life. But when we begin to live by faith in His promises, we are able to not only thank God for all the good that comes our way, but also the bad.
- *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:6-7*
- *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4* Little children, rarely, if ever, give thanks to their parents when they are disciplined or asked to do things they do not want to do. As they mature and understand that these things are being done out of love and meant for their good, they begin to accept them. Sometimes, even years later, they may come back and give thanks for the trials they had to endure. “Thanks, Mom, for spanking me.” Is thanking God for the hard things you face a part of your prayers? Even if it is, there is an even further level of maturity God wants us to achieve.

3. Joyously, Giving Thanks to God for the Hard and Hurtful Things in Life.

*“We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will... **joyously giving thanks to the Father.**” Col. 1:9-12* Not only are we to thank God for all the wonders of goodness He showers upon us, and even the hard and hurtful things He allows and brings for our good, we are also to give thanks for these hard things with great joy! This is not possible in our own strength, but by the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit, we can.

FEBRUARY 19

OUR THREE ENEMIES

"In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

We must always remember that we face three enemies as we serve our Lord Jesus.

Enemy #1: We Are Living In a Fallen World Filled With Fallen Men.

"Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse race, among whom you appear as lights in the world." Phil. 2:15

We live in a world of fallen creatures who have rejected God's rule, God's design, God's Word, and God's will. Even more, we live in a world decimated by the consequences imposed by God on His creation because our race rejected God, denied His rule and disobeyed His Word. Adam's sin brought spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death in hell. We are living in the midst of **the downward progression of mankind** described in Romans 1:21-32, that guarantees humanity's decline toward depravity and wickedness. *"Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity... to degrading passions... to a depraved mind... being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, and evil."* Rom. 1:24-29

Enemy #2: We Are Living "In the Flesh", Our Unredeemed Fallen Nature.

Our salvation has created in us a new inner self that hates sin. Although sin no longer exclusively rules our life, it still exists in our "flesh," the unredeemed part of our humanness that remains until we go to be with the Lord.

"I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." Rom. 7:18-25

The only way a Christian can win this constant battle within, and be victorious in the tests and temptations of life, is to walk in the truths of God's word by the power of the indwelling Spirit. We must constantly walk in the Spirit and put to death the desires of our flesh. (Gal. 5:16)

Enemy #3: We Are Living Where Satan Is Active And Is Our Adversary.

We are living in the midst of the Satanic rebellion against God and the evil presence of the fallen angels who live to deceive, discourage, divide, and destroy God's people in their war against God. *"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."* 1 Pet. 5:8-10

FEBRUARY 20

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

“He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:21

If you have money in a bank account, more money can be put into this account or money can be removed from it. This is the meaning of the Greek word *logidzomai*. It is usually translated “reckoned to” when describing what God has put into our “account” when we trust in the finished work of Christ for our eternal salvation. *“For*

what does the Scripture say? ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ (i.e. set down to his account) Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works.” Rom. 4:3-6

There has been a great exchange in your personal account with God if you are a Christian. Much has been removed, and much has been put into it.

- **Our Sins Have Been Removed And Put Into Christ’s Account.**

“And when you were dead in your transgressions...He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Col. 2:13-14 Christ paid a debt He did not owe, because you had a debt you could not pay! This transfer of sin from our account to Christ’s is revealed in Isaiah 53:

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” Isa. 53:4-6

- **The Righteousness Of Christ Has Been Put Into Our Account.**

“Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.” Phil. 3:9 As sinners, we are not “right” and have no ability to change ourselves or cancel out what we have done. Something must be done for us, and it has. Not only have our debts been paid by Christ, but His righteousness has been “put into our account”!

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:21

Our debts have been paid by our Lord Jesus and His riches have been set down to our account!

WINNING THE BATTLE FOR YOUR MIND

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Col. 3:2

Whatever controls your thoughts, controls you. We are to live by faith, hope, and love, but this does not happen unless our mind is focused on God, His work for us, and His revealed truths and promises. *“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Col. 2: 6-8*

How can we find peace of mind and heart, and help others to do so, as we go through our day?

1. Be constantly remembering who you now are in Christ.

“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Eph. 4:23-24

2. Be constantly remembering God’s promises to turn all bad things into good for you.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Rom. 8:28

3. Be mentally engaged in talking to God, all the time.

“In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:6-7

4. Be careful to quickly take every bad thought about people and life into good ones.

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.” Phil. 4:8

5. Be asking God to expose, remove, and prevent Satanic lies in your mind and life.

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him.” 1 Pet. 5:8

6. Deal with any guilt and bitterness in your life, toward God and others. Remove it.

“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.” Heb. 12:15 *“I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.” Acts 24:16*

7. Be mentally focused on your calling to live selflessly for God and others.

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.” Phil. 2:3

8. See to it that images, entertainment, and false ideas do not take control of your mind.

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Col. 2: 6-8

Peace of mind and heart. They can be yours, regardless of what you have, and are facing.

FEBRUARY 22

A TIME TO PRAY – FOR OUR AUTHORITIES

“As a matter of first importance, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority.” 1 Tim. 2:1-2

There are 5 different authorities that are identified in the NT. Governmental authorities are the focus of our text. The others (elders, parents, husbands, masters) will be addressed later. The primary reason we are to be praying for those who run the government of our particular nation is clearly stated.

“... in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 2:2-4

The “all men” that God desires to be saved would include BOTH those who are in governments, and those people that governments have authority over. Being able to live a *“tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity”* would mean little persecution and opposition from our government to share the gospel and stand for Christ. Being a good citizen in the eyes of our government officials, to the extent that we do, would be a good witness to them also.

Few committed Christians have been able to enjoy the freedoms and support of their government as have Americans. But this has rapidly diminished over the last 50 years. The costs of standing and speaking boldly for Christ are now significant. How should we, and must we, now pray?

1. That our standing for Christ would not be silenced, either by threats or by law.
2. That our living and speaking for Christ would not lead to harm from the government.
3. That our government officials, at all levels, would hear the gospel and many get saved.
4. That the light of Christ through us and His church would bring many to salvation.
5. That we and other Christians would not become spiritual cowards as the costs increase.
6. That the examples of those who have gone before us, and were both willing to die for their faith, and exhibited good attitudes toward their government authorities, would guide us.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:14-16

Light shines the brightest in the darkness. It is turned on, and increases in intensity, by prayer.

DRINKING THE CUP UNWORTHILY

“Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.” 1 Cor. 11:27

What is **the price** of our redemption for the consequences of our sinning against a holy God? It required our Savior to die for us. It required Him to give up His life as the Creator and Ruler of the universe and take our unrighteousness upon Himself as His own. This brought about the Father’s rejection and punishment of Him that was due to us. *“Although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be held on to, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Phil. 2:6-8* We are to remember this often and we do so whenever we celebrate our redemption in our communion services.

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, (symbols of Christ’s body and life) you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” 1 Cor. 11:26 However, this remembrance of the price Christ paid to redeem us can be done in an “unworthy” manner. This unworthy manner means that what He has done for me has little or no bearing on how I am living my life.

*“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For **you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body.**” 1 Cor. 6:19-20*

There are significant consequences when we are living life in an unworthy manner.

- Loss of usefulness to God in the work of the age. (2 Pet. 1:3-9)
- Loss of power to do what He asks of us. (1 Thess. 5:19)
- Loss of fruit, because we are not abiding in “the Vine” as we should. (Col. 1:10)
- Loss of rewards at the Bema. (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

*“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship.**” Rom 12:1*

The idea is to rededicate yourself to God at every communion time, which is entirely reasonable because He gave His life for you, so that you may not spend eternity in the lake of fire. As we come to partake of the bread and the cup, in remembrance of what Christ has done for us, let us also remember the warning that was given to the church in Corinth, where they were not seriously yielding themselves to God.

*“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord **in an unworthy manner**, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For **this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.**” 1 Cor. 11:27-30*

We do not hear this warning very often. We should.

FEBRUARY 24

HOW TO ENCOURAGE THE DISCOURAGED

“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.” 1 Thess. 5:14

Unless we learn and impose God’s truths on our circumstances, we easily become discouraged in the midst a fallen world. This is especially true of young and immature believers. We are to encourage them to stand, persevere, and even have joy where God has placed them. We are to encourage them to shine for Christ with right attitudes and responses. How are we to do this? He tells us.

- ♦ **Encourage them with your faith. (Nehemiah)**

“And I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me...Then they said, “Let us arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work.” (Neh. 2:18)

- ♦ **Encourage them with your hope. (Paul)**

“But we do not want you to be uniformed, brethren, ...that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.” 1 Thess. 4:13 (i.e. a focus on their present circumstances)

- ♦ **Encourage them with your love. (Onesiphorus)**

“For he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains...and you know very well what services he rendered.” 2 Tim. 4 16-18

- ♦ **Encourage them with the truth. (vs. lies they have accepted)**

“Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth.” Eph. 6:14

- ♦ **Encourage them with God’s promises.**

“We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose... What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?” Rom. 8:28-31

- ♦ **Encourage them to focus on others. (vs. themselves)**

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 2:3-5

Who needs your encouragement today? Admonish. Encourage. Help. Be Patient With Them.

FEBRUARY 25

CONTENTMENT, PERSEVERANCE AND JOY IN THE WAR

*“In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness,
which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.” 2 Tim. 4:8*

Contentment, perseverance, and joy are the words that are used to describe the mature responses of a Christian in the midst of the long war against God.

CONTENTMENT while we are suffering through the battles of this awful war only comes when we have learned who our God is and what this means for the war we are fighting for Him and those He loves. Are you content in the trials that you are facing? The back of the Book tells us that we win! The promises in our training manual tell us of the return of our Lord in total victory, with us in the celebration! The infinite power of our commanding general assures us of the truth that “He causes all things to work together for good, for us who love Him and are called according to His purpose”! *Rom. 8:28* This perspective allowed Paul to say:

“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Phil. 4:11-13

Are you content in the place you have been assigned to? The wounds that you have suffered? The things you have lost? You can do all things through Him who strengthens you.

PERSEVERANCE in this long war, in the face of incredible trials and suffering, was illustrated by the apostle Paul and with so many that have come before us.

“The time of my departure has come...I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” 2 Tim. 4:7

“Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 3:13-14

When the going gets tough, some Christians grow timid. Some quit. Those strengthened by the Spirit persevere. As the going gets tougher some seem to grow spiritually stronger. When you have run out of your own strength, have you found that you can do all things through Him who strengthens and empowers you?

JOY is the third, and shocking, description of a disciple of Christ living a hard life of doing what the Lord has asked and facing what He has allowed.

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4

Be content where God has placed you. Persevere facing what He has allowed. Have joy facing your trials, knowing that He causes all things to work together for good. Finish your course.

CONTENDING EARNESTLY FOR THE FAITH

“I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Jude 1:3

Are you committed to contending earnestly for the faith? If so, you need to be aware of the three categories of believers who will need your help. You will also need to know what to do for each.

1. We are to help those in our church who are confused about what is true and what isn't.

“Have mercy on some, who are doubting.” Jude 1:22

The deceptive statements made by false teachers, coupled with their worldly lifestyles, can easily confuse some immature Christians within the church. Without much experience and teaching, they find themselves **confused**, –unsure of what is biblically true and what isn't. Jude calls upon the mature ones in the church to have mercy on ... “those who are doubting.” Like wolves stalking sheep, false teachers prey on the weak (2 Tim 3:6) and those mired in doubt. (James 1:6, Ps. 73:13-16, 77:7-9). Those of us who are strong must show mercy to such souls as they are torn between truth and error (Eph 4:14), and commitment and non-commitment (Heb 3:7-4:13; 6:1-12). Showing mercy here means exhorting such people with the truth to help them before they are permanently caught up in heresy. This takes time, patience, and sympathy.

2. We must bluntly warn those who have become convinced of false teaching.

“Save others, snatching them out of the fire.” Jude 1:23

Jesus modeled these first 2 during His ministry to those who were confused, unsure, and filled with doubts. He patiently and gently presented the gospel and His commands. But to those who were convinced of false teaching, such as the scribes and Pharisees, He was blunt, confrontive, and gave them grave warnings about the consequences. “Snatching” is the word *harpazo* and means “to seize or take something by force.” The picture here is seeing someone on the very edge of the cliff, convinced that jumping off is really God's will! What a challenge, rescuing **those now convinced of false teaching**. But we must be willing to be used of God to save others. We must contend **for** them regarding the truth.

3. We must, with great caution, proclaim the truth to those committed to false teaching.

“And on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.” 1:23

Heretics are profoundly deceived individuals, deeply committed to their deceptions. When reaching out to such people, we must proceed with the utmost caution. The admonition “have mercy with fear” indicates the sobering, frightening nature that outreach to such people entails. Getting too close could result in being tainted by their lies or being consumed by our efforts. This warning is repeated 5 times! (Mt. 16:6, 12; 1 Cor. 5:6-7, 15:33; Gal. 5:7-9)

FEBRUARY 27

IT IS NO LONGER I

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” Gal. 2:20

One day, years after his conversion, Augustine is said to have been walking down the street when a former mistress called out to him. He continued walking and did not answer her. She called out to him again saying, “Augustine, it is I!” According to the story, Augustine turned and responded, “Yes, but it is no longer I.”

*“If any man is in Christ, **he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” 2 Cor. 5:17* Augustine had a new spiritual nature that was still held in his old body. He looked like the same man, but things had changed and most were still hidden.

“For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” Col. 3:3-4

In what sense is our new life in Christ “hidden”?

1. It is hidden because our new spiritual nature is not physically visible.

“He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature.” 2 Pet. 1:4

2. It is hidden because our shared life with the Father and the Son is not revealed to unbelievers.

“A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” 1 Cor. 2:14

3. It can be hidden if we do not put on our new self and walk in the Spirit.

Two men I knew had grown up together, but had left for different colleges and had not seen each other for many years. One had become a Christian, the other had not. They were both hired by the same company and moved to the same town and began to work together. Very soon the non-Christian asked the Christian this question: “I am the same man that I was. What happened to you? You are not the same man I used to know.” Using different words, the Christian answered his old friend the same way Augustine had answered his.

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” Gal. 2:20

As this Christian walked in the truth, by the power of the indwelling Spirit, he was obeying our Lord’s command to *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:16*

FEBRUARY 28

OUR CALLINGS FROM OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Rom 8:28

As a beloved child of the Creator and Ruler of the universe, God has a special plan for your time on earth. (*John 15:16*) We are called, in His timing, to the work and places and people that are “according to His purpose”. We see many of these in Scripture. The primary ones are these:

1. We Are Called To Be Saved From The Wrath To Come, Thru Christ As Our Savior. *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” Mt. 11:28*

2. We Are Called To Follow Christ As Our Lord.
“And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Mt. 4:19

3. We Are Called To Do Those Special Works God Has Prepared For Us.
“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10

4. We Are Called To Live A Supernatural Life In This Natural Realm.
*“In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”
Phil. 4:12-13*

5. We Are Called To Deny Ourself And Live For God And Others.
“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’” Mt. 16:24

6. We Are Called Back When We Fail. Forgiven, Loved, And Called Again.
“He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.” John 21:17

7. We Are Called To Assume Responsibility For Others.
*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
Matt. 28:19-20*