



EXALTING CHRIST  
Advancing the Gospel

# 40 DAYS OF PRAYER



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*"And I, when I am lifted up from the  
earth, will draw all people to myself." -  
John 12:32*



Greetings Church Family,

First Presbyterian Church's Capital Campaign, "Exalting Christ, Advancing the Gospel," is so much more than a fundraising initiative. This is a 'faith raising' initiative. As the people of God, we are called to pray. And, as the body of Christ, we are called to unity.

Paul's prayer for the church at Rome is just as applicable to those of us at First Presbyterian Church.

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

—Romans 15:5-6 ESV

The goal of this devotional is to equip us to prayerfully journey together over 40 days, as we read the same devotional and prayer each day. Although physically apart, we are united in our prayerful pondering of Scripture. We will be glorifying and worshipping God 'with one voice over the next 40 days.

These short devotionals were written by members of our church family—of all ages. The Scriptures and reflections are not about financial stewardship or giving. These devotionals are, however, grounded in God's word and illustrate how His powerful word motivates and moves us in our daily lives.

As we embark upon this collective prayer journey, we draw closer to God, closer to one another and become united in our faith.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.  
Pastor Bill



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**“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” – Revelation 3:20**

As a young Mom and new Christian, my attempts to meet with my Lord and Savior each day became futile attempts. Surely when my husband and children had left for work and school, there would be a time to draw near to God and His Word. But distractions, whether physical or the ones my mind wouldn't release, pulled me away from what I envisioned as a blessed “filling” for my day.

A quickly read devotional and a run through the list of prayer requests became tedious because I was in control, or at least I thought I was. I was exhausted, overcommitted, and frustrated. But the Holy Spirit was changing my heart to desire a much closer walk with Jesus. His call to me in Revelation 3:20 was the door that began to open, revealing the adventure and walk with my God for which I had longed.

I began to pray that He would show me a time when the world would be silent and His word would be the only words heard. Increasingly, even though my alarm was set for 6:30, I began to awaken at 5:30 a.m., sometimes 5:00. A sleepy shuffle to the library and my comfortable chair, and it began.

Over time, scripture was speaking to me in ways I had never known. I was drawn to write my prayers, dipping deep from the well of scripture I had just read. The ancient words of my Bible began to open doors of praise and gratitude. I knew I was being led by the Spirit, as words I had never used, and revelations that revealed glimpses of my Savior, bubbled up and onto the page. I was no longer listening to my Savior knock on the other side of that closed door, He had entered to spend precious time with me. This brought such joy!

I am now in the twilight of my years, finding my early morning appointments even more meaningful. My Lord has taught me to rest in Him, to dig deep, harvesting nuggets of praise that are offered back to Him alone.

My Gracious Heavenly Father,  
I bow to you this day, thanking you with all humility for the tender way you draw us into a relationship that our hearts yearn to know. The constant beckoning of this world fills us with frustration and the need to constantly strive for more. But You, O Father, satisfy that need with Your gentle wooing of our hearts, washing over us with peace and the desire to be filled with more of your truth. Set our pace to the measure of your grace, and delight us with discoveries of you not yet known. In the precious name of your Son, Jesus, Amen.

Anita Smith

**"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."**

**- Romans 5:6-11**

Like many people, I struggle with perfectionism. I demand of myself that I be a perfect student and athlete. The idea of making a B on a Chemistry test or falling out of a turn sequence during a dance competition fills my stomach with anxiety. But of course, no one is perfect. So demanding that I get every single part of my life right is a futile quest that will only end in frustration and self-loathing. My perfectionism translates into my relationship with the Lord as well. Every time I sin, I am overwhelmed with shame. I find it difficult to go to God and repent of my sins because I am anxious that he will reject me for not being the perfect Christian.

This summer, God in his providence sent me to RYM Colorado with our youth group, where a speaker made me look at my salvation in a completely different light. Using Romans 5:6-11, he presented what to me was a radical idea: Jesus didn't die on the cross to save me from an eternity of punishment, he saved me for a relationship with him. He didn't die on the cross because I was perfect, he was a perfect sacrifice so that I might experience the joy of being a child of God.

What Jesus desires most for us is to be in relationship with him - not perfect obedience. I am not saying we should not do our utmost to not sin, but instead that our relationship with God should not be dependent on how much or how we have sinned. God loved us so much that while we were still sinners he sent his only son to die for us. With that confidence we can draw close to His throne to repent of our sins, to praise Him, and to bring our worries and prayer requests before Him. By finding our worth and righteousness rooted in Jesus, we can feel secure in God's steadfast love for us and the guarantee of our salvation.

I have found that this security makes it many times easier to obey God's commands. After all, I am not abstaining from sin out of fear of losing my salvation but rather to be sanctified and grow closer to God through the power of the Holy Spirit. And in other aspects of my life, my need for perfectionism has diminished as I have realized that my grades and performance do not determine my worth: Jesus's immutable, infinite, everlasting love for me defines me.

Dear Heavenly Father,

We praise you for your steadfast love and endless grace. Help us to remember that you desire a personal relationship with us, and that you love all of us - especially the parts that are less than perfect. Help us to feel secure in our salvation because of your faithfulness, and to find our worth and peace in what Jesus has done on the cross and not in our own works. Amen.

Sara Grace Abernathy



**“My Son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my teaching in your heart. ... Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.”**

**- Proverbs 3:1-4**

Three of our four grandchildren have been married in the past ten years. After the rehearsal dinners for each of the weddings I have made brief comments to the soon-to-be brides and grooms, and each time I began by reciting these Bible verses. At one's wedding love and faithfulness abound. However, over time, it is important to remember the first verse which urges us to **not forget and keep teaching in our heart** if we are to retain favor and a good name in the sight of God.

Virginia and I have been married for 60 years and neither of us has let love and faithfulness for each other leave us. We have been blessed with a wonderful family, which, in a few months, will include three great grandchildren. We could not be prouder than we are about their strong Christian faith. I hope our example has helped with this and expect their example will extend to their children and grandchildren as well.

Dear God,

Thank you for the multitude of blessings you provide to me daily. Your love and faithfulness to my family and me are a constant reminder of your Holy Spirit in our lives. Help me to pass on to others the love I have received from you.

William Steinhauer

**“Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” - Matthew 6:9-13**

There are times, given the challenges of life in a fallen world, when prayer is difficult. The need is there but words fail us. It is at these times that Scripture comes to the rescue.

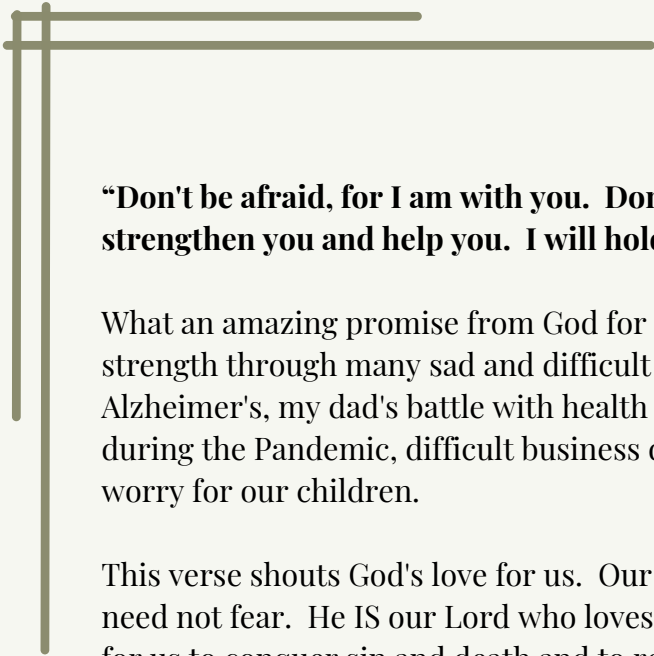
In 1535 at the behest of his friend and barber, Martin Luther wrote a short book “A Simple Way to Pray”. It suggested that when words fail us, use well known passages of Scripture like the section on the Ten Commandments, or Matthew 6, or even the Apostle’s Creed as a guide and “pray through them”.

Sometimes The Lord’s Prayer is all we can think of to pray and even by rote it is a wonderful resource. Thank heaven we have it available for those times of great need. But as Luther would suggest, it becomes even richer when each phrase is expanded and thus becomes the starting point for what we really want and need to talk to God about.

Jesus is telling His disciples (that’s us) how to pray and gives us the model of how that should be done. It is up to us to do it.

Eternal God,  
Creator of the universe and all things therein, we praise and  
worship you. Teach us your ways that we may worthy witnesses for the  
coming of your kingdom. You know our needs and provide generously for us.  
Give us grateful hearts and a generous spirit. Give us the grace to forgive  
others and through Jesus’ atoning death forgive us of our many sins. Lord,  
Satan is always near. Deliver us from temptation and help us to be more  
Christlike as we face life’s choices.  
In Jesus’ name, Amen.

John Cowan



**“Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you in my victorious right Hand.” - Isaiah 41:10**

What an amazing promise from God for each of us! This verse has been my comfort and strength through many sad and difficult situations from seeing my mom suffer with Alzheimer's, my dad's battle with health issues, my husband's hospitalization with Covid during the Pandemic, difficult business decisions, loved ones illnesses, broken relationships or worry for our children.

This verse shouts God's love for us. Our Father is with us in each and every situation, so we need not fear. He IS our Lord who loves us so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross for us to conquer sin and death and to reconcile us to Him.

He will give us His strength and help us no matter what we are going through. Most amazing of all, God holds us, not just in His Hand, but in his VICTORIOUS right Hand. Our Lord is sovereign and guarantees victory for us in every difficulty or every heart ache we could ever experience. His victory may look different than what we have in mind or what we imagine, but it is His perfect victory that He has planned for us.

Trust, knowing that God is with you, He is your God, and He holds you in His VICTORIOUS right Hand.

Gracious Father,

We praise you for being with us, so we need not ever be afraid. We praise you that you are our God, so we need not ever be discouraged. Thank you for the strength and help You give us no matter what we are going through. May we trust You and always know that You are our Sovereign Father who holds us in Your victorious right Hand.

In His Grip,  
Amen

Mary Helen Heaner

**“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” - Ephesians 1:4-6**

I have noticed singers who upon the completion of their performance engage in a gesture of dropping their microphone. I understand this gesture is to signify the conclusion of a performance of note. Our scripture today is definitely “mic drop” worthy; however, I choose to call it “knee drop” worthy. Why? Stop and consider the meaning of this verse. God chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. Think of what this verse teaches us.

Before God ever said “Let there be light” or before he created the angels or laid the foundations of the world or before he named the stars in the sky, he chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight. To make it even more personal, we could read it “He chose ME” to be holy and blameless in his sight and he predestined ME to be adopted in him. This is incredibly great news. It is joyous, breathtaking, humbling, and reassuring. You were known by God, chosen, predestined, and adopted as his in love through Christ Jesus for no reason other than for his pleasure and by his will. Certainly this engenders much praise and thanksgiving as we realize our eternal salvation was determined and established by God and secured by Christ Jesus before the creation of the world.

Heavenly Father,  
When we stop and realize you chose us in your Son before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in your sight; we fall to our knees in gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise. We know we are unworthy of such a blessing and we are unworthy of such love. Thank you for adopting us into your family as sons and daughters by your glorious grace and for your glory. We give thanks that we belong to you and praise your holy name. Amen.

Greg Garrett

## **My go to Scripture in my prayer and devotion time is Romans 8.**

By God's Holy Spirit I can pray with confidence, "His will be done" regardless of the circumstance. Verse 28 assures me God causes ALL things to work together for the good of those who love God.

What does it mean to love God? We abuse that word love so often that it has sort of become meaningless. We love ice cream and we love Jesus. God's love for us is not warm and fuzzy. It means something; He died to show His love for us.

Jesus left only two commandments. Read- Matthew 22:40. Love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. To love God is to totally surrender our will to His leading. Trust and obey in every circumstance, and to have no rights to our will. If we truly love God we will obey His commandments - read John 14:15. That's a true test of our love for God. And to know whatever happens today it is God's will for you.

All of your circumstances are in the hand of God, and so you don't ever have to think they are unusual. Your part in intercessory prayer is not to agonize over how to intercede, but to use the everyday circumstances and people God puts around you by His providence to bring them before His Throne, and to allow the Spirit in you the opportunity to intercede for them. Knowing you can trust in the Lord's everlasting love.

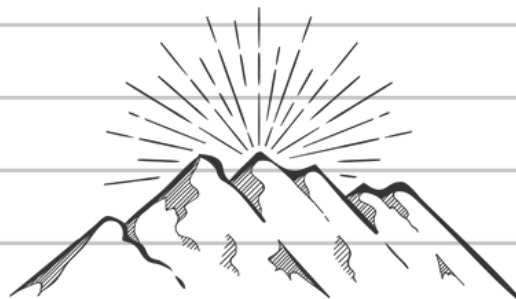
His promise to you is that He will never leave you or forsake you. He promised His Holy Spirit will guide and enable us to live a life to obey and glorify Him; we have no excuse when we fail. You can rest in His arms, rest in His infinite power and grace. What can the world do to you? Do not be afraid because NOTHING can separate you from the love of God. Read Romans 8:26-39. What a powerful glorious promise from our Lord and Savior.

By the precious blood and broken body of Jesus Christ we are His.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. - Philippians 4:4

Louise Hunt

# Week 1 Notes & Reflections to Remember:



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**"When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought great joy to my soul." - Psalm 95:19**

I think we can all relate to some form of anxiety during our lives. Whenever I'm preparing to go on a mission trip, or our recent pilgrimage to the Holy Lands, it seems anxiety always creeps into my mind. There is so much to do in readying our homes while we are gone, packing the correct things, and preparing our hearts and minds. It is when anxiety floods our minds that satan attacks us and tells us we are not prepared. That there is too much to do and we will fail. Isn't that how he works in our everyday life as well?

Thanks be to God that we can rebuke him in the name of Jesus! The Lord goes before us and prepares the way. He is with us, above us, around us always! Breathe in His Spirit and lay hold of the calm; the peace that only He can provide. His love and His grace is sufficient. When God is working we can sit back, watch and be ready when He says to us "come".

Come all ye who are weary and I will give you rest.  
Come to me with ALL your requests and concerns.  
Come and bow down before me and worship.  
Come together, for where two or more are gathered in My name- I will be there.  
Come and let us sing for joy to the Lord.  
Come and look to the Lord and His strength, seek His face always.

Heavenly Father,  
Thank you that our help is in the name of the Lord, maker of heaven and earth. Help us to be still and know that you are God. Thank you for Scripture that reminds us who You are and points us to You. Remind us we are not alone, that we have the greatest gift ever- Jesus. We praise you that you never leave us or forsake us in the midst of our anxieties. All praise, glory, and majesty be Yours forevermore! In Jesus precious name, Amen

Abby Holcombe

**“Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,  
for I have put my trust in Thee.  
Show me the way that I should go  
for I lift up my soul to you.” - Psalm 143:8**

A short but powerful verse which I have found to be both comforting in difficult times and inspirational as a daily reflection. The first line can be a reminder that hope can always be found in recognizing God's love for us or motivation to serve Him can be found in remembering his grace.

Line two either confirms that we trust him in all situations or motivates us to follow Him through His word and seek guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Line three pleads for direction. Again, it can be a situation of difficulty or simply a desire to be on the path he chooses for us.

Finally, line four reflects back to God our understanding of His grace and that our current existence and place in eternity are at His mercy.

I believe that if you memorize this verse, you will find yourself repeating it often.

Heavenly Father,  
Give us a heart that is completely yielded to your love, a heart of sacrifice to serve you. Give us a mind that seeks to know you first, so that ultimately, we know ourselves. And in this attitude may we be a blessing to others as we journey home to you. Amen.

Lanny Thomas

**"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." - 2 Corinthians 4:7**

Life can be difficult. We face uncertainty. We face suffering, even death. There is no better example of this than Paul. There is no one better who experienced the difficulties of life to the degree that Paul did. First, he experienced these difficulties and he can sympathize and relate to us. Second, he can speak authoritatively as an apostle who spoke from a transformed heart and mind. Paul was truly an experiential theologian. He spoke from an experience that was tempered by his theology.

The broader passage (2 Corinthians 4:7-18) of this text is full of sound theology in living eternally in a temporal world. Paul's language is theological, yet lyrical. It speaks to the heart as well as to the mind. It is the life of the Gospel cast in the imagery of everyday life. Paul speaks in contrasts and images so that we might see life from the eternal perspective.

We are called to live in light of eternity. That is the secret to knowing and experiencing God. As we understand this, we are enabled to see beyond the deception and emptiness of this life and see the beauty and glory of God. Paul understood this. It was this philosophy that allowed him to face persecution, hardships, stress, opposition and numerous other difficulties that encompassed his responsibilities as an apostle.

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay" -Paul uses beautiful imagery to picture human frailty. We are pictured as common clay jars. To the Corinthians these jars were a part of everyday life, both common and expendable. That is the picture of the Christian, the frailty speaking not only of our mortality, but also our fallenness which encompasses our whole being. What is the "treasure" that he speaks of? It is the treasure of the gospel. Imagine that we who are so frail and so weak are permitted to possess and to proclaim the wondrous gospel of Christ through our lives and through our witness. Why is this? It is "to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." Whatever we accomplish in this life, it is obvious that it is only accomplished by the power of God and not by ourselves. We become discouraged when we seek to live in our own strength and not by the power of God.

Paul reminds us in verse 11: 'For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.' Our life is a continual cycle of death and life. Even as we face our own limitations, the limitless power of Christ is manifested in us. Strength and weakness, death and life, all are pointing to the power and the glory of Christ. As we develop an unconscious sense of ourselves, we are developing a consciousness of Christ's glory. The infinite treasure of the gospel that we possess is the possession of Christ himself and that enables us to live in light of eternity.

Father, teach me to live in light of eternity. Broken and frail as I am, I am yours. You have pledged yourself to me. In my own strength, I am powerless, but in Christ I can do all things who Him who strengthens me. Remind me in the daily grind of life to see you at work in my life, personally involving yourself in my life because you love me. May I love and adore you because I am eternally yours.

Kenneth Studdard

**“Deuteronomy 33:25 b . . . and as your days, so shall your strength be.**

When asked to write something for this devotional booklet, I thought of all the wonderful verses which speak of God’s sovereignty or of His divine election of us, his children, which mean so much to me -- but my eye kept seeing a little plaque I have in my kitchen which says “as your days, so shall your strength be.”

These are the words of Moses as he pronounced blessings on the 12 tribes of Israel at the end of his life. Sometimes I think my life is busy but Moses really had his plate full. He was now 120 years old. He had led the Hebrew children out of Egypt and through the wilderness and now to the edge of the Promised Land. God had given him strength and wisdom throughout this over 40 year journey – and He will do the same for me as I age and seek to STILL be of service to my family and, even more importantly, His church, the new Israel.

If I am baking or sewing or gardening, I need to ask for strength for the task but also need to be listening to the Holy Spirit’s prompting on how to use my gifts to serve others knowing that we have “only one life, will soon be passed. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

One more verse, if I may: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:9-10

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we come humbly to Your throne of grace, knowing that all we have comes from Your loving hand. We give thanks for Your provision to us and to our church. If it please You, use our feeble work and the fruit of our work to serve others. Show us our sin – let us not be proud or self serving, but humble and generous toward the household of faith. In the precious name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Evelyn Storey

**“Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind:**

**‘Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words?**

**Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much. Who determined its dimensions and stretched out the surveying line? What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?’” – Job 38:1-7**

I often struggle with being out of control over my life and the things that take place day to day. I constantly find myself feeling anxious and fearful and questioning God and His goodness, His faithfulness, His trustworthiness. These verses speak of a very present truth: I am not God. I do not have the slightest idea of how to operate creation and the universe and every created thing's life in the world, let alone just my own. I am not omniscient, omnipresent, or sovereign. I am sinful and finite minded and often ignorant to the Lord's wisdom and power and love for me. The Lord is cloaked in mystery and His ways and thoughts are higher than ours.

What a gift of grace that God simply asks us to trust Him and to lay our heavy yokes and burdens at the feet of His Son, Jesus Christ, our savior who carries our burdens and takes away our sin.

Dear Lord, thank you for being in control over everything in existence. Thank you for the way that you love your creation and thank you for orchestrating and ordaining every moment of every day before it even comes to be. Thank you for your wisdom and sovereignty and for your trustworthiness and faithfulness. Thank you for being consistent and unchangeable Lord. You placed every star in the sky and you know them by name- you are amazing God. Thank you for your love for me and that you hear my prayers and care about my life. Please help me to have a desire to know you and be known by you, my creator. Please help me to hold my life and everything in it with a posture of obedience to your will and with open hands. Thank you for your love for me, I love you God.

In Jesus's name I pray, amen.

Rose Hill

**“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” - John 16:33**

I love this verse! John 16:33 gives us hope and brings us peace. It calms when times are tough and reminds us who is capable of easing anxiety and worry. “But take heart! I have overcome the world” replays in my head often. Let me tell you why...

Growing up, I only went to church on Sundays and occasionally attended youth group activities. I didn't start actually studying the Bible until I was an adult. As a new mom, I joined a Bible study, our family began regularly attending Sunday School and Wednesday night gathering, and small groups became important parts of our lives. As I started digging in, I realized there are some scary stories and hard lessons in The Bible. It is The Word of God, true, infallible, and the greatest love story of all time. But, there are some dark stories, tough topics, and hard realities. It's not all sparkles and rainbows, you know?!? These things took me by surprise at first, but I started to realize that to appreciate the good parts, I needed to learn about the hard parts too.

We live in a dark, defeating world where suffering happens sometimes. We experience death, pain, loss, shame, fear, anxiety, stress, depression, anger, disappointment, loneliness, and so many other negative emotions and experiences. John 16:33 tells us that we will have trouble, so this should not come as a surprise to us. But sometimes it does and we need to be reminded of a light at the end of a dark tunnel. That's what this verse does for me.

Earlier in the book of John, Jesus is telling His disciples that life is going to be hard out there for them. Their job was going to bring persecution upon them. Just like us, they were going to experience those “troubles” I mentioned earlier. This verse was a pep talk before they set out to do their work. Jesus continued to remind them that if they stay firm in their faith He will be with them the whole way.

To me, the most grounding line is...“But take heart! I have overcome the world.” It's better than anything a superhero, president, athlete, coach, motivational speaker, parent, etc. has ever said. As a matter of fact, nobody else can say that. Is this world a tough place to live? Yes. Are we going to have trouble? Absolutely. But, the battle has been won. It is not up to us to fight the fight alone, Jesus has done that for us! He has overcome the world! We must believe it, tell others about it, and rest in it...that should be our focus. So, when trouble comes our way, we can remember John 16:33. I don't know about you, but knowing that makes life a whole lot more peaceful for me.

Father God, I praise you for your Son, Jesus! What a warrior He is. Plant in our hearts daily a desire to see this life through His eyes and show us the ways to glorify you. When troubles come our way, remind us that you sent Jesus to die on the cross for us and He has overcome the world! Lord, thank you for loving us that much. I pray this in Jesus's Holy Name, Amen.

Lauren Brewster

**"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,**

**But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal,**

**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." - Matthew 6: 19-21**

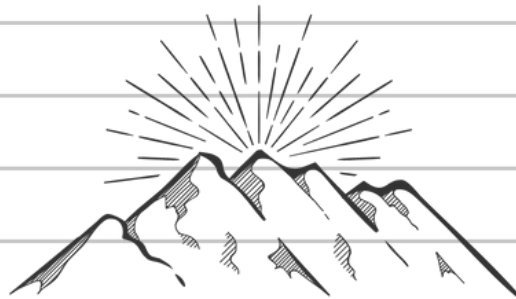
Wealth and material possessions are the chief competitors for my affection rightfully due God and his kingdom. And the reason is clear – they are a source of comfort, security, power and even hope. Especially in our culture, they are the modern-day golden calves and “high places” of the Old Testament. In his book, *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller identifies an idol as anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. If I am honest, and I reckon I will be since I am writing to fellow admitted sinners, my natural tendency is to hedge my bets. I don’t worry about moths or rust, and I have insurance against anything taken by thieves. But business failures, recessions, market drops, governments imposing taxes and 40-year high inflation are eating away at “my” earthly treasures. I rationalize my behavior as “being a good steward”. After all, God calls us to plan for uncertainty (Ecc. 11:2) so, there’s that.

Yet, as he masterfully always does, Jesus cuts to the heart (pun intended) of the matter in verse 24 of Matthew 6 saying, “no one can serve two masters ... you cannot serve both God and Money”. And, if the solution is to “store up treasures in heaven”, the obvious question is how do we accomplish that? I am a “to-do” list guy. I want a list of 10 steps to store up treasures in heaven. So I set about reading several commentaries and articles on the subject and, in doing so, I found a writing by Marshall Segal that satisfied (and convicted) me the most. It ended with him making the point that God will not only reward us for laying up treasures in heaven but he is our ultimate, superior treasure and, if we are truly convinced of that, we will overflow with what Segal refers to as ambitious generosity: “Not, make sure you cover your bases, and then see if you have some left over to give away, but do whatever you can to have this treasure. Not leftover generosity, but radical generosity – the kind that can only be explained if Jesus really did die and really did rise from the dead and really will reward those who give and sacrifice.” In other words, the question for me and for you is whether I (we) really believe what I (we) say when we stand together and recite the Apostles’ Creed. If so, then each of us must determine, in our own heart (2 Cor 9: 7), what ambitious, radical generosity looks like. “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Jim Elliot

Heavenly father, forgive me when I fail to trust and pursue you with all my heart. Help me in my moments of unbelief. Help me to loosen my grasp on earthly treasures and invest them your kingdom. Help me to treasure you above all “things of earth” that I may live the rest of my life of ambitious generosity. In Jesus name, Amen.

Rick Gilbert

# Week 2 Notes & Reflections to Remember:



EXALTING CHRIST  
Advancing the Gospel

**"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."**

**- Galatians 3:20**

My Christian life truly began when I died to my old life, repented, and began to crucify sinful desires that kept me from following Christ the way I should. Dying to self is difficult because we live in a "me world" where we are told we deserve to have the best of everything.

I consider this rubbish. That I may gain Christ in my life, that I would see Jesus in my life each and every day, and that I would realize his presence with me, is my desire. My prayer is to live for Jesus and fulfill the purpose God has given me during this earthly life to help glorify Him.

Heavenly Father – we praise you for creating us in your image, so that our desire is to worship you, but as we get older we sometimes worship what we have accomplished in our life, but it is all a loss compared to knowing Christ. Thank you that we know Jesus better as the Holy Spirit leads us by staying in Your Word, and by making sacrifices to know Him better. Thank you that your word helps us press on in growing toward perfection. Knowing we cannot be perfect ourselves, because only you, God, can work in and through us to carry it on to completion until the day we see Jesus face to face.

In His name we pray,  
Amen.

Bill Brewster

**“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.” - Psalm 32:8**

This verse calms all of the doubts and worries I carry each day, because it helps me remember that God has made a specific plan for each and every one of us. While reading this verse, I am reminded of how unstoppable God’s love is for His people.

Sometimes I catch myself becoming extremely anxious about the future plans in my life. Being a senior in high school brings many worries - Where am I going to go to college? Will it be the right place for me? What if I choose the wrong major or if I don’t make friends?

When I think about these things, this verse shows me that I need to be confident in God, and know that He will guide me down the right path and have me where I need to be. It tells me that I do not need to worry because He is my counselor, and He will never leave me.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for keeping your eye upon me. I pray that you continue to guide me through each decision that comes upon me. When fear and worries try to break me down, remind me of your constant and unconditional love. I praise you in advance for leading me down the path you want me to take. Amen.

Caroline Brewster



**"Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." - Philippians 4:11**

I first remember reading this verse as a freshman in college. It was the beginning of the spring semester, and I didn't want to be there. I wanted to drop out and stay home. And yet, my parents drove me and my earthly possessions five hours north to the frozen tundra of Wisconsin in January, said 'you'll be fine,' and waved goodbye. They were right (of course). I was fine. I grew in that semester and met friends who are now in heaven who had a profound impact on my life. Paul wrote this book while in prison. I think my cozy dorm room was probably a pretty far cry from the cell from which he was writing, and yet it took that perspective for me to realize that God had good gifts to give me in that season.

Since that time, this verse has grown in complexity. It's not just for those times I am unhappy with my situation- it's also for the times I'm super excited and need to slow down before trying to rush to the next thing. This verse encourages me to be content in the circumstances in which God has placed me- both good and bad. In the good, slow down and praise God. In the bad, slow down and praise Him again. He is in all things and is in control of all things. True contentment can only be found in Him.

Lord, thank you for being the Giver of all good gifts. Help me to give thanks in all circumstances and realize that they are fleeting- that true contentment is only found in You. Take away those distracting things in which I try to find my identity apart from You. We love you.

In Jesus's name,  
Amen.

Hillary Renner

**“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding: In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.” - Proverbs 3:5-6**

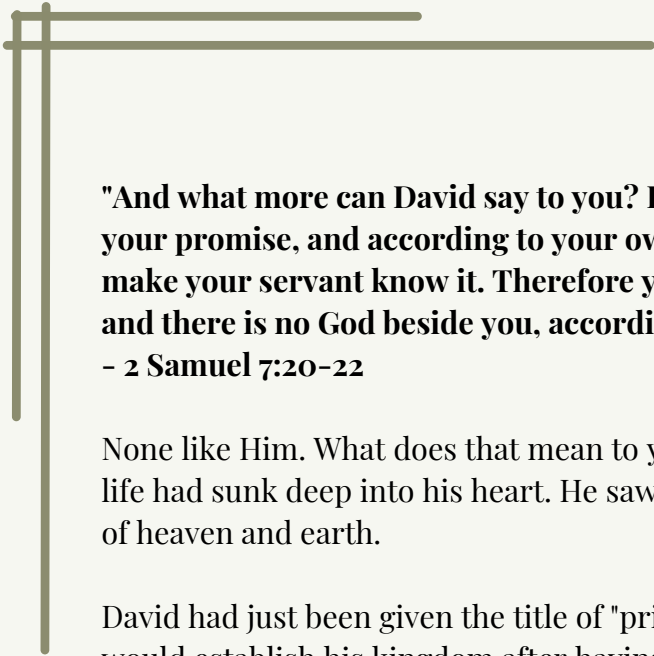
In his Study Bible, Dr. David Jeremiah notes... "the skill of living is the sort of wisdom about which Proverbs is concerned. So the writers of Proverbs want to equip all of us with the skills needed to bring order out of the chaos called life".

In today's world, we need God's wisdom more now than ever before. We are bombarded by the secular world view which seems prevalent in today's society, and which intimidates many from standing for God's truth, and living, to the best extent possible, in accordance with God's teachings.

There is a God, and his work and his teachings are as true today as when they were in the days of Solomon. Lets acknowledge and praise him every day. Lets look to God every day for his wisdom and guidance. Let's stop relying solely on our own understanding and rather look to God to direct our paths.

Our Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that you are the creator of all things; that your truth is the only truth; and that truth is not determined by what we think or by majority vote. Please help us to seek your truth and wisdom. Help us to stop totally relying on our and the world's understanding. Please be with us and direct our paths every day and keep us mindful of your will for our lives.

King & Mary Ann Askew



**"And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it. Therefore you are great, O Lord God. For there is none like you, and there is no God beside you, according to all that we have heard with our ears."**

**- 2 Samuel 7:20-22**

None like Him. What does that mean to you? To David it meant that the Lord's blessings on his life had sunk deep into his heart. He saw that his testimony was weaved together by the Maker of heaven and earth.

David had just been given the title of "prince over my people Israel" and was told that the Lord would establish his kingdom after having gone through many rough years of turmoil and heartbreak. He knew that only God could pull him through battle after battle, give him the wisdom needed to reconcile with Saul, and persevere through loss.

The same goes for us as believers. There is none like Him in our testimonies, there is none like Him in His ability, there is none like Him in His love for us.

Lord, I pray that I would be quick to remember your faithfulness in my life and the promises that you and only you can fulfill. There is none like you Lord!

Erin Evans

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

This verse is a daily reminder that being Christlike is a state of selflessness. I’ve loved the saying that being selfless isn’t thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less. In this wonderful world made by our Creator, it can be really easy to be distracted by the many creature comforts afforded to us.

The fear is always to become less reliant on Christ and more reliant on ourselves. Each time this occurs in my life, I find less joy and fulfillment versus the times spent in service to others. The Holy Spirit gently reminds us that nothing here on earth is actually about us. This is truly how God designed us and any attempt to fill this need with other things, seemingly winds up in futility. Remembering the blessing of relationships with others and the importance of serving others before ourselves will push us in a Christlike direction. I am constantly reminded in my successes and failures of the value of relationships here on earth, and most importantly, with our Heavenly Father. We shouldn’t do it for reward or merit, but because God has called us to serve humbly.

Thank you Lord for your word that you have given us for guidance to live a joy filled life. The blessings of relationships with you and others are a constant reminder of how small I am and more importantly, how big you are. It brings great comfort knowing that my selfish ambition pales in comparison to your love and the love of those around me. Please be a constant reminder of this full dependency on you not only to serve others better but to serve my own interests less.

Sam & Sally Echols

**“Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.” – Psalm 128: 1-4**

When we read this chapter we are reminded of God’s covenant promises for the entire family, and that the family unit is not independent from God, and can not function apart from Christ.

We are encouraged to see that God has not just promised to sustain our family, but bless abundantly in all matters of our lives.

Raising families is no easy task and we have hard times. Marriage and children are understood by modern culture as a civil institution, a burden, or unnecessary. Remember that God says, “it is not good for a man to be alone,” it is not good for a woman to go unprotected and it is worse for a child to be neglected.

When a man (husband) fears the Lord, the greatest reward he could receive is a woman (the fruitful vine) and the most precious gift that this holy union could bring are many children (olive shoots) around the table. The table is the Lord’s, the fullness of the earth is the Lord’s and when we look at the reality of this and its effect in our small lives we rejoice together with Christ over the miracle that a family is.

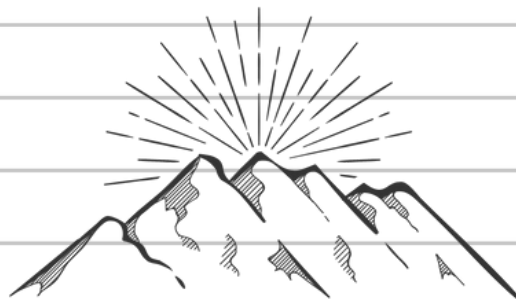
Father in Heaven,

We thank you Lord for this day, and we thank you Lord for this devotion and prayer guide. We thank you for this church family who saw fit to bless us with this resource, and we are most thankful today for the family unit and the blessing that you mean that to be. We’re thankful for the truth that we can find in your word, and the good news of the Gospel. We don’t have to wonder, Lord, or question what’s right, or what you would have to say on any matter, for it’s all contained in the pages of your Word. We’re grateful Lord to be yours and we’re grateful to be part of a covenant family. I pray that we would take the truths from your Scripture and hide them in our heart, that we may see family as the blessing that you mean it to be. As our abundant and rich heritage we have in you. I pray that we would hold closer to you, and your word, and to each other. We love you, Lord, and we’re so grateful to be yours, Jesus.

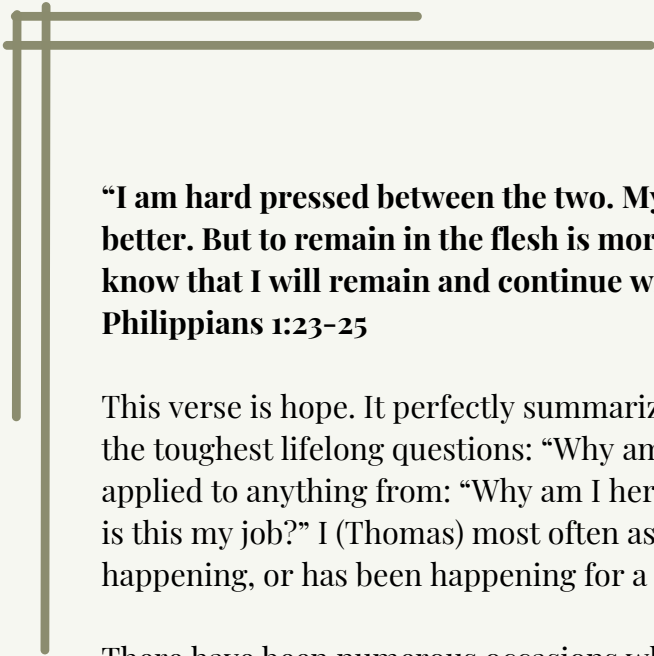
We beg and ask all these favors, in the mighty name of Jesus.  
Amen.

Garrett & Katterra Cochran

# Week 3 Notes & Reflections to Remember:



EXALTING CHRIST  
Advancing the Gospel



**“I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,” -  
Philippians 1:23-25**

This verse is hope. It perfectly summarizes the gospel and its impact on life, answering one of the toughest lifelong questions: “Why am I here?” This question is very broad, and could be applied to anything from: “Why am I here on earth?” to “Why am I in this marriage?” or “Why is this my job?” I (Thomas) most often ask this when something difficult or frustrating is happening, or has been happening for a long time.

There have been numerous occasions where I have thought, “This life is literally the worst. Can I please just be with Christ already?” But then...

THIS VERSE. Why am I here? For you! For my wife! For my children! For my brothers and sisters in Christ! If I wasn’t supposed to be right where I am today, I would be dead.

Our existence in each circumstance, marriage, family, job, etc., is not purposeless, but is ordained by God for the benefit of His Kingdom and the redemption of His people.

That gives us so much peace in God’s ultimate plan for us in the midst of our circumstances.

Father, You are sovereign over all things. Thank you for the peace that comes with knowing you have placed us where we are on purpose. Thank you for the hope that what is to come, life in Your presence, is far better than any life here on earth. Please be quick to bring this Truth to our minds when our circumstances tempt us to despair. We love You.

In Christ’s name,  
Amen.

Thomas & Jordan Orr

**“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive Mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” - Hebrews 4:15-16**

Have you ever felt as if you cannot overcome the sin that grips you? I know I have. So often I get bogged down in temptation, anxiety, worry, and even hopelessness. Life is not easy. Life is actually the opposite; we live in a fallen world.

I try to remind myself of these verses every day. They remind me that I am not alone. I have a Father who loves me and has felt the feelings that plague my soul but conquered them over and over again.

My favorite part of these verses comes in verse 16. The author does not say that we may simply draw near to the throne of grace. The author shows that we can do so with confidence. We may draw near knowing that we will receive mercy from a Father who sees us as blameless.

We have a high priest who longs to help his people.

I hope we can all be encouraged by the hope we have, even in the midst of suffering and strife.

Father,  
Give us strength to stand rooted in the Gospel against the temptations and struggles this sinful world brings daily. Remind us of your grace and mercy. Allow us to be filled with the Holy Spirit who gives us confidence to approach You, our loving Father, whenever we need. Remind us of the Gospel. Remind us that we are forgiven in You. We are no longer slaves to the sin that once gripped our soul. We have been made new. Let us put on the new self and flee from sin, so that we may enjoy You more and more each day.

Frank Manning

**“Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:**

**“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.” - Isaiah 43:16-21**

The Israelites were searching for a way, looking at everything that happened to them and the circumstances that they encountered and struggled to keep their eyes focused on what God was doing. But God was making a way. A different way than they expected, but he was giving them all they needed to fulfill His sovereign plan for their lives.

We, just like them, struggle when the temperature of life is hot and when change is pounding down our backs. We must fixate our eyes on Jesus. God’s provision for us is sufficient to see us through whatever mountain seems too high to climb, storm too scary to rest in and sea too big to swim.

God is with us. When we forget to look for Him and when we struggle to listen, God is so graciously present with us in every situation.

Lord today as I walk in obedience to faithfully live today to serve you and to grow your kingdom on earth, would you give me eyes to see and ears to hear you. Would you help me to see and to believe that you are making a way, sometimes a different way than I would expect. Help me to trust that your plans are more complete than mine, that you alone are the God who will bring more joy and rest to my soul than anything else on this earth. Today may I walk in obedience and faithfulness.

To God be the Glory.

Cooper Evans

**“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” – Psalm 103:1,2**

Benefits are huge! Many times they are more important than one’s base salary. What if one could get an employer paid health insurance plan that covered medical, dental, vision, drug costs and you could keep your own doctor and healthcare facilities? And what about no co-pays? Then add in employer paid 401-k, life insurance, stock options, housing allowance, company car and the list could go on and on!

But these are all temporary! The Psalmist is talking about ETERNAL benefits! Surely the forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life should cause our souls to “Bless the LORD!” In this psalm, David goes on to remind himself and us of what the LORD has done for us. In this beautiful psalm our very short lives, ‘we are but dust’, are contrasted with the everlasting mercy of the LORD. His throne is in the heavens and his kingdom ruleth over all.

Dear reader, you should read the entire psalm. It is loaded with benefits!

Dear Heavenly Father,  
We bless You with all of our soul. We thank You that your mercies are new every morning. We praise You that we are not strangers or guests at your throne of grace but children of the Heavenly Father! Thank you for shining your face on us and blessing us. Help us to walk in your light today as we seek to be your humble servants.

Eddie Johnston, MD

**“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” - Joshua 1:9**

This powerful verse has led our family for many years. It is displayed in our home and our children have committed it to memory. The context of this verse from Joshua comes during the time after Moses' death, when the Lord was commissioning Joshua to lead his people into the land he promised them. This was no simple task. Joshua, the Lord's newly commissioned leader, would likely have had his doubts, as we know that before him was the task of taking possession of Jericho as well as many other battles in order to possess this land the Lord promised. Knowing what was before him, the Lord gave instructions to Joshua multiple times to “be strong and courageous, do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed” because the Lord knew how tough the road was ahead. To Joshua, the command to not be afraid may have felt like an empty command, but the Lord did not stop there, as he assured Joshua that he would be with him wherever he goes. Can you feel the difference in the weight that command carries with the Lord's full presence behind it? Does the fact that the King of Kings himself is always with you give you assurance and confidence to face every situation and every day?

By displaying this verse in our home, we hope that our kids will be reminded of the Lord's presence with them and that they will feel the weight of that truth. This promise gives us confidence and assurance that the God of the universe, who created us fully and knows us, does not leave us alone. He is with us wherever we go! How do you feel knowing that the God who spoke these truths so long ago to Joshua is the same God who is present and speaking them over you today? Taylor and I currently teach 2nd grade Sunday School, and we recently posed that question to our class. One of the young girls simply replied, “it makes me feel home.” What a perfect description for the presence of God... it is HOME! I hope you will read this verse and face the unknown of today knowing that the God of the universe is with you, I hope you feel his presence in all circumstances, and I pray this truth gives you assurance that you are his and that you are loved!

Lord,

Would you give us an overflowing understanding of your constant presence. Give us confidence to speak with you incessantly. Calm those who feel anxious. Comfort those who are mourning. Be present with those who are lonely. Give assurance to those who have doubt. We know, Lord, that your presence comforts each of us in the exact moment we need it. We are thankful that you give us your presence which gives us more and more confidence to follow your command to “be strong and courageous.” Lord, help us as we face each new day to seek you and welcome your presence among us.

In Jesus's name, Amen.

Harris York

**“Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.” – Psalm 91:14-16**

One Sunday afternoon after church in 2017, Jim decided to drive me to dance practice in Atlanta because he wanted to drop me off and go help our son, who lived in Marietta, set up his new TV. We were cruising down I-75 in my Prius. Jim was driving and I was reading. We were in the middle lane. A 38 foot RV was next to us in the fast lane. He decided to move to the middle lane. He did not see us at all and the front of his RV hit the drivers door and plunged us in front of him so that he t-boned our car. We started spinning around in the middle of I-75, with cars and huge trucks passing us on both sides. I had no idea what was happening to us. I just remember screaming to the top of my lungs, "God save us, God save us, God save us!"

After spinning around 5 times, I truly believe that God, Himself, came down and moved us over into the median. Only by God's grace and His miraculous touch were we protected from all of those other cars and trucks speeding past us while we were spinning around. Even more miraculous, even though our car was totaled and no air bags deployed, neither Jim nor I, nor anyone in the RV had a single scratch or injury. All glory to our awesome and incredible God.

While I was standing outside the car, waiting on the police to come, I recalled Psalm 91. Our God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. He is all powerful. He is a God who keeps His promises. I have 100% faith in His word, His promises, and His power! I am so thankful that God has every hair on my head and every cell of my body in His perfect control.

Awesome and amazing Father God, whose name is hallowed throughout the universe, We praise your name because you take care of us 24 hours a day. You are thinking about every one of your children every second of every day. Help us to always feel your presence and know for certain that you are always with us. Whether everything is going well and you celebrate our successes or whether things are going bad and you carry us through our trials, may we rest assured that you will never, ever forsake us.

We pray in the name of our precious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Mary & Jim Holcomb

**"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7**

**"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8**

As a family that has pondered a 'family mission statement or vision' in the past, but hasn't actually put pen to paper, we wondered what our children would say when asked "Is there a particular verse that comes to mind when you think of our family?" These verses were the answers from our college, high school and middle school age children.

We then asked, 'why' do these verses come to mind. Things like "we know we are not perfect but we all love each other anyway"; "even when we argue, we know that we love each other"; and ultimately "love endures and bears all in the hardships and conflicts along with the times that it is easy to love each other". As parents, we often wonder if our children are really hearing our words, understanding our instruction and/or taking to heart those things that we hold dear.

Our mentors, Paul and Virginia Friesen taught us long before we had children that more is caught and taught. We've often reflected upon this notion and have been immediately reminded to exam our own lives and walk with the Lord.

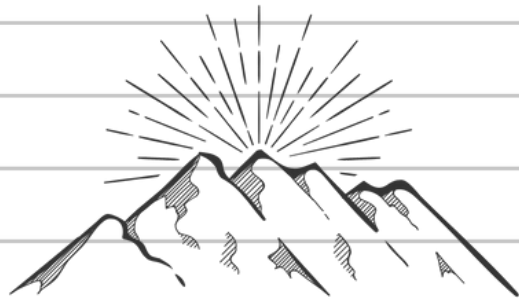
Dear Lord,

Thank you for children that are eager to learn about you. Thank you for the family, friends and mentors that have partnered with us, prayed for us and supported us along the way.

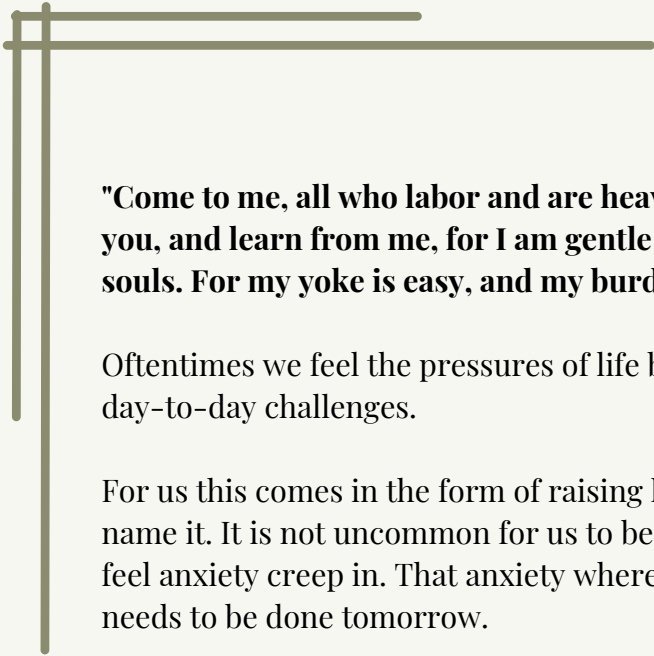
Please guide and direct us as parents to first seek you in our own lives as we attempt to point their hearts towards you. Please give us the open hearts to love unconditionally as our home is a representation of Your love and forgiveness. Thank you for sacrificially giving us Your son, saving us from sin in this fallen world. Amen.

The Kings

# Week 4 Notes & Reflections to Remember:



EXALTING CHRIST  
Advancing the Gospel



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

Oftentimes we feel the pressures of life bearing down. We are easily overwhelmed by life's day-to-day challenges.

For us this comes in the form of raising kids, working hectic jobs, paying expensive bills, you name it. It is not uncommon for us to be lying in bed after a long day and all of a sudden, we feel anxiety creep in. That anxiety where you are already beginning to stress out about what needs to be done tomorrow.

These verses have become a mainstay on our hearts as we wrap up the day. We are reminded that we don't have to carry life's burdens by ourselves. We can trust Jesus when he says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

It's a great picture into the heart and soul of our Lord. One full of compassion, love, and grace.

Father, you are so good. Your love is unending. Your grace and mercy have no bounds. Forgive us for our selfish pride that inhibits us from approaching you with our worries and sin. Forgive us for thinking we can do it all on our own. Help our stubborn hearts to trust you and take you at your word when you say, "Come to me." Do not let ourselves get in the way of how you plan to love and provide for us today. Help us to rest deeply in who you are.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

Caleb & Natalie Babington

**“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” – Romans 8:28**

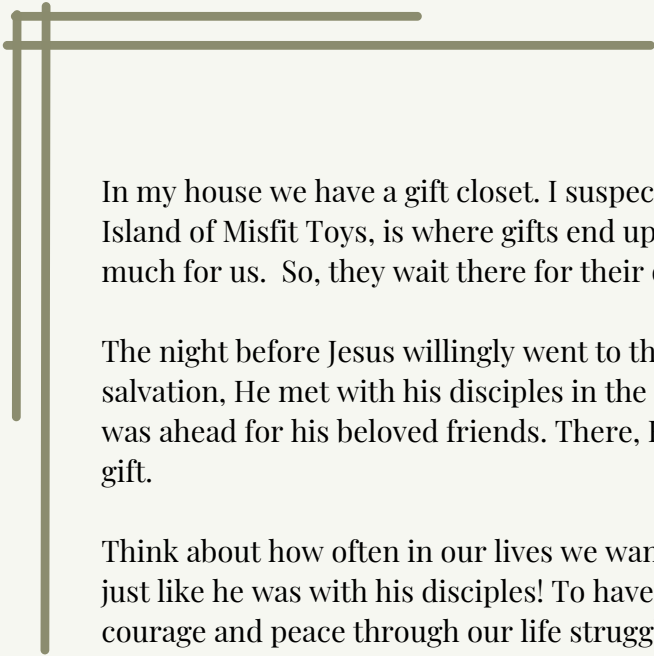
Sometimes living in this world can be out of control or things we do not expect go wrong. The thing I like about this verse is that I know that no matter what happens “God’s got this”.

This verse has proven true in my own life when I accidentally do something wrong or somebody else does in a school project or performance. One example of this is when I was doing a play for school. I was supposed to make an entrance by running into the play. Someone put their bag in the wrong place, so I slipped and fell and brought the curtain down. Afterward I could see how God was working with it being a comedy play, and it just made the whole play funnier.

This shows that even when things we do not expect to go wrong go wrong, God has it under control.

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for this day and that you love us so much that even if everything is going wrong or differently than we expect, you give us the assurance that you planned it out for our good and your glory.  
Amen.

Jude Osben, 13



In my house we have a gift closet. I suspect you might have one, too. Here, just like Rudolph's Island of Misfit Toys, is where gifts end up that are very likely perfect for someone else but not so much for us. So, they wait there for their opportunity to find their new home!

The night before Jesus willingly went to the cross to give us the first part of His perfect gift to us, salvation, He met with his disciples in the upper room. Just like in our own lives, Jesus knew what was ahead for his beloved friends. There, He lovingly promised them, and us, another very special gift.

Think about how often in our lives we want so badly for Jesus to be physical right here with us—just like he was with his disciples! To have Him with us to give us counsel, comfort, understanding, courage and peace through our life struggles and hardships would be indescribable. I admit, I often envy the disciples and their special relationship with Him but imagine how they must have felt when Jesus spoke these words to them:

**"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you." – John 16:7**

**"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." – John 14:15-17**

Something more advantageous than Jesus himself? Not only is Jesus the perfect gift given to us, but Jesus is also the perfect gift giver to us. He has given us the Holy Spirit so that we can do even greater things (John 14:12). When I take the time to examine my life and my heart, I very often find those things that I want to change. When I'm really honest, I know that there are things that need to be changed but I can't see them or worse yet, I've hidden them away. This is where Jesus's second part of His perfect gift comes in— the Holy Spirit is the power we have to become more Christ like, to more faithfully follow his commandments, and to witness more boldly proclaiming the glory of our loving Father.

Dear Father

I thank you for being the perfect gift and the perfect gift giver. I know that whatever I am to become is through the work of your Holy Spirit. I pray that I understand more how to use your gift to do Your amazing work and to witness your gift of salvation for those who would put their faith in you. I pray that I use the Holy Spirit to keep your commandments and I pray that I don't hide your special work in me— no matter how messy or unattractive my story might be— in the gift closet. Let me show the world your love!

Amen

John Pittman

**“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” – Philippians 1:6**

There is much to say about this verse and how it has provided me with great encouragement, time and time again:

A defining characteristic of the Christian’s life is holiness. God commands holiness from his people (Leviticus 11:44). Peter confirms this charge by instructing Believers of the early Church to “be holy in all of [their] conduct.” (I Peter 1:15-16).

My problem is that oftentimes my conduct is not that holy. Actually, when I consider the true nature of that command, I am convinced that my very best behavior never reaches that mark. And it is at the times when I am most acutely aware of this problem that this verse provides the greatest encouragement.

This verse reminds me that even though my holiest conduct falls woefully short of the Father’s commands, He has saved me, He will complete His “good work” of salvation and sanctification in me, and He will preserve me until Christ’s return. This gives me great encouragement as I seek to obey, albeit imperfectly, God’s commands.

Dear Father,

We often speak, think, and act in ways that fall short of what you require. However, in your grace and mercy you have promised that you will finish the good work of salvation and sanctification that you began in us. May we joy in and trust in your precious promise that you will preserve your people. May it prompt in us the confidence to strive to obey your commands.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray,  
Amen.

Joshua Jones

**"Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God concerning you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

In her book "The Hiding Place", Corrie ten Boom relates an incident from her Nazi prison experiences that brought these admonitions to life for me. When Corrie and her sister, Betsy, entered the women's death camp of Ravensbruck, they smuggled in fragments of Scripture, one passage being the end of 1 Thessalonians 5.

That first night, as they prayed together after reading these verses in a grossly overcrowded, flea infested barracks, Betsy thanked God for the fleas. Corrie was horrified! "I am not thanking God for fleas!" Time wore on.

Betsy's health declined so she was reassigned to the knitting brigade from the potato fields. Betsy excelled as a knitter, finishing her quota quickly. There, in the flea infested barracks, she moved freely among the knitters, sharing the gospel and praying with women. Within the barracks they had unexplained freedom. One evening Betsy met Corrie at the barracks door with a triumphant smile. She had discovered the source of the mysterious freedom. The guards feared the fleas!

Give thanks in all things. Pray without ceasing. Our loving Abba takes care of the rest.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Please forgive me for my often ungrateful heart for blessings and a too often murmuring spirit. Grant me the grace to give thanks in all circumstances, to ever trust Your all wise Providence and to have a quiet and settled mind in difficulty.

For the Lord Jesus sake,  
Amen.

NancyBess Johnston

**"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation." - Psalm 91:14-16**

The last few versus of Psalm 91 are life saving, so powerful, a go-to for those who call upon His name in times of trouble, fear, and persecution BUT God himself is the one that answers. Scholars believe Moses wrote Psalm 91 and David compiled it in his book of Psalms. Reliving one dark day in my life, I knew at the time the enemy was out to destroy and take my life. Psalm 91 changed my life forever. Still today an instant feeling of hope, life and victory fills my heart when I read or pray these powerful versus.

This is my story – while serving in the South African military in November of 1987, I was standing outside between bomb-shot buildings in enemy territory, chatting with friends. The next moment I was off my feet, flying in the air and I came down flat on my back. I realized I had been hit by a bomb flying from an enemy jet.

In an instant death was staring me in the eyes. Fear overwhelmed me – I felt as if I was being pulled down to death and I knew I had to call out to my savior before it was too late. My buddies came to pray for me and read me my last rights, thinking it was time to say good bye to me. I did not want to die and I called upon His name over and over: "Lord, please don't let me die, forgive my sins, Lord. Please give me a second chance"... over and over and over. I never cried or screamed, my voice was calm but inside I was filled with fear but my Savior listened, He answered me by coming to my rescue and delivered me from trouble.

Despite my confused, shocked state I asked the chaplain to read the last few versus of Psalm 91 to me. Months later he met me again and told me that I had requested this very specific verse and how it impacted his life and encouraged him. We saw it as evidence that our living God was with me and answered my call in a time of trouble. I should have died that day but He blessed me with a long life. I have not been in a life or death situation since then but even in little troubles, this verse continues to comfort me and I hope it will comfort you too.

#### Prayer

Lord, thank you that you are our living God and you have given us your living word to speak to us in whatever situation we find ourselves in. Thank you that you are with us. Amen.

Krige Schabort



**“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with THANKSGIVING, let your requests be made known to God;” – Philippians 4:6-7**

**“Giving THANKS always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” – Ephesians 5:20**

History has recorded that the great General Stonewall Jackson did not take a drink of fresh water without offering thanks to the Lord. King David reminds us that our blessings from the Lord are too numerous to count (Ps 40). Our King’s provision is perfect. As we go through our days with each one of its many activities, may we remember that every single circumstance comes from our Sovereign King, Who is to be praised for its provision . . . His perfect provision in every thing.

Not only is there a sweet peace in our humble gratification, but also our constant thankfulness leads us to unceasing prayer in this continual offering of gratitude to our Lord in all matters. There is not a single element of our lives that does not deserve His praise . . . each step, each breath, each hope, each word that He enables us to have, our families, the beautiful elements of our world – there is no end to His unremitting goodness to us. God’s provision is perfect.

Even through and in spite of the serious troubles and meanness of our current times, we do praise and thank the God of all creation and right purposes, for His provision is perfect. How blessed we are to know our sacred Maker personally through our Lord Jesus Christ to Whom, without ceasing, we offer our sincere and heartfelt thankfulness.

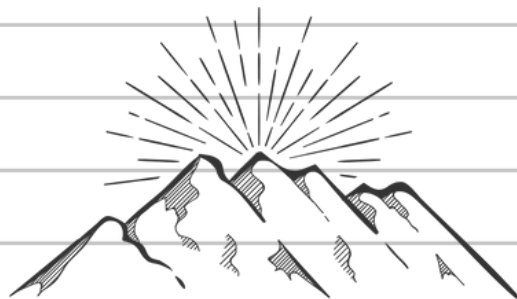
Holy Lord God Almighty,

Turn our hearts to live in gracious gratitude to You. Cause Your Holy spirit to fall on us that we will clearly see and know the glorious benefits of life with Thee. Bring us to thank Thee most heartily and joyously for every gift of goodness beyond measure – even the smallest tokens from Your Right Hand, for Your provision is perfect.

We love you, Jesus.

Kathryn Arp

# Week 5 Notes & Reflections to Remember:



EXALTING CHRIST  
Advancing the Gospel



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

As I was thinking about what to write, I felt as though I needed to write about being at Peace with the Lord. In my life, I have been through many hard trials. One of those is my mom being diagnosed with an incurable cancer.

After her passing, I could not seem to wrap my mind around learning how to be at peace in a time of such hardship. I would try and find my peace in the things of this world instead of finding true peace in the Lord.

The Lord revealed to me what true peace and rest is with him when I started to open up about my struggles. I would write down my prayers to him and pray for peace and rest. This helped me to write down how I was feeling and process my emotions. I found that when I brought my troubles and doubts to the Lord he would give me peace about whatever situation or circumstance I was in.

This later helped me to enter into a new relationship with my step mom and my new brother and sister with a heart of joy and a peace that I was in the family God had planned for me to be a part of.

Peace with the Lord is a peace that nothing in this world can ever give us. It comes from the Lord who made us and knit us together by his hands. When we bring our troubles and worries to Him, he will give us rest and peace that can only be found in him.

Father, help me to bring my troubles and doubts to you alone! Help me to not look at the things of this world, but to you who knows me and can give me true rest.

Lizzy Pardue

**“Make my feet like hinds’ feet, Lord! Let me run on the mountaintops—for you, oh Lord, will make me strong!” – Habakkuk 3:19**

My wife Elizabeth is currently reading a book, *Hinds’ Feet on High Places*, to our girls. It is an allegorical story of how the character, “Much-Afraid,” learns to trust the Great Shepherd. She leaves her relatives who are named Fearing and follows the Shepherd to the High Places “where perfect love gets rid of fear.”

Much-Afraid is riddled with a crippled body, specifically, her feet and mouth. The story goes through the process of Much-Afraid gaining “hinds feet” as she journeys through the Valley, the Desert of Loneliness, Mount Injury, the Canyon of Full Surrender, and finally the High Places. Once she gets to the High Places, she steps into a pool at the bottom of a waterfall and her feet and mouth are made perfect. On the 3rd day, she meets the Great Shepherd on the peak of a mountain. He gives her a new name, “Grace and Glory.” It’s a beautiful story that I would encourage you all to read!

Grace and Glory learned that King Jesus wants each one of us to fully surrender our lives to Him, and to learn to live on top of our mountains and our problems, instead of them being on top of us.

We will go through times of loneliness and sadness and we will have seasons of peace and happiness. Always walk with the Shepherd King. We can trust that He has already created the perfect path. The Shepherd had a plan to make Much-Afraid’s hinds’ feet, to bring her to the High Places, and to crown her with a new name. He also has a plan for your life– a very good plan.

God, You see every attempt we make to try to lay down our desires and to follow you in the ways you have taught us. Every time we do this we learn to trust you a little more. Help us to see things the way You see things. Help us to move away from being Much-Afraid and lean into your Grace and Glory. Amen.

Justin Bruce

**“...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” - James 1:19-20**

Does it not seem that our society and even the whole world has become more angry, and that all of us appear to be faced on a regular basis by confrontation with others. This happens in politics, interpersonal relations, even while driving a car, and more sadly, in our churches and families. Obviously, anger and the confrontation that may follow, is not new to our society, but in our daily lives we seem to be faced with this more and more in our interactions with our friends, our children and their friends, fellow workers, and even strangers.

In the “old days” before electronic communication one method of suppressing our own tendency to fly off the handle or act confrontationally when angered, was to write a letter expressing our anger or frustration. Then we could put the letter in a drawer for several days. Then the writer could remove the letter, review it, and have the option of destroying it before sending it on. This was one way to help us be slow to anger.

Our modern solution seems to be to write the same message with all its anger and rancor, but this time do so on social media, and then push “send.” We no longer see the need to slow our own worst impulses toward anger and creation of discord. Instead our society relishes the ability to say hateful things on social media that they would never dare say face to face. God’s Word gives us, his people, many reasons to reject the spread of discord and encourages us to practice patience and calm. These verses of scripture may help.

**“Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm.” - Psalm 37:8**

**“He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exults folly.” - Proverbs 14:29**

**“A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger.” - Proverbs 15:1**

**“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.” - Colossians 3:15**

Our Father God, You have told us that you hate one who is a false witness and sows discord among your people. (Prov. 6:16-19) And, if we cease to be a gossip, strife will cease (Prov. 26:20.) Help us Lord to avoid the easy and fleeting communication methods provided in this time which only serve to fuel fires of discord. Strengthen our spirit and give us self control and patience. We seek Your peace and comfort; help us to avoid the battles we bring on ourselves when we forget the only true source of peace and security. We ask for the help and guidance of Your Spirit as we deal with worry, sorrow, grief, stress, and conflict in our lives. We understand the world changes for us with regularity, even daily. We seek to remember that you do not ever change. Please fill us with Your comfort. We need you more than ever. Amen

**"For whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh will reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up"**

**-Galatians 6-7-9**

Have you ever attempted to produce cotton from a corn seed, or wheat from a mustard seed? Each seed has its own physical DNA that determines its produce. In the Kingdom of Heaven, each seed has a spiritual DNA. Gentleness is not produced with anger, nor is peace with chaos, faithfulness with doubt, love with hate, or goodness with evil. In the Kingdom of Heaven, the seeds we plant predict the harvest to come. The harvest that God, in his mercy and perfection, cultivates to his glory and our enjoyment. The same harvest that Jesus mentions to his disciples that are ripe and ready to be gathered. (Matthew 9:35-37)

Several truths we know from the scripture above. 1.) If we sow from the flesh we will reap its produce of corruption which leads to death. However, if we sow seeds from the spirit we will reap fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5) rejoicing and relishing in God as the amazing cultivator He is. We not only grow closer to our creator in this process, we are allowed to enjoy and rejoice in the harvest He has produced. 2) It will be work. However we are encouraged to not grow weary in the working of these spiritual fields. The God of Heaven where we are planting our seeds, is also the "The Lord of the Harvest" (Matthew 9:38) who is in charge of cultivating his kingdom. Have faith in the Lord of the Harvest to take your seeds however few or seemingly insignificant, and produce a plentiful harvest.

We all sow seeds of something every day. By our nature we either sow seeds of the flesh or seeds of the spirit. What seeds are we planting today? Are we looking at the spiritual fields of our marriage, children, vocation, finances and relationships within the body of Christ asking God what seeds HE would like to be harvested in the coming season? How would God have us steward those fields?

Father,

Thank you for the many blessings you have provided us from your faithful and generous character. As we look at the fields of our life, give us wisdom today on how to steward them according to your glory. Let us know what seeds to plant and where to plant them, that your harvest may be plentiful in the coming season. May we rejoice today in the Lord of the Harvest and may we be prepared to plant and harvest as you direct us. Amen.

David Baker

**“...He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.” - Psalm 23:3**

August, 1966. I was just completing my graduate study in audiology with no job in sight. An unexpected call came to my professor looking for an audiology research assistant. After a phone interview, I was on the way to Colorado State University. Fate intervened?

June, 1967. A student was lamenting the fact that he could not take a job in Louisiana. With his permission, I interviewed and accepted an instructor/supervisory position for audiology students at the University of Southwest LA. Fate again?

May, 1970. A cold call to my office asked if I was interested in a Director/Audiology position in Rome, GA. I accepted and moved to Rome. Fate persists?

Finally, 1971, I had a chance encounter with an ear specialist who wanted an audiologist as part of his clinic. I accepted and began my private practice for the next 36 years.

During a very extensive bible study, I discovered , Not Fate, but God through the Holy Spirit was in control of my life’s journey. A few of the following scriptures reveal his plan for everyone who trusts and believes in him:

**Jeremiah 29:11 - “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, for welfare and not evil, to give you a future and a hope.”**

**Matthew 28:20 - “And surely I am always with you to the very end of the age.”**

**Hebrews 13:5 - “,,never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”**

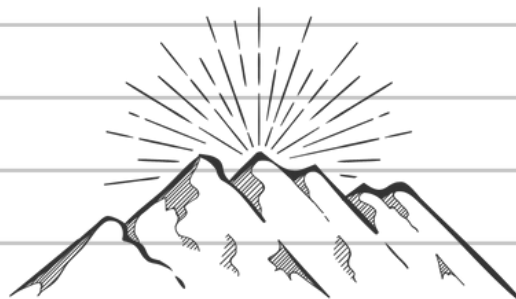
**Philippians 2:13 - “...for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”**

My prayer for us all comes from 2 Thessalonians 3:16; “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!” Amen.

P.S. WWJD—Walk With Jesus Daily. He will be with you forever.

Steve Fellows

# Week 6 Notes & Reflections to Remember:



EXALTING CHRIST  
Advancing the Gospel



First Presbyterian

— R O M E —