

2023 FAMILY DEVOTIONAL  
VOLUME 11

*Abounding  
in  
Hope*



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## FROM BISHOP A. THOMAS SENIOR PASTOR

**T**he most important part of a believer's life is the part that only God sees, the "hidden life" of communion and worship that is symbolized by the Holy of Holies in the Jewish sanctuary (Exodus 25:18-22). The safest place in the world is in the shadow of the Almighty, as declared in Psalm 91. Through Jesus Christ we find safety and satisfaction under the wings of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. Jesus pictured salvation by describing chicks hiding under the wings of the mother hen (Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34), and the psalmist in Psalm 91 pictured communion as believers resting under the wings of the cherubim in the tabernacle. Further in the Psalm some names of God are listed to encourage us to trust in Him. He is the Most High (Elyon; vv. 1, 9), a name found first in Genesis 14:18-20. He is higher than the kings of the earth and the false gods of the nations. He is also the Almighty (Shaddai), the all-sufficient God who is adequate for every situation (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11). He is LORD (vv. 2, 9, 14). He is Jehovah, the covenant-making God who is faithful to His promises. He is **God** (Elohim, v. 2), the powerful God whose greatness and glory surpass anything we can imagine.

This is the God who invites us to fellowship with Him in the Holy of Holies! This hidden life of worship and communion makes possible the public life of obedience and service. This God shelters us beneath the wings of the cherubim, but He also gives us the spiritual armor we need as described in Ephesians 6:10-18, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having*

*on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”*

The protection of God is guaranteed. He promises to never leave or forsake us. He is the Almighty Watchman, a sleepless Guardian. Psalm 121:4-8 declares, “*Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.*”

He is a faithful Friend. Nothing can happen without His direction, for even hell itself is under His control. Darkness is not dark to Him. He has promised to be a wall of fire around His people—and who can break through such a barrier? Others may well be afraid, for they have an angry God above them, a guilty conscience within them, and a yawning hell beneath them; but we who rest in Jesus are safe from all these through the rich mercies and promises of God.

If we give way to foolish fear we shall dishonor our profession, and lead others to doubt the reality of godliness. We ought to be afraid of being afraid, lest we should vex the Holy Spirit by foolish distrust or make the Word of God null and void. So, we rebuke all morbid fearful and groundless apprehensions. God has not forgotten to be gracious, nor shut up His tender mercies. It may be night in your soul, but there need be no terror, for the God of Hope changes not.

As is customary, at the beginning of each calendar year, the Oneness Re-hoboth Apostolic Church engages in 31 days of prayer and fasting. In this environment we create the opportunity for our church family and the community at large to pray in an effort to gain strength and courage for the challenges ahead. We invite you to join us and trust that you will make full use of this great privilege. It’s time to pray.

## SAFE AND SECURE

*“I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: My God; in him will I trust.” (Psalm 91:2)*

If you are alive today, you need no convincing that we are living in troublesome times. Inflation, wars, political and social acrimony, a steep moral declension, and a general anti-Christ climate are enough to shake the foundations of the believer’s faith. It seems that there is little hope of things getting better. In fact, to the watchful, the occurrences in our day seem to foretell of a time in the not-too-distant future, where the cost of being a Christian will be very great indeed. Distracted by the drama of it all, we can start to feel vulnerable and insecure, filled with doubts and anxieties about the future. We sometimes even question our salvation.

Though disheartening, we need not despair; Jesus has left us many promises in His Word to strengthen our faith. He promised to be with us all the way to the end (Matt. 28:20). He leaves His perfect peace with us so that our hearts will not be troubled, and we will not be afraid (John 14:27). And again, He has assured us that we who have been given eternal life are secure in His hands. No person or circumstance can remove us from the safety of His grasp (John 10:28). When adversity strikes, we can be confident that God is our unassailable refuge. God has protected us in the past, He is protecting us now, and He will continue to protect us.

For the child of God, the future is secure because God safeguards His people. This is a timely and comforting reminder for believers today. When we trust God, He fortifies our faith so that it can withstand all of life's trials, regardless of their severity. Tragedy, turmoil, confusion, cruelty, and disaster are standard features of our world today. But rest of soul, quietness of heart, security and comfort belong to those who flee in faith to Christ for refuge. In the words of Charles H. Spurgeon, *“When you go through a trial, the sovereignty of God is the pillow upon which you lay your head.”* Amen.

## OUR “ABBA FATHER”

*“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15)*

**H**uman beings seem to have a deep longing to be embraced and find full and complete acceptance. The many esteem issues we face can often be traced to some moment of rejection, loneliness, or demeaning remark from someone influential in our lives. The yearning for this kind of affirmation, though noble, has led many to search for it in all the wrong places. Our broken world today stands as a witness to the misfortunes and futility of this misguided approach. We can, however, locate good and spiritually healthy sources of genuine acceptance, the foremost of which is within our relationship with our heavenly Father. His love for you does not depend upon your achievements or your striving to merit it. His love never changes and His acceptance never ends.

When we were saved, we were freed from the slavery to sin, death, and dread. We were at once relocated to God's Kingdom of real freedom, life, and faith. The moment we were born again, the spirit of slavery that gripped and deceived us with unbelief, shame, and fear is replaced by the permanently indwelling Spirit of God. If we then continue to live in fear, it is because we fail to claim what is ours by grace through faith and have not fully embraced that God is now *for* us. We are adopted into His family. What a glorious thought!

The Spirit of adoption is the Holy Spirit that was given to us by God as a down payment and guarantee that we are His and now have access to His many precious and unchanging promises. We have the awesome privilege, as adopted children to cry out - like His only begotten Son, Jesus – “Abba Father” (Mark 14:36). How can this be? The Apostle Paul takes the intimate words of Jesus and places them in our mouths! We need not approach God as servile, trembling slaves, but with the feelings of love

and acceptance which pertains to children. We can flee to the arms of our eternal father, as a little child exclaiming “*Daddy!*” We had no natural claim to Him; the act of adoption is one of mere kindness and pure sovereign love. Yet, we are fully His children, under His protection and care.

As events unfold globally and personally, it is easy to lose sight of this precious assurance and be tempted to despair and become fearful. But our Lord, who knows the end from the beginning, is in full control and has us safely in His hands. The person who has truly been filled with the Spirit of adoption will not fall away when suffering comes, but rather, like Jesus in Gethsemane, will look full in His wonderful face and cry out in full assurance, “*Abba, Father!*”

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2023

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## JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST

*“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ...” (Romans 8:17)*

**G**od adopting us as His children is really a marvelous truth for many reasons, including the fact that we are now joint heirs with Christ. The Apostle Paul informs us that “*Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*” (Galatians 4:7). It is by union with Christ Jesus, that we who believe on His name become children of God, and in that capacity, the possessors of the birthright. We are now Jesus’ siblings (Hebrews 2:11), and like Him, we have a right to God’s inheritance.

Historically, earthly inheritance is usually reserved for the firstborn, while the others, though equally children, went without. We recall how Isaac inadvertently gave all the birthright to Jacob, and had none left for Esau, the intended recipient. But it is not so in the family of God; all God’s children are heirs, however numerous the family. We are all the heirs of God

and joint heirs with Christ, entitled to God's inheritance by grace.

This is great news for us! But one may ask, what is it that we are actually inheriting? There is a portion of the inheritance available for believers today, which our heavenly Father expects us to immediately take hold of, and benefit from. The Apostle Peter informs us that God's *"divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature..."* (II Peter 1:3-4). We are partakers of God's nature, and we should allow that life of God to be evident in us on this earth.

The Scriptures reveal to us that we are recipients of a far greater inheritance. It is an eternal inheritance. We are assured that we have an inheritance *"incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (1 Peter 1:3-5). There is an inheritance waiting for us in eternity full of many splendors. Although we have been privy to some revelation of our heavenly inheritance - ultimate salvation, the Kingdom of God, glory, honor and crowns in heaven - we don't know all that it entails, for *"eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."* (I Corinthians 2:9). It will be an inheritance far grander than we could possibly imagine.

God has given us children a good heritage. It is a guaranteed possession that no one can take, waste, spend or steal (Matthew 6:19-21). We have an inheritance both now and for the future, neither of which we want to miss out on. While we enjoy all that is available to us now, may we always look forward to our eternal inheritance reserved for us in Heaven.

## LED BY THE SPIRIT

*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Romans 8:14, KJV)*

**T**he Apostle Paul begins the verse with the preposition “for” to explain that those of us who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. In other words, the evidence that we are true children of God is confirmed by the Spirit leading us. To be led here denotes being guided or persuaded to move not by an intrinsic force, but rather, the leading is as a result of a power or force extrinsic to us. This is the Holy Spirit. To be led also denotes that there needs to be a willingness to follow which is our responsibility as true sons of God. Remembering that the Spirit has the personality of our Father in this context, if we are His sons, we will demonstrate the traits and values of our Father when we are being led by Him. This is a true evidence of sonship.

One of the traits of our Father is, He hates sin and subsequently as His children we must also hate sin. In Romans 8:13, Paul exhorts us to kill sin and the flesh so that we may live. We do this by being led by the supernatural power of the Spirit who is our Father and who would only lead us in the paths of life in love as His children (Psalm 16:11). Those who are Spirit led are those who have the Spirit indwelling as sons of God in order to put to death the deeds of the body which is sin.

We must remember that the Spirit is gentle and sensitive, not forceful or compelling, therefore, He can be grieved. Being mindful of this, we need to remain willing to be led by the Spirit and maintain a Christ-like attitude as we seek to do His will prayerfully. He gently persuades us, giving us the desire, not driven by fear but motivated by His fatherly love for us as His children.

Being Spirit-led is a continual progressive process which takes us from the initial stage of justification to sanctification setting us apart to be used in our Father’s Kingdom and His ultimate glory. Our salvation is totally

dependent upon this process therefore we must remain prayerfully submissive to the leading of the Spirit.

Does being Spirit-led mean we live a perfect life void of problems? Definitely not! We still live in the same world, with its evils, disasters, pressures and fears, and of course, Satan who continues to test us. The difference is, we now know who we are and whose we are, that is, children of God who are being led by their Father. We are living in the old creation but we are part of the new because we have the Holy Spirit within our old sinful nature, which propels us to constantly groan in prayer that the will of our Father be done here on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6, 2023

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## THE DOWN PAYMENT

*“Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” (2 Corinthians 1:22, KJV)*

**L**ife in the Lord Jesus Christ is one of assurance and stability because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is not only a seal on believers that they belong to God and their salvation has eternal security, but the Holy Spirit is also the promise and the guarantee of our eternal inheritance. According to our focus Scripture, we can understand that *“the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”* is the first installment or down payment, guaranteeing everything the Lord Jesus Christ has promised us, including future glorification and resurrection power for eternal life. The seal also denotes authenticity and approval (Revelations 7:3) as participants of the eternal harvest.

A closer look at the text reveals that the guarantor of the promise, and the promise are one and the same. This means, we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and that Jesus Christ Himself has come to dwell within us.

This process begins after we hear the Word of truth of the gospel of salvation and by grace through faith we trust and believe Him to seal us with His Spirit of promise. In the meantime, we wait for His return when He will redeem us as His bride and purchased possession, (Ephesians 1:13-14). As recipients of His seal and possessors of the “down payment,” we are given an actual promise to validate His unbreakable and indestructible word of promise. The seal serves to endorse His ownership of our lives and gives eligibility for transference into His eternal Kingdom. The immutability and faithfulness of God makes His promise foolproof, giving us confidence even in the face of discouragement and adversity that He will return to complete the transaction, (Philippians 1:6).

Let us pause to take a glimpse of the value or the worth of this down payment. 1 Corinthians 2:9 tells us, *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared...”* for His purchased possession. We presently enjoy and can testify of the manifold gifts and fruit of the Spirit but we expectantly wait for all the promises of greater gifts to come including the gift of everlasting life. His seal upon us has transformed us to His likeness. We belong to Him and He belongs to us, we are in Him and He is in us, and He has chosen us to be His bride. The seal, which is the earnest or the down payment, in as much as itself is part of the whole, is as a piece of the inheritance. We therefore wait for the completion, all the fullness, the final payment, the inheritance, the bridegroom and future glorification.

In the natural world, if a receipt as a first payment confirming a bargain price is lost, there is no guarantee of the bargain price therefore the receipt is kept securely. How are we securing the seal or the down payment within us? We must be brought under the renewing and transforming influences of His indwelling Spirit prayerfully so that we are made meek and humble. He has given His grace and a wonderful display of His love for which we should be abundantly thankful and reproduce. We must pray for wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the Spirit to enlighten our darkness, to bind our hearts to Him, to quicken and energize our souls to do His will and to make the weakest among us strong so that we will be united and on one accord for the outpouring of His Spirit on others. Considering the magnitude of this promise in comparison to our humanity, the Apostle Paul says we groan “earnestly” in the Spirit because He makes intercession on our behalf, (2 Corinthians 5:2).

## A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

*“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1, KJV)*

**H**aving read about the heroes of faith in the preceding chapter of Hebrews, the Apostle Paul now makes an inference of inspiration to our efforts in the race. Here is an allusion to the Olympic Games during which we are encircled by a great number of spectators cheering us on. In this case, these are not just spectators but witnesses, who have borne testimony to the truth of the faith race. When we think of this legacy, we should become greatly inspired to run on, because none of the heroes of faith saw the fulfillment of God’s plan, they only lived in the shadow of it. They exemplified faith as a forward-looking trust in God.

In preparation for the best performance in any race, the athlete must strip himself of any encumbrance or entanglement which can readily hinder his best efforts. He must be determined to get rid of everything that would slow him down (weight) and everything that would hold him tightly (beset). It is recorded of our heroes or witnesses of faith how they achieved a list of victories and amazing feats in the face of difficulty, hardships and suffering. Having this testament, we are encouraged and inspired but we must pray for conviction to embrace the same true godly faith as we face our adversities.

The most appropriate response to this inspiration given us by all the witnesses to godly faith, is to intentionally continue to run the race patiently. We must be intentional because like the heroes, our faith will also be tried with troubles, perplexities, and persecution, but we will not be distressed, in despair, forsaken, cast down or destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). How is this even possible? God’s amazing love for us has enabled us to still hear

and respond to the gospel message of salvation today and is the reason He has waited to fully deliver His ultimate victory over sin and suffering. Our “Cloud of Witnesses” never received the promise nor these “better things” which God provided for us, that they without us should not be made perfect, (Hebrews 11:39-40). We are able to shed our sins and hindrances by the empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit as we strive to continue this race.

Our ultimate witness and example however is Jesus Christ Himself who exemplified how we should live our lives and resisted all the temptations we would ever face. He understood that His suffering was part of the plan “to work together for good” everything for His glory and our benefit. We can be assured that God does not abandon us when we suffer but He at times uses those experiences to “train” us and make us stronger athletes who can persevere and endure despite obstacles. The goal here is to win as our witnesses did. For that reason, we remain prayerfully focused not only on the race but also the prize. Jesus Christ is not only our supreme witness, but He is also the object, originator, source and creator of our faith, life and salvation. He is the perfect one who will perfect us. We began this race with Him in redemption and forgiveness of our sins, we responded in justification by faith. He gave us salvation and freed us from the fear of death and led the way of faith for us to follow. Our transformation allows us to know and worship Him with gratitude and reverence. We enjoy the joys of salvation now and whatever obstacles we face are only temporary and will be greatly overshadowed by our future glorification and reward.

## CHRIST'S INSEPARABLE LOVE

*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35, KJV)*

God’s love for us is unconditional and everlasting. It is extraordinary, stable and continuous. He loves us so much that He willingly died on the cross to restore us unto Himself. Not only did He pay the penalty for our sins, regardless of the nature of the sins that we have committed in the past, present, or will commit in the future, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9, KJV). What an expression of God’s love! He continually seeks ways to restore us to His fold as His outstretched arms await our return to His grace and mercy.

In Jeremiah 31:3, God emphasized the inseparable love that He has for us when He declared, *“I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn thee.”* Scripture repeatedly assures us that God will always love us and that no earthly or spiritual powers can separate us from His love. However, even with all these assurances, we at times find ourselves in life situations which have shaken our confidence in God’s love. These circumstances of life can be seen as enemies who are trying to separate us from God’s love.

In Romans 8:35, the Apostle Paul lists some examples of powerful earthly situations that can threaten our hope in the inseparability of God’s love: troubles, hardships, persecution, famine, nakedness and sword. The list is by no means exhaustive and we all have our personal items that we can add, pointing to situations that can threaten our security in His love. No spiritual powers can separate us from God’s love. When we suffer from these things we may be inclined to think that Christ has abandoned us. No, He has not. The Apostle Paul reminds us that *“In all these things we are more than conquerors...”* (Romans 8:37). He was fully confident of

this reality when he went on to say that neither death, life, angels, principalities, powers, present or future situations, height, depth or any other created thing is able to sever God's love for us (Verses 38-39). We can be certain that the forces of nature, government, spiritual darkness, and hell lack the ability to separate us from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Despite the situations in our lives, it is comforting to know that God's inseparable love to us is unconditional and unchanging. Therefore, we must align our will to His will to maintain an inseparable relationship with Him.

MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 2023

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## NO EXPENSE SPARED

*"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32, NKJV)*

**G**od did not refrain from any cost in giving up Jesus Christ, His own Son for us. Since in doing so, God gave His greatest gift to mankind, He will freely give us everything that we need, (Romans 8:32). How comforting and reassuring to know that God loves and cares for us so much! The great expression of love that is described in the above verse aligns closely with John 3:16 which states, *"For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

God cares enough for you and me that nothing was too costly, or too precious for Him to spare so that we could be redeemed. He did not spare His Son who bore the expenses of our salvation. He did not spare Him from

the misery and affliction derived from living in a sinful world. Though sinless, He suffered as if He was not, taking the penalty for our sins upon Himself. God did not spare Him from persecution, hatred and the cruelty of men. He was despised and rejected by His family and others who were close to Him as well as His own countrymen. God did not spare Him from poverty, though He was rich He became poor for our sake, (2 Corinthians 8:9). God did not spare His Son from the journey to calvary as He endured mockery, insult, ridicule, scorn, physical agony and the full range of human suffering. God did not spare His Son as He hung like a criminal, dying a slow, painful death.

God delivered Him up, holding back nothing for us all, regardless of race, nationality or gender, whether we are rich or poor or the vilest of sinners. He made known His love for us when He died for us while we were in our sinful state (Romans 5:8). Be assured that if God spared no expense to give us His only begotten Son so that our greatest need is met, He will also freely provide for our lesser needs. Whatever your needs are, rest on the promise that your “...*God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 4:19)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2023

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## DO YOU LOVE HIM?

*“But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9, NKJV)*

**W**hen asked the question, “Do you love Jesus?” A common response is a resounding YES! Often, a follow-up question is asked, “Why do you love Him?” A popular answer is, “Because He first loved me.” God has prepared many amazing and wonderful things for those who love Him, things that our minds are too finite to imagine or think and greater than our eyes can see

or ears can hear. Some of these things are not natural or physical and can only be revealed to us through the Holy Spirit who searches the deep and hidden things of God so that we may understand what God has prepared for those who love Him, (1 Cor. 2:1-13). People who do not have the Holy Spirit are unable to understand these truths and therefore perceive them as foolishness, (Verse 14).

In today's world, it can be hard to imagine that better days are ahead. The constant flow of negative news can make it feel as though things are getting worse each day. The Apostle Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians in chapter 2 of his first letter to them reminds us that our true hope for the future is found in something that happened in the past. The event that occurred in the past is echoed in Romans 5:8 (NIV), "But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." When we know what Jesus had done in defeating death, nothing about the future should scare us. We have a blessed hope in Christ and the wonders of our eternal future are hidden in Him.

To realize and participate in the deep and hidden things that God has ordained for us requires us not only to believe in Him but to love Him. To love Him is to devote our entire being: spirit, soul, mind and body to Him so that He becomes everything to us. This causes us to live with boldness and courage as we look forward to enjoying what Jesus has prepared for us. Although we may not fully understand them now, we know that they are better than anything anyone has ever seen or imagined.

As we pray, let us be grateful for the great things God has prepared for us. Be thankful for Jesus who paved the way for us to truly love so that we have a positive future.

## IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS

*“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” When Jesus heard that, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” (John 11:1-4, NKJV)*

**L**azarus your brother is sick and near death. You send a message to Jesus, a dear family friend and miracle worker, to come immediately. Jesus receives the message and seemingly dismisses it by implying it's not that serious. This isn't fatal. Well, apparently Jesus was wrong. Or was He? Lazarus did die. But this circumstance was not mainly about the death of Lazarus. Rather, it was about the glory of God being revealed through Lazarus' death.

How many times have we faced life challenges that seem hopeless and final? However, that outlook is always from our perspective, based only on what we can see, which isn't much compared to what a God who dwells from everlasting to everlasting can see. He is the One who sits on high in the heavens and sees all that is occurring in the earth and has already declared the *“future before it even happens.”* (Isaiah 46:10 NLT)

According to the King James Version of John's Gospel, Jesus said, *“This sickness is not unto death.”* (11:4). Multiple other translations say, *“this sickness will not end in death,”* and it didn't. Lazarus' death was a means to an end. The end is that God would be gloried. Gloried in that verse means praised, extolled, honored. God allows suffering, pain and even death so that He will be gloried, praised and honored. Lazarus' death was a pathway to the glory of God being revealed. God allowed it for a purpose.

Jesus' pending suffering, crucifixion and death was a gateway for Him to

be glorified (John 7:39). We are partakers of His suffering so that His glory may be revealed, (1 Peter 4:13). In other words, through our lives and in our sufferings, He is gloried, praised and honored.

Our personal suffering always has a greater purpose that God will use for His glory. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, it wasn't only Lazarus and his family that benefited. Many of the Jews who saw the miracle came to believe in Jesus (John 11:45). God was gloried. Our sicknesses, issues and disappointments do not have to end in despair, but rather in glory to God and in our lives becoming a living testimony of what God can do for and through an individual.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12, 2023

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## FOR OUR GOOD

*“But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 45:5-8, NKJV)*

**G**od's focus is often on the futuristic big picture. Our attention is often concentrated on the present, focusing on what is to God a minor detail and a means to an end. In Isaiah 46:10 (KJV), God says, *“I am God, . . . declaring the end from the beginning.”* The NLT version says, *“Only I can tell you the future before it even happens.”*

God's futuristic big picture of declaring the end from or at the beginning

rarely includes a declaration of the middle. In Genesis, chapters 37; 39–50, we meet Joseph, a young man who had two prophetic dreams that suggested his brothers and parents would bow to him and that he would, as one of his brothers stated, “reign over” them. It’s clear from the text that Joseph and his brothers were certain these prophetic dreams would come to pass. Joseph was already exhibiting leadership over his ten older brothers and they resented it and him.

However, what Joseph’s dreams did not reveal was the process that would lead to the realization of those dreams. It was a process that started with the crushing betrayal by his brothers. They would later refer to their betrayal as resulting in the *“anguish of [Joseph’s] soul”* (Genesis 42:21 KJV). Joseph went from being the favorite son to being sold into slavery in a foreign country. While there, he was wrongly accused of attempted rape and was imprisoned. The span between the end and the beginning for Joseph was thirteen years that were filled with betrayal, pain, isolation and false imprisonment. But the Lord was with Joseph and made him to prosper during the most difficult period of his life, (Genesis 39:2).

With all the struggles, Genesis 42:9 suggests that Joseph had forgotten about the dreams of elevation. For thirteen years he was in survival mode; at one point he tried to orchestrate an early release from prison, (Genesis 40:14). Joseph was focused on his immediate present, which God was using for his good.

Two years after he tried to gain his freedom, the change in his circumstances came. God gave Pharaoh two dreams that would facilitate Joseph’s elevation. Overnight, Joseph, in effect, went from a prison inmate to the second in command in Pharaoh’s regime. In each step of the way over the thirteen-year process, God used difficulties to position him to accomplish the end that God had declared in the beginning. Joseph eventually came to realize this and told his brothers who had betrayed him, *“you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.”* (Genesis 50:20, NKJV)

The night seasons can be very dark but God has already made a declaration concerning the end, and the end is not only for your good but also for the good of others and the Kingdom of God. In the difficult times take refuge in knowing that there must be a greater good that God will accomplish, not in spite of the struggles but because of what you’ve been through. God is strengthening your resolve and building your character to prepare you for what He has already prepared for you.

## IT'S ALL IN KNOWING

*“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”* (Colossians 1:9, KJV)

**K**nowledge is power.” A statement accredited to Francis Bacon from his 1597 publication, *Meditationes Sacrae*. Knowledge is power! The book of Proverbs underscores this in chapter after chapter, verse after verse with admonitions and reminders such as: *“For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”* (Proverbs 2:6, NKJV). *“Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold.”* (Proverbs 8:10, NKJV). *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* (Proverbs 9:10, NKJV)

When the enemy attacks your faith he often does so by attacking your knowledge of God, your knowledge of the Scriptures and, more poignantly, your knowledge of God’s prophetic Word spoken directly to you. The circumstances of life will unfold in ways that are contrary to what you have heard from the Lord and read in His Word. But it is in knowing these words that we will be able to persevere and live according to God’s will. The writer of Psalm 119:11 (NKJV) says, *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”*

There’s often a disconnect between what God said and what we’re experiencing. In Genesis, Joseph had prophetic dreams that spoke of promotion and headship. Instead, over the course of thirteen years, he experienced bruising betrayal by his brothers, was sold into slavery and imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit—the seeming opposite of what God had said. However, during those times of contradiction we must hold on to the knowledge of what the Lord said. Paul prayed that the believers in Colossae would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will. The knowledge of

God's will is equivalent to a bullet proof vest. The bullets will come but knowing God's will through His Word can cause them to deflect.

Knowledge of God's will through His Word will not only insulate you when the enemy attacks, but it also becomes a weapon with which you can fight against the enemy. Paul told Timothy to remember the prophetic words that he received and to use them to war against the enemy and remain firm in the faith. It is the *rhema*, the revealed word or the prophetic word, that is the sword of the Spirit spoken of in Ephesians 6:17. God's Word is both offensive and defensive.

Hide God's word in your heart. Rehearse His promises. God is not a man that He should lie, and He will not go back on His promises to you. Regardless of how dark the night gets and contradictory the circumstances, fight back with knowledge by remembering what God told you. He did not change His mind.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2023

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## SUFFERING WAS PROMISED

*"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

**T**oday's devotional is a sobering reality check as we examine our faith walk. The thought of suffering is not a thrilling idea but it's an inescapable truth. In our daily lives we intentionally do things to avoid pain and loss. For example, we wear a seat belt while driving, eat the right foods to stay healthy, pull an all-nighter to prepare for an exam, or keep a rainy-day fund for uncertainties in order to maintain or extend our comfort. Even with our best efforts, however, we experience discomfort or loss of some sort. That's just life.

Looking at our lives as Christians, we have it twofold. We must manage the everyday stresses of life, as well as respond to the suffering we experi-

ence for being righteous. It should be of no surprise that suffering is intricately woven in our lives as we live for Jesus. 1 Peter 4:12, 14 (NIV) tells us, *“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you... If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”* In other words, suffering was promised to us. Show me someone who professes Jesus but experiences no opposition and I will show you someone who may not be living for Jesus at all! Mainstream culture has always been opposed to the requirements for Christian living, and our current culture promotes and encourages open disdain for Jesus and anyone who attempts to pattern their lives after Him. So, whether you are a CEO, parent, student, teacher, engineer, doctor, truck driver (add your occupation or status) you will be hated by the world just because you love and live for Jesus. In John 15:18 (NIV) Jesus said, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.”*

It is possible to experience suffering if you are a *“murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.”* (1 Peter 4:15, NIV). There are consequences for being evil; there are consequences for being lazy; there are consequences for being unjust. Let us also remember that a murderer may not always use physical force; the tongue can be a lethal weapon. God promises that the one who suffers for righteousness is blessed! This sounds counterintuitive to our finite minds, but because Jesus said it, that means it is true and we ought to rejoice in that fact.

The takeaway from today’s devotional is that we should wear our Christian suffering as a badge of honor. If we suffer for the cause of Christ, it means we are doing something right. Even through our tears we keep going because we know God is working it all out for our good and His Glory. We know He loves us and hears our cry. As we pray today, let us examine the cause for our sufferings. If you have not yet suffered for righteousness’ sake, sooner or later you will.

## PERSUADED

*“...For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 21:13)*

**O**ur pathways in this life are designed by the Almighty God and although we have the power of choice, Job declared that the omniscient God knows where he is going and when He tests him, he will come out as pure as gold, (Job 23:10, NIV). Therefore, our future state is better than our present state. Jeremiah 29:11 (KJV) states, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”*

We have a glorious hope in God that nothing in this world can destroy or take away. Although the Apostle Paul was preaching and declaring the Word of God in many cities, he had visions from the Holy Spirit that he would be imprisoned and face death when he arrived in Jerusalem. However, he stated that his goal in life was to spread the Word of God and he was not concerned about his mortal life, (Acts 20:22-23). Some people may say that it is unfair for the child of God to suffer harm when doing His Will. But let us remember that we are on the battlefield for our Lord and, *“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please God who enlisted him as a soldier.”* (2 Timothy 2:4). Because Paul was fully convinced of this, he was ready not to be imprisoned only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord Jesus, (Acts 21:13 NLT). His focus was on completing the mission and not about how much the mission will cost him or what he will lose. Paul was persuaded to live and die for Christ! For this reason, he boldly declared in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, and I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”*

Our mentor the Apostle Paul has left a good example for us to follow. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has ripped away many precious persons and things from our lives. There have been times when our faith may have been weakened and we felt like giving up, but can I tell you, that's when Jesus makes the difference in our lives. He has made us heirs and joint heirs with Him and if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him, (Romans 8:17-18). The Apostle Paul was fully persuaded and totally sold out to this fact because he knew the course he was running, and he did everything in his power to complete it well. So run your course and focus on completing it well, for in so doing you shall be rewarded by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us aim to hear Jesus say these amazing words, "*Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*" (Matthew 25:21)

MONDAY, JANUARY 16, 2023

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## FROM SUFFERING TO GLORY

*"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18)

**P**reviously we focused on the fact of suffering. Today we will look on the other side of suffering; the lessons learned, the patience, perseverance, maturity, and glory that comes after suffering with Christ. Referring to Jesus, 2 Timothy 2:12 (KJV) tells us, "*If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.*" Since we're striving to be like Jesus, it behooves us to suffer with Him and not deny Him. The eternal reward that follows our suffering here on earth is the incentive that keeps us from quitting.

Do we benefit during our period of suffering before we get to glory? Yes! First, it can refine our perception of God and our praise to Him. When we praise Him amid our suffering it will come from a heart of genuine admiration of Him. Our praises will not be cliché and mechanical. Instead of

cursing the darkness, we focus on the promises of God and praise Him for what He has done and for what He can do! We can say like David “... *though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for THOU art with me...*” (Psalm 23:4). We can trust Him, even when we can’t see Him.

We learn patience as we wait for Him to deliver us. Of course, we do not wait around, hopelessly wringing our hands in despair. We serve Him wholeheartedly despite our imperfect situation. We serve Him by serving others. We serve Him by doing for the Kingdom whatever our hands can do. Sometimes while serving we experience deep hurt and disappointment, leading to tears and weariness. Instead of throwing in the towel, we cry out to our God and encourage ourselves with His Word as we keep on serving. God does not ignore our tears. Psalm 56:8 confirms this, “*You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?*” Psalm 27:5 is another great consolation to the vulnerable, “*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.*” Verse 14 encourages us to “*Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.*”

There are many other beneficial lessons from suffering, such as humility and submission. As we persevere and mature through suffering, we are being prepared for Glory. In 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NKJV) we are told, “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” Our current suffering may feel heavy, but it is light when compared with the weight of Glory that is waiting for us. Let us not be shortsighted and lose hope. Let our prayer today be for renewed focus and strength to keep fighting the good fight until we get to Glory.

## REPLENISHED

*“For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.” (Jeremiah 31:25)*

**W**e have had 2 ½ years of hardship and discomfort like we have never seen in our lifetime. Many have never experienced a pandemic. The constant stories of deaths, hospitalizations, job losses and the threat of recession resulting from COVID-19 are alarming, and added to that are riots, polarizing politics and drastic changes in our social climate. This two-year journey has wearied many of us, and we cannot carry on with adequate strength if we are not replenished. God wants to satisfy our languishing soul, but we must be intentional in allowing Him to replenish us.

Fear and anxiety cannot consume us if we are going to be replenished. Neither can we stay plugged in to the 24-hour access to news and information without becoming drained. Isn't it interesting that although the news drains us we seem to be drawn to it? Somehow, we are convinced that we need to be fed a constant dose of news and information. This is the enemy's plan, to keep us distracted with the “facts” of the day, while we miss the real information that our soul craves. Our intention is not to minimize the “facts” but to highlight the truth that God has not lost control of the world. His eyes still go to and fro the universe seeing every good and evil act.

The real news is that despite the chaos, God is with us. His promises outlive time. He was with us before the pandemic, He is with us now and will be with us tomorrow. He will never leave us, whether in sickness or health, dearth or wealth. He never promised us a smooth journey. He did say in John 16:33, *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* Even as we struggle over the mountainous terrain of uncertainty, we can take comfort from our focus Scripture Jeremiah 31:25, *“For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish.”* What a consolation that our timeless God will not for-

sake us! We do not know why He allowed the pandemic but we do know that nothing escapes His view and no hardship that we face is a surprise to Him. He knows we are tired and concerned for the future, but be reminded, He is with us! This is great news for the soul. If you feel overwhelmed and depleted, get replenished under His wings. (Psalm 91:4)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2023

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## HELP IN WEAKNESS

*“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Romans 8:26a, KJV)*

For anyone who has ever found themselves in the predicament of nursing a disabled vehicle on the highway, there could be no words more beautiful than to hear “help is on the way.” Worry and anxiety will be greatly diminished when stranded motorists see the Department of Transportation vehicle marked **Highway Emergency Local Patrol (H.E.L.P.)** coming to their rescue. The average driver might not necessarily be equipped to address the issue of a faulty radiator, break failure or transmission problems, therefore when the experts arrive on the scene, they are prepared to tackle the issue at hand, and get the motorist back on their journey without any further delay.

Similarly, on the highway of life, we gladly welcome the aid of Divine HELP due to the numerous incidents and hindrances that we encounter along the way to our destination. The Word of God gives us the assurance that help in our weaknesses will be available through the Holy Spirit. When we do not know what we should pray as we ought, help will be on the way. In our frailties The Lord will undergird us with sufficient grace and perfect strength, (2 Corinthians 12:9). Grace will be meted out according to the need, just as promised in John 1:16. Grace is coming to render help right where we are pulled over on the sidetrack, where we en-

counter trials, afflictions, burdens and weaknesses. This is where we will receive grace upon more grace.

In Acts 9:32-35, a certain man named Aeneas was bedridden because he was sick of the palsy for eight long years. This condition meant that he had no power and mobility in his limbs. But when his day of deliverance came, the Apostle Peter made a declaration saying “*Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole, arise...*” and immediately his status was changed and he rose up out of weakness into strength. Like Aeneas, your name is being called, your help has come, and Jesus Christ is making you whole and strong right now! **ARISE!**

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2023

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## THE IDEAL INTERCESSOR

*“...But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Romans 8:26b)*

**I**n 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. advocated for the African American community when he delivered the very pivotal “I Have a Dream” speech. He spoke on behalf of all those who would otherwise be unable to speak up for themselves. The Word of God reminds us that we also have an Advocate, when we do not know what we should pray for as we should, we have an Intercessor who will champion our cause and pray the perfect prayer every time – the Holy Spirit is our ideal Intercessor. It is so encouraging to know that the Spirit of the living God is actively interceding for us when our own strength and knowledge fail. The human spirit can only take us thus far and no further in prayer, but when the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that are too intense for words, our prayers are accelerated, and the perfect will of God is accomplished.

The beautiful thing about intercessory groanings is that the heavy lifting is done by the Holy Spirit, and no human effort is required. All we need to

do is to maintain our posture of prayer and allow the Spirit Himself to make intercessions for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. When Jesus was on earth, he demonstrated how groaning and sighing in prayer healed the man who was deaf and had a speech impediment (Mark 7:32-35). Jesus looked up to heaven, sighed, then spoke a word – “Ephphatha,” which means be opened. Today, He continues to orchestrate lives, open deaf ears, and loose mute tongues by praying His perfect will through us with groaning and sighing.

Oftentimes, we adjoin ourselves with other like-minded individuals to seek the Lord in prayer because we recognize that a prayer tag team can be a very powerful tool. We do not fully understand how the divine mathematics works, but we truly believe, as it is written in the Word of God, that one can chase a thousand, and two can put ten thousand to flight (Deuteronomy 32:30) How much greater the result would be if our prayer partner is the Holy Spirit Himself. When we do not know what to pray and how to direct our prayers, He knows it all. He is never at a loss for words or groanings. We can anticipate that the Lord will hit that bull’s eye in prayer 100% of the time and so, our obligation is just to show up for prayer and He will handle all the details. He is the best Advocate anyone could ever have, and He will always get perfect results. The Lord would say to us today, it is not by your might, nor by your power, but it is by my Spirit. (Zechariah 4:6)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2023

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## A GUARANTEED RESPONSE

*“And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:27)*

**H**ave we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, take it to the Lord in prayer.” We get such great encouragement and consolation from these words taken from the beloved hymn, “What A Friend

We Have In Jesus”. If we were to answer the questions that are posed in this song, most of us would answer a resounding YES, we have many trials and temptations and YES, we have troubles everywhere. It is good to know that we do not have to be discouraged because there is hope and even in the most devastating situations we can take our concerns to the Lord in prayer. When we are at a loss for words, and it is hardest to pray, the Holy Spirit searches the heart, interprets our unspoken prayer requests and makes intercessions for us according to His perfect will. The best prayers that we could ever pray are the ones where we do not have all the right words, because the Spirit’s intercession will guarantee the perfect answer.

Businesses often make great claims and promises about the quality and performance of their brand. As such, they sometimes guarantee the utmost satisfaction to bolster consumers’ confidence. On a greater scale, the Lord gives us a guarantee that is far more superb. He assures us that He will always respond to our prayers, (Jeremiah 33:3). How then do we reconcile with the fact that the answers to some of our prayers are different from what we have prayed for? If we prayed for someone to be healed and that person passed away and did not recover from the illness, we tend to ask the question, why? The Lord’s guarantee tells us that the Spirit makes intercession for the saints, according to the will of God. This is to say, the guarantee is applicable if we pray His will and not ours. We can always try to persuade or encourage the Lord to answer the way we see fit, but ultimately, His will must be done. It is therefore best for us to pray in this wise, “thy will be done.”

If we ever questioned in our hearts why we should even bother to pray, when the Lord controls the final outcome anyway, know that the Lord wants us to pray. His words tell us that we should pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and that we should always pray and not faint, (Luke 18:1). Our focus verse tells us that He searches our hearts, He knows the mind of the Spirit, and He intercedes for us according to His will. He wants His saints to play a very integral role in the process of prayer, by partnering with Him for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. So even when we do not know what and how to pray, we can be confident that the Spirit of the Lord will make compensation for our shortcomings, and will pray the perfect prayer, and that is a guarantee.

## PATIENCE WHILE WE WAIT

*“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.” (James 5: 7-9)*

**T**o wait for something or on someone without agitation is an admirable quality. From this comes the phrase “Patience is a Virtue.” It is a reflection upon someone’s ability to wait for something. Patience is the ability to wait on God’s timing and for the fulfillment of His promises. It also involves patience with people and the enduring of injustice, suffering, trouble and mistreatment, while committing our lives to God in faith that He will make all things right either in this life or at His coming.

At times when we pray or ask for something, the answer or that door may not open until tomorrow, or next week, or next year but it will happen in His time. But what kind of attitude do we have while we wait? While we wait do not grumble or swear, don’t become frustrated but remember Jesus was and continues to be patient with us. Can you imagine life without God’s patience towards us?

The word translated “patience” (Greek *hupomone*) is better rendered “endurance” or “perseverance”. It indicates endurance in whatever trials we may face without losing our faith in God. *“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.”* (Job 13:15). The outcome of the Lord’s dealings with Job reveals that in all Job’s afflictions, God cared deeply about him and mercifully sustained him. This same God, Jesus Christ cares for us the same way. James reminds us that God is concerned about all His people and that, in their suffering, He will sustain them in love and compassionate mercy. (James 5:7-12)

The motive for patience and perseverance in the faith is the imminent

coming of the Lord. We must never become distracted by things that will hinder your relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Christian patience is not a mere yielding to necessity, as moral patience taught by some philosophers, but it is accepting something reluctantly but without protest. It is done in wisdom and the will of God.

This is a lesson that we must all learn, though ever so hard or difficult it may seem. Be encouraged. Let your faith be firm, without wavering. Practice what is good without tiring, and your resolutions for God and heaven fixed, despite of all the sufferings or temptations.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2023

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## ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

*“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (1Thessalonians 5:18, KJV)*

**H**aving an attitude of gratitude means making a deliberate effort to express appreciation on a regular basis for things, be it big or small. American self-help author, Melody Beattie, states that “Gratitude turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity...it makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates vision for tomorrow.”

It is God’s will for everyone to be thankful in everything. This is His will concerning every human being. Even in the tough times we are expected to give thanks to God. As the saying goes, once there is life there’s hope. Maintaining an expression of gratitude is of utmost importance in developing a relationship with God. Peter tells us that we are to follow in the steps of Jesus, (1 Peter 2:21). To follow His steps is to follow His example of gratitude.

Jesus Christ delivered a powerful lesson on thankfulness in Luke 17. Ten Lepers were healed and only one returned to give thanks. *“And he said un-*

*to him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.*” (Luke 17:19, KJV). The leper’s attitude of gratitude made him whole. How often do we return to give God thanks for prayers answered? Do we give thanks the moment we wake in the mornings? Do we still give thanks for food on our table, clothes on our backs and shoes on our feet? Do we give thanks for the jobs that we have? Even when the answer is no from God, do we still give thanks?

We who have received from God love, grace, salvation and all His spiritual blessings must not forget to thank Him. What He has done for us should cause us to come to Him with grateful hearts. *“We love him, because he first loved us.”* (1 John 4:19)

When we have an attitude of gratitude, it’s done from a place of abundance. Developing a grateful mindset will help us feel happier, more positive, and more compassionate with ourselves and with others. Jesus was compassionate all throughout His ministry. Focusing on what makes us feel grateful allows us to develop better habits of expressing appreciation for the people and things that matter most in our lives. Most importantly it helps to cultivate a long- lasting relationship with Jesus Christ. Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what we have, not what we lack. So let us be intentional to always give thanks in everything as Christ commanded.

MONDAY, JANUARY 23, 2023

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## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO GRATITUDE

*“But godliness with contentment is great gain.”* (1 Timothy 6:6, KJV)

**I**n Exodus chapter 16, the Children of Israel displayed a spirit of ingratitude. They complained about being brought into the wilderness to die of hunger. They expressed their desire to rather be in Egypt where they could eat and be full. That spirit is still common among people today, partly because of self-sufficiency, the spirit of entitlement and discontentment. Being ungrateful puts our relationship with God at

risk.

The key to contentment is realizing that God has given you in your present circumstances everything you need to remain victorious in Christ, (1 Cor 15:57). The ability to live triumphantly above changing circumstances comes from Jesus' power flowing in and through us. This ability does not come naturally, it must be learned through dependence on Jesus Christ. We cannot allow ingratitude to harden our heart and impede our relationship with God.

We can overcome the obstacles to Gratitude when we pause and reflect on the goodness of God. Take a few minutes and reflect on answered prayers and the people God has placed in your life to give a helping hand. Look at the opportunities where God has enabled you to be a blessing to someone else. The systems of the world teach humanity to be selfish. Social media prides itself on "Selfies," self takes the center stage. This gives way for the enemy to plant seeds of ingratitude with the intent to kill and destroy us by whatever means necessary.

Giving thanks for the simple things is so powerful. The devil becomes confused when you are thankful even in difficult situations. Living a life full of gratitude will only draw you closer to God. We overcome the obstacles to gratitude when we take our eyes off the gift and give attention to the giver. We overcome obstacles to gratitude when we thank God openly and acknowledge what He has done for us and when we proclaim a personal, caring God to the world around us. God wants us to always put Him first and when we do this it is easier for us to express gratitude in everything. For this reason, we are encouraged by Scripture to *Seek ye first the kingdom of God.*" (Matthew 6:33). If we are not grateful for what God has given us, getting more won't satisfy us either. Being thankful is the key to contentment. Let's continue to openly share the goodness of God.

## THE GOD OF HOPE

*“Now may the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13, NKJV)*

**T**his prayer in the focus verse for spiritual blessing was made by the Apostle Paul for the church at Rome at a time when they were undergoing persecution. He wanted to reassure them that by trusting in the God of Hope, they will find joy and peace even during difficult circumstances. The end result is abundant hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some of the English usages of the word hope are: something that is uncertain, something that has a chance of not happening, or something that depends upon what is humanly or circumstantially possible. In this light of its usage, everyday someone somewhere hoped for something that never materialized, giving rise to disappointment, anxiety and even anger. Some put their hope in the scientific system to find cures for diseases. Others put their hope in the political system for the answers to social and economic problems. We hope that we can find a better job, get good returns on our investments and that our children will be successful in life among, many other things that we hope for. When our expectations are not met and the situation we desired does not occur, according to the book of Proverbs, our heart is made sick. (Proverbs 13:12)

Scripture talks about having our hope misplaced. The Apostle Paul told Timothy to instruct those who are rich not to fix their trust in uncertain riches, (1 Tim. 6:17). In other words, not to make their riches the object of their hope. This week, millions will put their hope in one lottery or another, hoping that by having those six numbers their problems will be solved. The lottery will be the object of their hope.

The Bible’s usage of the word hope defines it as something that is certain in the future because it is dependent on God’s promises and His supernatural power. God is the source and giver of our hope. He is also the object

of our hope. Because we live in a world that is devoid of true hope, we must put our focus on the God of Hope. He is the hope and portion of His people. After Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, the prophet Jeremiah grieved and lamented, but then directed his thoughts toward the God of Hope, declaring, *"This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore I hope in Him!"* (Lamentations 3:21-24, NKJV)

Regardless of the circumstances you may be facing at this moment, look to the God of Hope, the source of abundant hope. He will fill you with joy and peace as you trust in Him.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2023

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## THE HOPE OF OUR SALVATION

*"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"* (Romans 8:24)

**T**he foundation of our hope is that God manifested His enormous mercy, bestowing upon us grace. This grace gives us an opportunity to have the new birth experience- the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and a new inheritance - eternal life, in which we attain through a personal relationship with Jesus. Therefore, it is not a fading hope but one that can sustain us and help us overcome all adversities and trials that will come our way.

Like the early church, we can be assured that this living hope will sustain us. Firstly, we have an inheritance reserved in heaven that no one can take away! So, we eagerly await the day in which the heavens will part, the Lord himself descends from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God to catch away those who are ready

to meet him (1 Thessalonians 4:16). We can therefore rejoice in this Scripture because, by putting on the “hope of salvation” (1Thessolians 5:8), we will escape the wrath of God that is to come on the Day of Judgment. The early church held firmly to this hope as a means of coping with their sufferings and tribulations. Equally, we too must allow this hope to sustain us despite the various difficulties we are experiencing as believers.

Secondly, the hope of our salvation will protect us because God carefully watches over those who trust Him. The resurrected power of Christ not only saves believers to make it in the Kingdom, but also protects them from all outside attacks from the enemy. Isaiah 41:10 says, “*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*” Therefore, do not allow your doubts and fears to diminish your faith in God. In our world, we will encounter disagreements, defamations, and discrimination because of our faith. But as born-again believers, we have a living hope that can keep us to the very end.

So then, what is sustaining you? Is it your family, your wealth, your health, or is it the living hope that we find in Jesus Christ? Like the early church, we too have no choice except to put our trust and confidence in Jesus.

Finally, we should live with a forward-looking attitude because of the hope that the gospel of grace gives us. Like the Apostle Paul, we should not be looking back but “*Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 3:13-14)

## LIVING HOPE

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3-4)*

**I**n the short conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus expounded to him the prerequisite to gain eternal life. *“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”* (John 3:7). Our born-again experience hinges on the fact that God has mercy upon us. We did not obtain this hope of eternal life through our works, but it is a gift from God. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2:8-9 that we are saved by God’s grace and not by our own works. Therefore, if we should glory in anything, let us glory in the finished work at calvary. For Jesus died, He was buried in a tomb, arose the third day and He is alive for evermore.

Through His resurrection, Jesus demonstrated that good will triumph over evil and righteousness will overcome sin. If He had not risen from the dead after living a sinless life, then we would logically conclude that evil will forever win and good is destroyed. However, His plan that brought us salvation was foolproof and was not subject to failure of any kind. Therefore, we have a reason to rejoice in that His crucifixion and resurrection convincingly proved that God’s unwavering love and mercy has given us a lively hope.

This hope (confident expectation) means that though we suffer with Him, we have this assurance that one day we will reign with Him. Our trials and hardship in this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed when we see Him face to face. 2 Timothy 2:12 emphatically declares, *“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him...”* Imagine for a minute what it is going to be when all our cares, worries, fears, heart aches and burdens in this life become a faded memory. Our God will wipe away all tears from our eyes! Are you excited about that glorious day?

The song writer penned it so beautifully:

*What a day that will be; When my Jesus I shall see  
And I look upon his face; The one who saved me by his grace  
When he takes me by the hand; And leads me through the Promised Land  
What a day, glorious day that will be*

Those who live and those who die in Christ, shall be raised incorruptible and so shall we ever be with the Lord. When we accept the Lord Jesus as our personal Savior by repenting of our sins, being baptized in Jesus' name, receiving the Holy Ghost and living a holy life, we made our reservation to sit in heaven with Christ Jesus.

*“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27, 2023

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## FEAR NOT

*“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will hold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10, NKJV)*

**H**aving fears is normal. We all know what it is like to be afraid. We all have fears that invade our thoughts; some of us are afraid of flying, the dark, snakes and spiders. We are also faced with fears that seem to follow us around, such as, fears of the future, health concerns, financial challenges or death. At times, we may find it difficult to let go of these fears. Left on our own, we may get to the point where we are overcome by them but when we rely not on our own efforts but on God's power, we are well able to overcome our fears.

In the field of statistics, a word that often occupies a reviewer's mind is the concept of reliability which speaks to trustworthiness and overall con-

sistency. Shifting this concept of reliability to God's steadfastness and dependability, we can declare that He is always consistent. Let us examine God's character by posing the following questions and what would be the answers: Did God speak the world into existence? Did He deliver the children of Israel out of bondage? Did He show up for the three Hebrew boys? The answer to all these questions would be in the affirmative, yes! Besides, now that we know God is forever consistent, (the Bible refers to this as His immutability, or He never changes, Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 6:17), why do we continue to fear? In Isaiah 41:10, God commands us to, "*Fear not.*" In this verse God has given us five promises which provide us with the confidence and assurance that we need to overcome our fears: He is with us, He is our God, He will help us, He will strengthen us, and He will uphold us with His power.

Several Scripture verses remind us of this promise of God to always be with us. Joshua, the successor to Moses, makes a perfect analogy of where we often find ourselves and must be reminded of God's provisions in our lives. "*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go*" (Joshua 1: 9, NKJV). Psalm 118:6 (NIV) states, "*The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?*" In other words, God is saying to us, didn't I tell you I got this, so why are you being fearful and frustrating yourself when you know that I always keep my promises? But somehow, we have allowed the happenings of life to plant seeds of fear in us when God has already declared His promises.

Our natural children are not concerned about our ability to provide, and honestly speaking, we often come up short, yet we often fail to trust Jesus, who is full of infinite possibilities. The lyricist, Dobby Dobson in reference to God, our Father's ability to provide for us says it well, "I will not suffer, I will not beg for bread. God is my provider; I will not beg for bread..." Our Father wants us to trust Him and to believe that He is in control regardless of our circumstances for He has not given us a spirit of fear. Let us remove fear far from our dwelling and trust in God's possibilities. He will never fail us, so there is no reason to fear.

## GOD IS FOR US

*“What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)*

**T**he Apostle Paul penned the words in the verse above at a time when the Roman church was experiencing great trials and needed the reassurance of God’s love and grace that He has for them. At times the difficult circumstances of life can cause us to doubt the fact that God is for us and we wrestle with believing that this glorious truth is indeed true. Today, like the believers in Rome, we can rest assured that the Almighty God, the one true God, the Creator of all things is for us.

Proofs of this fact, which the Apostle Paul labeled “these things” are outlined in Romans 8: 1-30: We know that God is for us because He purchased our salvation by giving His Son’s life for us, settling the sin question. We know that God is for us because He Has given us the Holy Spirit which dwells in us. We know that God is for us because He has adopted us and has made us joint heirs with His Son, Jesus Christ. We know that God is for us because despite the sufferings we may face, He promised that not only will He provide renewed strength and hope to endure but we shall be glorified with Him. We know that God is for us because His Spirit intercedes on our behalf and we know that God is for us because He has called us and justified us.

Knowing all “these things,” what could anyone or force against us hope to accomplish if God Himself is for us? What chance is there that any individual, situation or circumstance can thwart God’s intent and purpose for us? Who shall accuse God’s elect? (Verse 33). Because God is for us, no power, including Satan and all his hosts can prevail against us. All our adversaries are under God’s control. He will always interpose for and is resolved to bring us to glory. Nothing can prevent our future from happening. In all these attacks, we are more than conquerors through His unconditional love for us, (Verse 37).

Because nothing can ultimately be against us, we can face the dark storms of life with the peace that surpasses all understanding and with confidence knowing that even at those times our God is not against us, He is for us. Like the Apostle Paul, be *“persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 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.”* (Romans 8:38-39)

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2023

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## BACK ON TRACK

*“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.”* (Psalm 37: 23-24 KJV)

**H**ave you ever found yourself wandering aimlessly through life? Asking yourself, how did I get here? Seemingly having lost all sense of direction, having no sense of purpose, going through the motions, each day a monotonous repetition of the day before. You ask yourself, where did I go wrong? When did I get off track? How do I get back on track? How do I rediscover my passion for life and my zeal for the Kingdom of God?

Matthew 13:3-23 gives an account of the parable of the sower. Due to varying reasons, not everyone who received the Word did so on good ground. That in turn determined whether or not the Word remained and brought forth fruit. Today you may have gotten off track due to lack of understanding of the Word. Well, James 1:5 tells us, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally.”* Maybe you were offended by gossip or persecution. I Peter 4:14 encourages, *“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you”* (NIV).

For others it may have been the feeling of being choked by the cares of this world. Maybe it was the deceitfulness of riches or succumbing to temptation. It may have been the frustration of the lack of finances or the agony of sickness in your body. You are not alone. In II Corinthians 1:8 the Apostle Paul expressed how he felt pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that he and Timothy despaired even of life. But even though they had the sentence of death they trusted in God.

Regardless of the reason you may have drifted off track, what matters is getting back on. I John 1:9 tells us that, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Proverbs 24:16 tells us that a just man falls seven times and rises up again. So, if for some reason you fell, don’t resolve yourself to a state of defeat but get back up. Decide like the lepers in II Kings 7:3-20 that you are not going to sit there and die in the seeming famine of your circumstance. Rather get up, change your position, and move in the direction of your deliverance.

Today if you have been distracted, it is time to reprioritize your daily activities and to put Jesus at the forefront. In Luke 10:38-42 Martha was cumbered about with much serving. It is good to provide for and serve our families and others. But sometimes in order to get back on track we must be like Mary and sit at the feet of Jesus. Sometimes we need to go into our prayer closet and shut the door. There, He can tell us hidden secrets and show us great and mighty things that we never knew (Jeremiah 33:3). There in His presence, we can have fullness of joy and Jesus can restore our souls. There, the seed of the Word of God can fall on good ground and sustain us on the path of righteousness so that we can bear fruit a hundredfold.

## WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM

*“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Romans 8:29, KJV)*

**I**n Christ Jesus, we are destined by divine decree through the foreknowledge of God. The creator who existed when the earth was without form and void, set in motion the existence of time within eternity. You and I came into existence, and in the hands of a masterful omniscient God, we have tremendous promise and purpose. However, this can only be fulfilled if we allow ourselves to be conformed to the image of Christ. We may not always feel a sense of empowerment and promise while traversing the cyclical nature of life. Genesis 8:22 tells us that as long as the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease. It is within the constraints of time that we exist, subject to the dichotomy of seasons mentioned in Ecclesiastes chapter 3. We are surrounded by birth and death, weeping and laughing, losses and gains, love and hate, peace and war. To stay focused and triumphantly weather the seasons, we need to be like Christ.

Jesus is our aspirational ideal, our ultimate role model. If there arises a situation where we are not sure what to do, we can use Jesus as our inspiration. In John chapter 13 Jesus demonstrates a beautiful example of servanthood in washing His disciples' feet. In verse 15 He tells them, *“For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”* Philippians 2:6-7 tells us that Christ Jesus, though being in the form of God, made himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant. Likewise, in our discipleship of Christ it is our duty to serve others. When we spend time in fellowship with Jesus through prayer and consecration, we begin to take on His attributes. In Acts 4:13, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they took note that they had been with Jesus. In Christ, there is a transformation that takes place. Ephesians 4:21-

24 tells us that when we have learned Christ, we put off the former corrupt conversation of the old man, we become renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new man who after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. *“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”* (I John 3:3)

In Christ Jesus we have sonship. *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”* (I John 3:2). Time is but a temporary state. Our current bodies are temporary vessels. Philippians 3:20-21 tells us that, *“Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.”* I Corinthians 15:40-58 talks about the celestial body and gives a rapturous and victorious account of the promise of Christ’s return. Revelation 21:1 promises a new heaven and a new earth. In Revelation 21:6-7 God declares, *“It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end... He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be His God, and he shall be my son.”*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2023

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## ENDURING TO THE END

*“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”* (Matthew 24:13, KJV)

**E**nduring to the end requires focus, mindfulness, and determination. It speaks to the ability to withstand hardship or adversity. “No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers...to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude, and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds our character, purifies our hearts, expands our souls.” (Orson F. Whitney). Our experiences are not futile because after we have suffered a while, the God of all grace, who

has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, will make us perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle us (I Peter 5:10).

The end point of our endurance is the promise of eternal life (I John 2:25). A place of rest in the presence of the Lord. John 14:3 tells us that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us and will come again to receive us unto Himself. So, like Abraham before us, we look for a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). We know there will be obstacles and setbacks along the way, but we are walking by faith and not by sight. Hebrews 11 tells us of the sacrifices made by the heroes and heroines of faith. How men and women like Moses, David, Sarah, Rahab walked before us. Some escaped the edge of the sword, endured cruel mocking and imprisonment. Others were stoned, sawn asunder, all for the name of Jesus Christ. In II Corinthians 11:23-27 the Apostle Paul speaks about the sufferings he endured for the cause of Christ. Hebrews 11:13 tells us they all died in faith, not having received the promises but having seen them afar off.

Today we carry on the mantle of faith. The Bible tells us that, *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”* (Hebrews 12:1-2). Knowing that they without us should not be made perfect. It is imperative to single mindedly maintain our focus. James 1:8 tells us that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Luke 9:62 tells us that anyone who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.

When we feel pressed beyond measure, we must remind ourselves that *“our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”* (2 Corinthians 4:17). The heroes and heroines of faith were men and women of like passions. They were made of flesh and blood just as we are. It was not easy, but they endured through faith. So, *“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”* (Hebrews 10:35-36). We want to be like the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 and declare, *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”*

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Bishop A. Thomas, calls on every child of God, every family as well as each member of the community, both young and old to a time of prayer, consecration and bible studies as you seek God for direction for your lives. At the end of this season of prayer, you will hopefully hear from God and become confident as you take the next step in building a strong prayer life that is full of faith, hope and virtue.

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