**Mike Hipes – Facebook Lessons, March through June 2020**

**June 30, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Sometimes when life gets challenging and frustrations arise, we tend to make mistakes. A husband said one time that when he got home, his wife got historical! I said, did you mean, hysterical? He said no, historical, she was so angry she brought up everything that I did wrong for the past 5 years! She later apologized. At times when we get angry, our emotions take over, logic goes out the window and the actions that we take are usually followed by a lot of apologies. When anger is involved, we sometimes think, this needs to be said! When we cool down, we say, I wish I didn’t say that! We wish that we could have a do-over or take something that we said or have done back! Sometimes the actions are irreversible! What I love about God is that He is paying close attention to us and our every thought and behavior, and wants to help us avoid these mistakes and encourages us to do the right thing. God is always in our corner trying to guide us! The question is, are we listening? Was Cain?

“In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Genesis 4:3-9

When you read this passage and the dialogue between God and Cain. We usually gravitate to what Cain did! We talk about his anger. The fact that sin was crouching at his door. However, I believe that this passage says more about God than it does about Cain. I can’t help but love the picture of God stepping in with Cain before he is about to blow it big time! God loves Cain! He is trying to help him to do the right thing! You can almost hear the conversation with God saying to Cain, listen Cain let me help you with what you need to bring to Me as an offering, and please don’t redirect your anger at your brother because of your jealousy. Let Me help you do the right thing! But first, let Me caution you to what actions you are thinking about toward your brother. Don’t get hysterical or historical! Pause and think this through right now! I’m on your side Cain! Please let Me help you cool off so that you don’t do anything foolish and that you may regret later! Why are you angry? Why has your countenance fallen? Sin is crouching at your door. You need to get a handle on it before it handles you!

God is always in our corner and on our side! Don’t you just love that about Him?

Have a super day!

Mike

**June 29, 2020**

Good afternoon!

I hope all had a great weekend.

Do you find yourself saying I love you a lot to people but sometimes lose sight of the real meaning and commitment that saying these words truly carry? Isn’t saying that you love someone supposed to mean so much more when it comes to sacrifice and action? Listen to how John explains love in the following passage and see if you catch a deeper obligation that comes with saying that you love someone.

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” I John 3:16-18

I don’t know about you but I catch myself saying to people at church, love you brother, love you sister all the time! I say it to my wife, my kids, my friends and sometimes even to folks I recently met. This afternoon the Army sergeant arrived to pick up my daughter Allison who left for the Army! It was a tearful parting with all of us telling her that we loved her over and over again. Everybody was saying that they loved each other. There was so much emotion going around I think even the sergeant was told that he was loved. John writes that you can know real love if you are willing to lay down your life for another as well as not just love with words of speech but with actions. Certainly, we would all do so for our children, spouses and maybe some others but would we do so for all who we say this to? May we not be love in word only Christians! Let’s truly be ready to love as Christ loved us! By this the world will know that we are His!

Blessings,

Mike

**June 26, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Most of the time when we think of the word “grace” we think of God’s unmerited favor! It’s what we are saved by! We are saved by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. However, listen to some of these passages on grace that may broaden your perspective about God’s grace.

• “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Heb. 4:16

• “And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” I Peter 5:10

• “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.” Romans 6:14

• “But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” 2 Corinthians 12:9

• “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:18

• “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” Philippians 4:23

• “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” Romans 12:3

• “You then, My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 2:1

Did you catch some of the additional areas of our Christian walk where God’s grace is working? From approaching His throne of grace, to helping us when we suffer, God’s grace is sufficient! It keeps us humble, gives us strength, helps us to grow, it keeps us from allowing sin to master us! God’s grace is so much more than how we begin our Christian walk, it is what we need to faithfully continue it! God’s grace is always with us!

Have a great weekend!

Grace and peace to you,

Mike

**June 25, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Lately, with all that continues to go on in our lives, my prayers have generally revolved around first asking God for the things I need or want and ending with thanking Him for what He has done. After reading David’s prayer in I Chronicles 29:10-13, it seems before we pray for anything, praising His name and who He is needs to be first above everything! Look at what David emphasized first and foremost when he prayed!

10 David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,

“Praise be to you, Lord,

the God of our father Israel,

from everlasting to everlasting.

11 Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power

and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,

for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, Lord, is the kingdom;

you are exalted as head over all.

12 Wealth and honor come from you;

you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power

to exalt and give strength to all.

13 Now, our God, we give you thanks,

and praise your glorious name.

Wow! The whole prayer seemed to revolve around David praising God for who He is and His awesome sovereign power! In fact, he didn’t even make a request for himself at all during this prayer! I hear people say from time to time, God answered my prayers! It is usually connected to something that they asked God for and that He granted. Have you ever had someone say God answered my prayers by saying no to my request? Yes and No, both are answers, aren’t they? It seems to me that God can say yes, no, or wait when it comes to our supplications. There is nothing wrong with asking God for whatever we desire or feel we are in need of, but the deeper point is that we should be praising Him and lifting up His name because of who He is first and foremost above what He does for us in our lives! Amen church?

In His service,

Mike

**June 24, 2020**

Good afternoon!

How you look at something can make all the difference in the world! Three contractors were visiting a tourist attraction on the same day. One was from New York, another from Texas, and a third from Florida. During the tour, the guide was asking what they all did for a living. They all said that they were contractors. The guide said, “Hey we have a rear fence that needs to be repaired, would you three guys mind taking a look at it and possibly giving me a bid?” They all said of course, and off they went to the back of the building. The contractor from Florida was the first to step up. He took out his pencil and tape measure, did some calculations and said, “Well I figure the job will run about $900. $400 for materials, $400 for my crew and $100 profit for me. Next to step up was the Texas contractor. He also took out his tape measure and pencil, did some quick figuring and said, “Looks like I can do this job for $700. $300 for materials, $300 for my crew, and $100 profit for me.” Then, without so much as moving, the New York contractor said, “$2,700!” The guide was puzzled and said to him, “You didn’t even measure like the other guys! How did you come up with such a high figure?” Easy, he said, “$1,000 for me, $1,000 for you and we hire the guy from Texas!”

How you look at things can make a very big difference! There are two basic ways to look at things in this life. Through the eyes of man or through the eyes of faith in God. We need to choose correctly!

If we are looking at things through the eyes of man rather than through the eyes of faith in God, two things may happen.

1. We won’t even notice the touch and prodding of God in our lives. In Numbers 22 we read the story of Balaam the prophet who was asked by Balak the king of Moab to come and curse God’s people. He said to Balaam, “please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me.” God let Balaam know that he did not want him to do this. What follows in the story is the unique but obvious hand of God that goes unnoticed by Balaam. While Balaam is riding on his donkey “the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with a drawn sword.” When the donkey turned off the road “Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back into the way.” The angel of the Lord appeared a second time and “stood in a narrow path.” Again, the donkey turned away and Balaam struck the donkey. Finally, when the donkey saw the angel of the Lord the third time she simply laid down and Balaam struck the donkey yet again. It was then that the Lord made the donkey speak to Balaam saying, “what have I done to you that you have struck me three times.” What, a talking donkey! Amazing right! The thing that is truly amazing is not so much that the donkey spoke, but that Balaam, without hesitation, responded back by talking to the talking donkey! Talk about not noticing the hand of God! Balaam was oblivious to the obvious! When it comes to your life as a Christian, how you live, parent, serve, work, reach out, spend time with God in prayer and in His word and much more, is He trying to get your attention? Has he been prodding you in certain areas of your life? Is your response one of frustration, anger, striking out against the prodding’s or are you responsive to the obvious! Let’s see things through the eyes of faith in God and not through the eyes of man.

2. Even when we do notice, we will resist the touch and prodding of God. The donkey turned and Balaam resisted three times in a row! Even after the donkey spoke to Balaam you would have thought, well how could he have missed the point! It was not that he missed the point but rather that he was resisting the point! In the end, the obstacles were put there by God Himself! Instead of resisting he should have been thanking God! Is it possible that we are praying for God to remove the obstacles in our lives, when it may very well be that God is the one who put them there for a reason! To get our attention! The next time you are tempted to pray for God to change your circumstances, stop and think, maybe God doesn’t want to change the circumstances, He wants to change you! When it comes to your prayer life, outreach, teaching your children, standing up for Jesus, being faithful in all areas of your walk with Christ, what has God been trying to do to get your attention? The big question is not so much how many opportunities we have to grow but through which set of eyes am I looking? Remember, like the three contractors, how you look at something can make all the difference in the world!

Have a great day,

Mike

**June 23, 2020**

Good afternoon!

The Scriptures Of The Day!

Today let’s take a look at some meaningful verses from God’s word on Self-Control.

• “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.” Proverbs 25:28

• “Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.” Proverbs 16:32

• “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23

• “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” Titus 2:11-12

• “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.” 2 Peter 1:5-7

• “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” 2 Timothy 1:7

I don’t know about you but self-control is not always something that comes easy! When I smell the chocolate chip cookies coming out of the oven or get a look at the home-made ice cream with whip cream on the dessert menu at the restaurant, my body goes into civil war mode. My head says, you don’t need that, and my stomach says, Oh yeah! One day I had such an experience at a restaurant picking up a take-out order. While waiting for my order the coconut cream pie was calling my name from the case right in front of me. The battle began between one part of me and another. When I arrived home with a piece of the pie, Margie my wife, asked me who ordered the piece of pie? I answered, that depends on who you are asking! Folks, God has given us the power of self-control in every area of life! We can have the victory over every battle that we face in the flesh and spiritually! Remember “Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” Ephesians 3:20

How are you doing with self- control these days?

In His Service, Mike

**June 22, 2020**

Good afternoon!

The Milky Way galaxy that we live in contains over 100 billion stars. Just to put that into perspective, it has been less than 2 billion minutes since Jesus was born! It’s no wonder Psalm 19:1 says “The heavens declare the glory of God; the stars proclaim the work of His hands.” The bible tells us that” In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The Hebrew word “BAHRAH” used there means something brought into existence by a miracle!

When you look up at the sky tonight you may be mindful of Psalm 8.

1 LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory in the heavens.

2 Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against Your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

4 what is mankind that You are mindful of them, human beings that You care for them?

5 You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

6 You made them rulers over the works of Your hands; You put everything under their feet:

7 all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,

8 the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

9 LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

When we think of our awesome God we sometimes think that He is very far removed. But He is closer than you may think! As powerful and majestic as He is, the bible says that He also knows the number of hairs on your head (Luke 12:7). That’s paying close attention to detail if you ask me. Granted that may be easier done for some than others. However, the point is that we serve an awesome all-powerful sovereign God who is in total control and that we can pray to, talk to and know that He actually lives within us! This should give us comfort and security especially during times like these!

Blessings,

Mike

**June, 19, 2020**

Good afternoon!

When my daughter Brooke was about 4 or 5 years old, she decided one morning that she wanted to leave home and live on her own. We lived in New Jersey at the time just off of a busy intersection. Brooke had her little pink backpack filled with some odds and ends along with a few toys from her room. She had obviously been to the kitchen as well as a box of gram crackers were visible. We told her to go ahead and go! Obviously, we were not going to let her leave town or even the yard for that matter but allowed her to exit the door as we watched her from the window. She got to the bottom of the porch steps and looked down the street at the busy corner. Then she promptly walked back up the steps and in the door. When we asked her why she didn’t go, she said with tears in her eyes, “I’m not allowed to cross the street!” I guess things weren’t as bad as she thought at home when it came to being out on her own!

In Luke 15 we read the story of the prodigal son who wanted to leave home at a young age. Jesus begins the story by saying that “a certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to the father, father give me the share of the estate that falls to me.” After he left home, it wasn’t long before the boy squandered all his money on loose living and began to be in need! After taking a job feeding pigs “he came to his senses.” Suddenly, like my daughter who was standing at the foot of the porch seeing the busy and dangerous roads of life ahead, he reasons to himself to turn back to God and home. “I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, father I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.” Wow, he went from “give me... to make me!” Talk about a change of heart! The story continues by saying that while he was still far off his father saw him from a distance, felt compassion and ran to him, embraced him and kissed him. The son confessed to the father that he had sinned against heaven and in the sight of the father. The father welcomed him back and put on a huge party! However, the older son was not so happy. In fact, the text says that “he became angry, and was not willing to go in” to the celebration party! What the father said to the older son in the last two verses of this story summarized the situation best. “My child you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been saved.”

There are three lessons here for us when it comes to family relationships:

1. Let’s take notice of what’s right before we take notice of what’s wrong. Sure, the younger son started off with a wrong attitude by saying “give me.” This led to big problems for him, self-inflicted problems! But when he came to his senses and had a come to Jesus moment by changing his heart, he came home with a humbled spirit. But notice that the father's focus was not on what the boy did wrong, but what the boy did right! The son came asking for forgiveness and mercy and grace. There would be time enough to address what happened, but when the son confessed, the father’s first words were not, I can’t believe you put me through all this, I hope you have learned your lesson. Instead, he responded in a way that impacted the son with the idea that there is always hope! True repentance brings hope! May we as Christians in our homes and churches be developing a sense of hope in people!

2. Let’s take notice of ourselves before we take notice of others. Did you notice what the prodigal said before he turned homeward? “I am dying here with hunger... I will get up...I have sinned...I am no longer worthy.” He didn’t blame his father by saying that he was too hard on him. He didn’t blame his brother by saying, he is cold and angry with me. Taking notice of ourselves first is always the best place to start. At times we tend to read or listen to lessons with other people in mind. We say I wish others were reading this or hearing this. Let’s begin with looking inward, and then let our eyes turn upward!

3. Let’s take notice of the major issues before we take notice of the minor issues. Notice what the father didn’t say. He didn’t say, hey son did you max out the credit cards? Did you wreck the car? What happened to your clothes? What he did say was, my son has repented. He is alive! He was lost but now he is saved! Also, notice what the prodigal did not say. He didn’t say, I lost all my money, my job, and I went hungry! He said, I have sinned, against heaven and in your sight! However, did you notice the older brother’s reaction? His first response was not, my brother has repented and has come home, is safe and has been restored. But rather he said first, I never got a party or got to bring my friends over for a big feast! Brothers and sisters, let’s put aside the minor issues and first focus on the major ones. This is the example we have from God!

Have a blessed weekend!

Mike

**June 18, 2020**

Good afternoon!

The Scriptures Of The Day!

Today let’s take a look at some meaningful verses from God’s word on Gentleness.

• “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” Philippians 4:5

• “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1

• “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” I Peter 3:15

• “Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” II Timothy 2:5

• “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Eph 4:2

• “slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.” Titus 3:2

• “You have given me the shield of your salvation, and Your right hand supported me, and Your gentleness made me great.” Psalm 18:35

• “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” Galatians 6:1

• “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:29

One of the biggest decisions you can make each morning is the kind of attitude you will have. Philippians 2:5 says, “your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” The best role model that one could have is Jesus Himself when it comes to the kind of attitude that we should have! In Matthew 11:29 Jesus Himself tells us “for I am gentle and humble in heart.” Let’s make this attitude ours as well as we begin each and every day!

In His Service, Mike

**June 17, 2020**

Good afternoon!

I was at the deli counter a while back ordering some cold cuts. The worker who took my order asked me how I would like them sliced. I said for sandwiches. Wanting to make sure that the thickness was right, she held up the first slice to show me from behind the counter for my approval. Seeing the first slice to approve was not an issue although she was a good distance away. The bigger problem was that she showed it to me with the flat side facing me rather than presenting it to me sideways so that I could see the thickness. She said, is that thick enough? I paused and smiled, she didn’t! I responded, could you please turn it the other way, motioning with my hand, to demonstrate the sideways view. She said, Oh, sorry, sure! You know different people look at things in different ways! Workers see things differently than customers, men see things differently than women, children see things differently than parents and so on! One early morning during the school year a couple of years back I said to my daughter Liz, I’m going to give Allison a shake, referring to waking her up for school. Liz responded, can I get one too, I like chocolate! See my point?

Today's section of scripture includes a child’s perspective in the home. You see a child’s perspective is critical in how we parent, especially when it comes to obeying. Colossians 3:20 says, “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.” Now before you say, well I don’t have kids or that your kids are grown, let me simply say that this is a lesson for all. It’s all about relationships with people. How we interact with young people, and how they interact with us. Whether at church, at home, in stores, at the deli counter and more, this is about understanding how to be our best through better understanding others. If you are a parent, married, grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother, sister, teacher or single, all can benefit as it pertains to relationships in Christ.

How do you know if you are a good parent? All kids are not born the same, are they? If you have multiple children, or even twins you know this. One may be a strong-willed child, another a compliant child! Kids are not all born with a blank slate but with their own individual personalities! Have you ever wondered why you can’t get children to obey just by explaining to them what you want them to do? Do you count to 3, 5 or even 10 before you act or they obey? Kids usually wait for the last number because they know that you won’t react until you get to that number. They know your limit and kids like to push the envelope. Testing and knowing the limits is a form of security for kids. One key is to try to get behind the eyes of your child. See what they see, feel what they feel. Regardless of the type of child, the real question is, what is your goal when it comes to your children being obedient to their parents? What is your focus and motive? Is it for your own peace and quiet? Could it be that obedient children are a good reflection on what people deem successful parents? Some parents have even said that when their kids disobey that they feel guilty as if they have been failures as parents! Paul said in I Corinthians 11:1 “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.” What better goal can we have as parents to have as our motive to model Christ! I want them to model me as I model Christ!

One key ingredient to having children who obey their parents is the parents parenting style. There are 4 basis parenting styles but only one to truly strive for.

1. The Dominator Parent. The dominator parent has a lot of laws and is very rigid and generally inflexible in their demands. He typically lives by three principles, rules, rules and more rules. Kids are not usually allowed to express their views. Things the dominator might say are, “You're grounded for six months!” “My word is final!” “Don’t even think about it!” “The answer is no, that’s all there is to it.” “There are no buts!” The child tends to withdraw and develops a lack of self-respect. What the domination parent misses is the fact that rules without a relationship usually push the rebellion button! Colossians 3:21 says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.” Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Wise words from God!

2. The Neglectful Parent. The neglectful parent generally leave the parenting to other people, baby sitters, teachers, etc. They are generally low on feelings, have little to no connection, largely due to being so busy in their own lives. Things the neglectful parent might say are “That’s a stupid way to feel.” “Lighten up!” “Get over it.” “Just leave me alone, I’m busy.” “None of your business!” The child tends to see themselves as a burden and develops deep insecurity.

3. The Permissive Parent. This parent is extremely loving but has very few rules or guidance for the children. When the child does something that deserves discipline, this parent tends to give in to bargaining from the child. There is inconsistency due to no clear boundaries or structure. The permissive parent tends to be an enabler. The bottom line is that this parent really doesn’t mean what they say, and the kid knows it! This parent would rather be the child’s friend than their parent. There are lots of words, but they are backed up with very little action. This parenting style teaches children to associate softness with weakness.

4. The Balanced Parent: This parent has clearly defined rules with an equal amount of love. In every situation, they are affectionate and supportive but displays control. Rules and standards are explained so that children know the logic behind them as well as the consequences. Discipline happens in a non-judgmental way. There is no condescending spirit. This parent allows the children to think differently and respects the views and opinions of their children, but they still are able to maintain a position of leading in the family. This parent sees the family like a team where everybody counts but the parent is still remains viewed as the quarterback. As a result of this type of parenting, children develop respect for their parents, have a sense of security and have open lines of communication. This is a balanced approach which does “not exasperate” children!

Blessings,

Mike

**June 16, 2020**

Good afternoon!

The Scriptures Of The Day!

Today let’s take a look at some meaningful verses from God’s word on Faithfulness.

• “O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt You and praise Your name, for in perfect faithfulness You have done marvelous things, things planned long ago.” Isaiah 25:1

• “I will bow down toward Your holy temple and will praise Your name for Your love and Your faithfulness, for You have exalted above all things Your name and Your word.” Psalm 138:2

• “Enter [the Lord's] gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.” Psalm 100:4-5

• “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” I Corinthians 10:13

• “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 3:3-4

• “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” I Corinthians 1:9

• “Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23

• “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” I John 1:9

There is a big difference between being perfect and being perfect in our purpose. There is also a big difference in when we stumble in our faithfulness and when one turns their back on being faithful. It is good to know that as long as we are walking in the light as He Himself is in the light, that when we stumble, the blood of His Son cleanses us from all our sins. This is what I John 1:7 tells us. So, even when we are less than faithful, God is always faithful to His promise to forgive us! It’s like we have an umbrella of God’s grace above us that continually keeps us covered in His needed blood for forgiveness. Praise God for His great faithfulness!

In His Service, Mike

**June 15, 2020**

I remember the first time I taught a kid’s class at church. As a newer Christian myself I was a bit nervous. I opened the class by saying, Hi, I’m Mr. Hipes. With that, multiple hands shot up into the air. The first child said, excuse me Mr. Hipes but can you tell us why we all look so different even though we all have 2 eyes, 1 nose, 2 ears 1 mouth. I responded, good question! Another child chimed in, where did God come from? I answered, give me a minute on that please. A third kid popped off, why are there so many churches? I quickly responded; I’ll do a little research. Finally, the kid who asked last said, can I go to the bathroom? I said, with confidence, that’s a yes! To the rest of the class I said, before we go any further, we better have a prayer! This is what I call the joy of teaching our young people! Think about it, if we don’t teach God’s word to our children, who will? The public schools generally don’t. The TV won’t! The government won’t! The world won’t! This is where parents come in. Every parent needs to arise and be a part of this!

We need to be a people with a spiritual vision for our young! What is your vision for your children spiritually speaking? We may see our children in this world’s future as doctors, lawyers, world leaders and more. Maybe graduating from Princeton, Yale, or Harvard, but where do we see them spiritually? Do we see them as godly mothers and fathers, bible school teachers, missionaries, prayer warriors, preachers, deacons or church elders? As children, the responsibility to “train up a child in the way he should go” Proverbs 22:6, is not their responsibility but ours!

In Judges 2:10 the bible tells us “there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done.” This is a point in Israel’s history where after coming out of Egyptian bondage and wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, Joshua had brought them into the promised land. In Deuteronomy 6:1-15, Israel is told to “love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.” They are also instructed to teach these things to their children diligently! Upon crossing the Jordan into the promised land years before, they were told to set up memorial stones for a constant reminder of what God had done. They were told, that “when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying what are these stones, then you shall inform your children, saying, Israel crossed this Jordon on dry ground.” Joshua 4:22. However, after Joshua dies, on the heels of all the incredible things God’s people experienced and were told to pass on, the most astounding verses of scripture arise, saying that this next generation did not know God, nor the work which He had done! These children followed their families, witnessed the reality of coming into the promised land and grew up in an environment of God’s awesome power. I’m sure they behaved as they were supposed to, attended spiritual gatherings as they were asked to, but in the end, they did not know the Lord! I’ll bet they were taught to hunt, farm, prepare food and even how to choose a mate! But somehow, they were never taught to choose who they should serve! At worship, I’m sure that they would bow at the time of prayer, recite the right words when it was appropriate. But somehow, they had no real personal ownership of knowing the Lord! Do you really know the Lord? Do your kids really know the Lord? If not, what’s the problem? Why didn’t they really know the Lord?

Two points:

1. Their faithfulness was only active as long as their leaders were faithful. As long as Joshua was alive and setting the pace, the next generation followed. But as soon as he was gone, so was their faith. They were children that were tagging along on the coattails of their parents and leaders’ faith, but had no real ownership of their own faith! They came to worship and more because their parents did and they did what was expected of them. But somehow, they never were taught to be faithful as a result of their own faith. When their role models were out of the picture, so were they! This is why we should instill in our children the idea of developing their own faith. This is so important before they go off to college or the military or move away from home.

2. Our young people need God’s word in their lives. What responsibility do we have as parents to our children spiritually speaking? Do your kids know why they come to church or why they are on this planet? Have you ever wondered why some kids are bored with Christianity? Some kids think that church is a place to socialize only. They need a sense of purpose! If not, then as a result, when the testing in life comes, they find themselves like the next generation in Judges 3:2 who were not prepared when the time of testing came. Knowing and being prepared with God’s word for the spiritual battles in life is an absolute necessity! This is why they were told back in Deuteronomy 6 to teach their children diligently, regularly, “when you sit... when you walk... when you lie down and when you rise up.” Let’s be serious about training up our children in the way they should go!

Blessings,

Mike

**June 12, 2020**

Good afternoon!

While we were on vacation in Lancaster PA, we decided to eat at one of those all you can eat Amish smorgasbords. At the time my daughter Brooke was young and a bit of a picky eater. As we were passing through the line of incredible foods, I noticed that although my plate was filled to the top with the many different options that were offered, Brooke’s plate was empty. As we approached the end of the food bar, I finally asked her why she hadn’t put anything on her plate yet. She said, dad there isn’t any mac and cheese? I really need some mac and cheese to eat with anything else I get. As popular as mac and cheese is, oddly enough it was missing. I said to Brooke, out of all of this wonderful Amish homemade food can’t you find anything else that you like? Silence! Ever been here as a parent? Since we were on vacation, I decided to not press her about eating her vegetables this time. I instead spoke to one of the kitchen workers about putting out some mac and cheese. I’m not always this much of a pushover, but decided to have a moment of grace for my daughter. The folks in the kitchen were very accommodating and said, no problem it will be coming right up. Problem solved!

You know there is a side of each of us that seems to notice what’s missing in life even in the midst of God’s great blessings! In the book of Exodus God delivers His people from 400 years of slavery! He not only delivers them but delivers them powerfully! After pounding the hardened heart of Pharaoh with 10 plagues, He brings them out of slavery by the miraculous opening of the Red Sea! His promise to them was to take them to a land of milk and honey! He gave them freedom! However, regardless of all that they were seeing and had been shown for their taking at the banquet smorgasbord provided by God, they instead settled for anxiety, grumbling and complaining about what they were missing rather than what they had been offered! How could they be in the presence of so much good only to notice what was missing?

This morning I woke up in freedom, and so did you! Today you probably woke up with a roof over your head, food in your fridge, coffee in your pot, air in your lungs, joy in your heart, a song on your lips and peace and quiet in the morning. Then, your kids woke up! LOL. But they woke up in freedom too! And with all the rest of the blessings that are yours as well! After the Exodus, God’s delivered people woke up in freedom, and with all of the trimmings of the blessing from God! The Lord provided water, food in the form of manna and meat and guidance all through the journey by way of a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud by day. Although God delivered them from bondage into freedom, took care of them all through the journey and provided for them a land flowing with milk and honey, all they did was complain. Regardless of the incredible feast of blessings before them, there was no mac and cheese! In fact, they grumbled, that if they decided to go back to Egypt, that although they would be again in slavery, that at least they would have one thing that they liked to eat! Unbelievable! Now by the time you get to the book of Numbers this attitude had been going on for a year. By Numbers 10-11 two years had passed! Point: How can God’s people who have been delivered so powerfully and have been exposed to the wonders of God still live so anxiously and far below what He had planned? When God is offering the best, why do we settle for less?

Two Reasons:

1. We settle for less because we continually call into question God’s capability, sovereign control, and faithfulness. God didn’t even mind proving His capability. Ten plagues, opening the Red Sea, providing food and water, leading with a pillar of fire and cloud and so much more. He did so for two years! But the straw that broke the camel’s back was their rejection! That’s right, rejection! Rejection of God’s capability in the face of His proven ability! As God told Moses in Numbers 11:23, “is the Lord’s power limited?” It was because they labeled God as limited, and continually questioned His awesome power and capability through constant grumbling and complaining for years, that was the reason were left with anxiety in life. Their lack of trust and faith blinded them to God’s loyal leading. What God had done was overshowed by what they were doing without! Folks, God has so much in store for us. May we not miss it by being focused on what’s missing in our lives and being blinded to the unfathomable riches that He has given us!

2. We settle for less because we continually call into question our own acceptability. What did the Israelite say over and over? Why did we leave Egypt? Why did you bring us out of Egypt Moses? They never really saw themselves for who they really were! Instead of living like covenant children, they acted more like transplanted Egyptians! They were in the middle of an identity crisis! Singing songs about being on their way to that fair land one minute and the next moment building a golden calf to worship! They left Egypt but Egypt never left them! Folks listen, God has great things in store for you. For them it was Canaan Land, a place flowing with milk and honey, but instead they settled for bread and water and wandering in the wilderness for the next 40 years. Why? They never made the exchange! They turned over a new leaf but never a new life! They tried to put God on but without taking the world off! They never truly identified with accepting themselves as covenant children of God! The result was that they settled for mac and cheese when a banquet was prepared! Brothers and sisters, our sins are forgiven, we are on the road to glory, we are living in freedom, and have a wedding feast banquet prepared and waiting for us in heaven. It is time to start living like covenant people of God! Our God in heaven does not want us to settle for anything less!

In Him,

Mike

**June 11, 2020**

Good afternoon!

The Scriptures Of The Day!

Today let’s take a look at some meaningful verses from God’s word on Goodness.

• “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:21

• “I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” Psalm 27:13

• “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6:10

• “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him.” Nahum 1:7

• “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” Romans 12:9

• “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23

Have you ever said that you needed to work harder on loving people, being more joyful or at peace? Have you struggled with your patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? The good news is that this is the fruit of the Spirit, not our fruit. All we really need to do is yield to the Holy Spirit and let Him have his way with us. Jesus speaks about bearing fruit in John 15. He said “I am the vine and you are the branches.” John 15:5 There is a big difference between being a fruit producer and a fruit bearer. The fruit that we bear is produced within us by God! We need to simply yield to the producer of His fruit! In other words, get myself out of the way! Don’t settle for halfhearted insufficient efforts of trying to respond with your own fleshly fruit. Submit to the Spirit and let Him produce His fruit in your life. The next time you need to respond to a situation in life that requires godly fruit, first pause and pray to the Spirit and say, please respond with Your fruit through me!

In His Service, Mike

**June 10, 2020**

Good afternoon!

It was a few days before Christmas when I walked into a department store at the mall looking for a few additional last-minute gifts for my wife Margie. I was at the cosmetic counter looking over a few items when the sales lady walked up to me with a big smile and handed me a flyer. It read, Calling all men, this is a “Procrastination Pass” for last minute male shoppers! It was an offer for their store to do some shopping for you! After reading it I thanked the woman for her concern. I said, can I ask you a question about the flyer? She said sure, fire away. I said, doesn’t this flyer kind of stereotype men? She responded, no! I said, do you have a calling all women procrastination pass? By this time a second lady working behind the counter walked up alongside the first woman to show support. After a long pause, she admitted, no we do not have that flyer for women. I then added, why not? Without hesitation she said, because we are perfect and don’t need one! I noticed the other lady behind her nodding in support of what her friend just said. Then the first woman leaned forward toward me and said, right? I immediately responded, absolutely right! I said to myself, do I have stupid tattooed on my forehead? Listen, I may be a procrastinator, but I can also be a politician when I need to be! That said, I think, in most circles that is, that nobody is perfect! But the good news is, that God uses imperfect people to do great things in His kingdom! I like to think of this as serving the God of new opportunity and second chances!

Here is the point: No matter what your past imperfections have been, including procrastination, your future is brighter than you can imagine, because God specializes in second chances and opportunities in serving Him. After Moses initially felt defeated, 40 years later God called him for a second time, to give Him a second chance to serve and be used by Him!

There are three things that we need to take special note of when considering new opportunities and second chances in serving God.

First: Past failures don’t decide my potential for the future. The halls of past failures are full of people that made a comeback with God. Abraham was a liar! On more than one occasion he lied. Why? Some noble cause, pivotal moment to protect an innocent person? No, it was to save his own skin! (Genesis 12,20) However, he came to be known as a friend of God! With a broken commitment and a tainted past, Abraham became one of the greatest servants for God that we know! Remember Jacob the chiseler and cheat? Took advantage of his brother Esau, taking his birthright, (Genesis 25-27) manipulated his father-in-law Laban out of livestock, (Genesis 30) yet even though he was a deceiver, God lifted Jacob to such heights, that his old name was changed to contain the scope of God’s work in his life; Israel! And what about Rahab, the prostitute? God selected her as his choice instrument to preserve the lives of His courageous servants, (Joshua 2) listed her in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11 as well as included her in the seed line of Christ! (Matthew 1:5) I could go on! Folks: No matter what your past has been, with God, your future is brighter than you can imagine!

Second: We have not arrived yet. God’s plan was to use Moses to deliver the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage and bring them to Canaan land, a land in freedom. At first Moses tries to help out his people in his own way, and by his own might. Exodus 2:11-15. In a sense he was trying to take his ministry by force. When it did not go well, and he experienced defeat, he ran away to Midian for 40 years! God finally appears to Moses in a burning bush, again calling him to the mission He had planned to use him for. Exodus 3 God’s people left the bondage of Egypt heading toward the land flowing with milk and honey but ended up wandering in the wilderness for 40 years instead! When you take your eyes off the goal, when you forget that you have not arrived yet, you end up settling for where you are rather than moving forward to where God wants you to be! Paul says, “forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” May we never settle for the distance we have come rather than the promises God has prepared for us!

Third: Present opportunities are new chances to be moved by God. The second 40 years- “The Burning Bush of Opportunity.” This was an ordinary day with an extraordinary opportunity! You might be thinking that today is just another day, but it’s not! Today is your “Second Chance” to again be moved by God! The day Moses saw the burning bush wasn’t so special, but the God who was present was! What changed the ordinary to the extraordinary was Moses’ response to God in the bush! When God is trying to get our attention, we must be moved! Moses said in Exodus 3:3 “I must turn aside now, and see...” When Moses stopped his forward motion, his attention was captured by God. “When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush...” v.4 Why then? Because God knew that at this point Moses was prepared to listen! Folks: Every day, bushes burn, needs abound, opportunities to share, serve, forgive, encourage, and more are upon us. Remember, when God is trying to get our attention we must be moved to action! It’s a pivotal moment! Remember, no matter what your past has been, the future is brighter than you can imagine. We serve a God who brings opportunity and second chances to His people! Let’s be ready when He calls us!

Have a great day!

Mike

**June 9, 2020**

Good afternoon!

The Scriptures Of The Day!

Today let’s take a look at some meaningful verses from God’s word on Kindness.

• "... I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 9:24

• “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” Colossians 3:12

• “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Ephesians 4:32

• “Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.” Acts 9:36

• “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” Romans 2:4

• “Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.” Proverbs 3:3

Kindness, and acts of kindness come in many forms! One time I spontaneously decided to pay for a lady’s groceries who was in line behind me at the market. It looked like she could use some help. When I told the young man at the register what I wanted to do, he just stared at me and said, “are you allowed to do that?” The woman was so thankful that she thanked me all the way into the parking lot. I didn’t do it for praise, I didn’t tell her my name or what church I went to, but to simply show some kindness to a person who looked like she could use a boost! Showing kindness and letting people see Jesus in your life is always a good thing! Try doing a simple act of kindness today and let your light shine for the Lord!

**June 8, 2020**

Good afternoon!

I was in New York City some years ago at a pizzeria in Greenwich Village. Because it was crowded inside the restaurant, I decided to sit at an outside table to eat my two slices of pepperoni pizza. There is nothing as good as real NY pizza! There were other people around outside enjoying their lunch as well. While I was eating, I noticed a well-dressed man, wearing a three-piece suit coming out of the restaurant with a slice in his hand. Because there were no seats available inside or outside at the moment, he just leaned up against the side of the brick building with one foot up against the bricks as he was eating. On the opposite side of the entrance was an open trash can that was there for all of us outside folks to use. It was then that I saw a street person slowly walk up into our area. After looking around some, he suddenly started going through the trash can looking for something to eat. He came up with a few old end pieces of pizza, a used Starbucks coffee cup and an ice cream cone that was melting and almost finished. He leaned up against the wall in the same way the guy with the three-piece suit was leaning with one foot up against the bricks. As I observed them both on opposite sides of the door of the restaurant in the exact same posture, like bookends, it was a striking picture of clean and unclean, holy and unholy, or was it? When it comes to biblical holiness, is it something that begins on the inside or outside?

Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 23:26-27, “You blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup... so that the outside of it may become clean also... you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and uncleanness.” Jesus was basically saying as it pertains to holiness, that the Pharisees were like a graveyard on winter’s day covered with a white blanket of snow. White on the outside but diseased on the inside. This reminded me of a bright white freezer I had in my garage one time full of food. It was during July when it was hot that a fuse blew out in the garage but I was unaware. After about a week, I went to the freezer to get something. When I opened the door, the food was all spoiled. The smell was horrific! Outwardly the freezer looked great, inside it was rotten meat! In Matthew 14:15-20, Jesus tells us that what defiles us is not what we eat that goes down into our stomach, even if it is a dirty old piece of discarded pizza, but what is in a man’s heart. The point is clear to see and understand. Our being holy begins from the inside out!

With that said, what is the measure of our holy lifestyle? Three things:

1. We need to have a biblical holy perspective. In I Peter I:14-15 Peter says, “like the Holy One who has called you, be holy yourselves... you shall be holy, for I am holy.” I am about 5’9” in height. If I had all of the kids from church join me at the front of the church building, compared to them I am easily the tallest. However, If I selected a few different brothers in the audience to also come up instead of the kids, suddenly I would be the shortest! When it comes to being holy, we are not to be comparing our holiness to other individuals. We can always find someone who seems to be less holy to compare ourselves with to in order to say, see I’m pretty holy compared to him or her! Peter said “like the Holy One who has called you, be holy.” When God is our standard, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. Don’t get caught like me at the pizza restaurant in NYC comparing the well-dressed man to the street man and thinking wow, that one guy compared to the other is clearly better. Our measure of holiness begins on the inside, as we use God Himself as our standard!

2. We need to have a holy inward focus. Colossians 3:1-2 is one of my favorite passages. It says, “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is... set your mind on the things above, not the things that are on earth.” Let me ask you a question. What do you daydream about? A vacation in Florida or abroad? Hitting the lottery? A bigger house or a newer car? Do you ever daydream about reading your bible more, praying longer, being in heaven or talking with the Lord on a more regular basis? Daydreams and thoughts usually give us insight to what we value the most! You might be thinking, Mike that’s a nice preaching point, but I live in the real world where I am surrounded by anger, hate, greed, impurity, violence and more! Our eyes are surrounded by evil and our ears are constantly filled with ungodliness! How can I possibly be holy, separate, seeking the things above when I live below! It’s about priorities! Remember, holiness begins with an internal focus not an external focus! It’s all about setting your mind on things above first!

3. We need to have an outward holy practice. Colossians 3:5-15 continues with, “Therefore, consider the members of your body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed... put them all off... put on a new self who is being renewed... and so those who have been chosen of God; holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience....and let the peace of God rule in your hearts...” The point is that a holy practice is only a result of the holy focus! What you are and what you do always begins in your heart and mind! Again, it’s all about an internal holy life first, and not settling for an external holy appearance alone. Like the two men outside the pizza restaurant, as it pertains to being holy, let’s not judge others or ourselves by what we first see on the outside, but begin on the inside where God does as well!

Blessings,

Mike

**June 5, 2020**

Our world today is very mindful of protection! On a national level, the President has a security team, the White House has security barriers. As a country, we have the Pentagon, the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, National Guard, Coast Guard. On a local level, the protection continues. We have Law enforcement, the police, home security, church security, personal security in the way of guns, cameras, dogs, and for some even cats with attitudes! Even on an individual level, protection is so very important. We install antivirus software to protect our computers. We install home safety equipment to protect our homes. We wear protective clothing at times to protect ourselves in hazardous situations, and so much more! Folks, every one of these areas of protection is valuable, important, and necessary. But there is one that rises above them all! Guarding our hearts! Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

Did you catch it? Above all else! In other words, make protecting your heart more important and everything and anything else! Make it the number one priority! Put a premium on it! The literal Hebrew text says “more than all else.” This is the utmost important thing that one can do! As the New American Standard bible says, do it “with all diligence.” The original language for guard here is defined as “a place of confinement, something closely observed, protected, preserved, guarded.” Why? Because “from it flow the springs of life.”

Here is the point: Who and what you are begins in your mind and heart, so above all, guard it! Everything you do in your life starts in you heart! I am sure you have heard the old saying, you are what you think! Proverbs 23:7 says, “As he (man) thinks within himself, so he is.” I have always been told that you are what you eat! I was behind a lady at McDonald’s one time who ordered a Big Mac, large fries, 2 apple pies, and a diet coke. I couldn’t help chuckling some and had to ask her the obvious question. I said, “excuse me but with an order like that why the diet coke?” She said, “every little bit helps!” Well, to be sure, you are what you eat, but what you eat begins with what you think! We don’t just suddenly find ourselves at the counter ordering food without first thinking about what we want first! All actions begin with a thought!

When I lived in Queens, two teens came into the hallway to our apartment in Jamaica where we lived. We lived on the second floor but had our bicycles in the hall on the first floor. The two boys just walked in the hall and started stealing things off of my bike. They didn’t suddenly find themselves in the hall as thieves! They became robbers in their hearts first, and then committed the act! I knew the boys and when I told my mom we went to their house and got the items back. I learned a few things that day. Inspired by Jim Croce song, you don’t tug on superman’s cape, you don’t spit in the wind, you don’t pull the mask of the old lone ranger and you don’t mess around with a little Italian lady from Italy named Rose, my mom! PS, it didn’t end up well for the two boys! All actions can be traced back to an initial thought! The kind of servant you are has to do with how we think as well! What kind are you? If you think like a soul winner you will act like one. If you think respectful thoughts you will treat others respectfully. If you dwell on the joy of your salvation you will be grateful! Great churches begin with a thought! A great prayer life begins in our minds! Great service to the Lord begins in our hearts! Acts 2:23 even tells us that God Himself, when it came to the sending of His Son to save us was “the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.”

Two things to keep your heart protected and guarded:

1. Beware of doubt to the point of despair. Satan’s first attack in the garden on Eve was creating doubt. In Genesis 3 the text begins by saying, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field.” He began to question what God had told Eve about dying if she disobeyed and ate from the tree by saying “You shall not die.” In fact, “you will be like God knowing good and evil.” Eve takes the bait and begins to reason to herself, hey this makes better sense to me than what God has said. Warning: Anytime we replace God’s word with human logic, problems will arise and intense levels of doubt will begin! You see, if it needs to make sense to me first or I won’t do it, then the standard for my life as a Christian is human logic over faith in God! Proverbs 3:5 “Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” Wise counsel for the guarding of your heart!

2. Remember, trust in the promises of God! The biggest smasher of a crippling doubt is a believing faith! We sing the song standing on the promises of God! Again, “Trust in the Lord with all of your heart.” Feeling like God has let you down is nothing new in scripture. We like to always focus on the popular themes of the bible like Paul and Silas singing in prison. Daniel surviving the lion’s den. David taking down Goliath, and so much more. We don’t like to talk much about Moses when he felt overwhelmed in the wilderness with the problems of all the people saying, why me God? How about when Elijah was on the run from Jezebel in fear of his life or Jerimiah and Job who were crying out to God thinking, where are you Lord? However, when you trust in the Lord with all of your heart and guard your heart against despair and doubt, you will remember that God is always with us! In the end, Moses who did all that whining ended up writing the song of Moses praising God. Job who questioned God, in the end after God spoke and revealed some things to him, said in a sense, God, I’m sorry that I shot off my mouth, I’m for You and I know that You are for me! Jerimiah who was upset and uncertain ended up writing “The steadfast love of the Lord.” DON’T EVER GIVE UP ON GOD BECAUSE GOD DOESN’T GIVE UP ON YOU! God always keeps His promises! Hebrews 13:5 says, “I will never desert you or forsake you.” We can always have trust in the midst of uncertainty! Keep your heart protected and guarded by trusting in Him!

Blessings,

Have a great weekend,

Mike

**June 4, 2020**

Dear Friends,

The Scriptures Of The Day!

Today let’s take a look at some meaningful verses from God’s word on Patience.

• “Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.” Proverbs 14:29

• “Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.” Proverbs 16:32

• “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.” Psalm 37:7

• “Love is patient.” I Corinthians 13:4

• “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9

• “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage, with great patience and careful instruction.” 2 Tim 4:2

• “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Exodus 14:14

• “But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life.” I Timothy 1:16

• “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” Psalm 27:14

At times being patient is very difficult! Learning to wait can be tough especially when we have been waiting for a long time! Whether in line at the store, or on hold while waiting on the phone, spending too much time in the house not getting out. Remember, patience is not a wait but a state of mind!

Blessings,

Mike

**June 3, 2020**

Good afternoon!

A woman speaking to her minister said, “Things have been doing better with him and I. There were problems for a while, so I took a trip by myself for two weeks! When I got back, his attitude and behavior were much better. I even let him sleep in the bed with me my first night home.” Then she added, “I really love that dog!”

All along I assumed that she was talking about her husband! I’ll bet you did too! Have you ever wrongly assumed something? Hey, I’m not the only preacher that wrongly assumed a situation. I read of the dedicated preacher who went to visit a wayward member of the church. When he arrived at her house, he knocked on the door but no one answered. He decided to step into her front bushes and peek into the window. He could see that someone was home as he could hear that the TV was on. Assuming that the woman was avoiding him, he thought that is would be clever to leave his card at the door with the scripture Revelation 3:20 written on it. “behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in...” The next day when the preacher arrived at his office, the same card that he had left at the woman’s house was now pinned to his office door Genesis 3:10 written on it. “I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked.” Never falsely assume something without knowing the facts!

In Matthew 22:1-14 Three false assumptions take place. Jesus tells The Parable of the Marriage Feast. He begins by saying that “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son.” Invitations were sent out but there were only rejections to the offer. After other attempts, the invitation went out to the highways and into the streets. Those who went to invite more people, gathered many who came both good and evil and the wedding hall was filled. However, “When the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, friend how did you come in here without wedding clothes? And he was speechless.” In the end the man was put out! To the religious listeners Jesus is driving home the point that even those who accept the invitation of the king, must come to the feast on the king’s terms and not their own! The biggest tragedy here is self-deception due to wrong assumption!

Did you notice that Jesus called the man friend? The guy is not the king’s enemy, but he is still not welcome. Why? Typically, according to some commentators, first century custom was that when you were invited to a wedding feast, upon your arrival before entering the hall, an appointed individual or the host would offer the proper clothing for you to put on. This one individual obviously declined the offer for the appropriate attire feeling that there was no need for him to change. Not having the been properly clothed for the wedding feast was not only an insult to the host but unacceptable. The garments speak of our need to be clothed in God’s righteousness and not ours if we want to be received at the wedding feast! Galatians 3:27 says it well, “For all of us who were baptized into Christ have been clothed yourselves with Christ!”

There are three dangerous assumptions that we need to be on guard against.

1. Never assume that an outward social church relationship is the same as an inward spiritual relationship with Christ. What was the problem? What was the man thinking? Everybody else at the feast was wearing the wedding garments. Sure, the invitation was a come as you are to the feast, good and evil. However, before you are accepted inside the feast there needed be a change. Yes, come as you are but only enter on my terms not yours. The real issue here was, that he didn’t think that is was necessary to be clothed differently. He was there enjoying the feast, the fun, the food, the socializing of the celebration. Wasn’t that enough that he came? But, when the king said that he couldn’t be there like that, he was speechless. Why? A very wrong assumption! A right relationship with Christ is much more that a social relationship with Christ. Being in a church building on Sunday, or attending a church service including staying around for the potluck dinner on the grounds, is very different than obeying the gospel and being clothed with Christ and putting on the wedding clothes of a right relationship that He calls us to do. What do you hang your salvation hat on? Your presence or your obedience?

2. Never assume that our standard of righteousness is the same as God’s standard of righteousness. The man had a right to be there. After all he was invited! But when asked to change into the proper clothes, he chose to do what he had a right to do, refuse and continue to wear his own street clothes. One of the biggest mistakes that some folks make when it comes to doing as Christ requires us, is allowing human logic to become the standard above the written word. The man may have reasoned to himself; these clothes are just fine. However, the word of God always trumps human logic. I remember the first time I ever did my own laundry at a laundromat. The instructions on the detergent box said use one cup of power. I reasoned to myself, these clothes need a lot more than one cup. About 15 minutes into the wash cycle the suds began to pour out of the top loader washing machine. The soap was now spreading all over the floor making a huge mess. People started yelling out, whose clothes are these, whose clothes are these? I promptly jumped up and said, whose clothes are these, and left the laundromat and the clothes. Human logic over the written word only results in bad outcomes! Come to Jesus as He instructs us not as we think we should on our terms.

3. Never assume that being part of the crowd is the same as being looked at as an individual. The man was in the crowd participating in the festivities. Yet, the king singled him out! His acceptance there was not based on what others did or who the others were, but on him and him alone! One time I was at a NY Giants football game. The Giants won the game over the Dallas Cowboys. On the way out of Giant’s stadium, all of the fans were yelling, we really whipped those Cowboys! I thought, well all we did was sit in the stands and eat hot dogs and drink soda. We may have all been gathered at the same stadium together but I’m not sure what I did was on the same level as what the players did. When we stand before God we won’t come before Him as a group but only as an individual! God is calling us to the wedding feast personally! Let’s come to the Christ on His terms and enjoy the wedding feast to come!

Blessings,

Mike

**June 2, 2020**

Dear Friends,

The Scriptures Of The Day!

Today let’s take a look at some meaningful verses from God’s word on PEACE.

• “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.” Proverbs 16:7

• “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let not your heart be troubled, and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

• “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:1617

• “He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.” Mark 4:39

• “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” Romans 16:20

• “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Colossians 3:15

• “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.” II Thessalonians 3:16

With all of the unrest that is going on in our country at this time, may we be praying for peace. Remember, peace is something that is not always found in the circumstances around us but because of a relationship we have with God, it can always be present within us.

Blessing,

Mike

**June 1, 2020**

Good afternoon!

While I was living in Ohio, I mentioned from the pulpit one Sunday morning that I loved the Buckeyes! This was a big deal for the folks in Columbus as loving their home football team was important. Now, being a New Yorker, this made them very happy! Some in the audience actually cheered! But then I completed my sentence by saying, yes, I do love the Buckeyes, you know those chocolate ones with the peanut butter filling! Then I heard a low groan. The funny thing was that as a result of my words, the following Sunday I was given a box of homemade buckeyes by a sweet sister in the church! Words are powerful and can bring about many emotions and results!

Listen to some of the following passages from Proverbs that make this point.

“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent.” Proverbs 10:19

“He who guards his mouth, preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.” Proverbs 13:3

“Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise.” Proverbs 17:28

“Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him” Proverbs 29:20

“He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from trouble.” Proverbs 21:23

In the first century three words could make all the difference between life and death. For Christians, saying or not saying “Caesar is lord” could mean the difference between living or dying physically! In like manner saying “Jesus is Lord” would also make the difference between living and dying spiritually! At a wedding ceremony saying the two words “I do” verbally bind a lifelong covenant promise between two people. The words we speak are powerful and can bring about positive or negative reactions in many cases.

Years ago, I was in my car driving out of a crowded parking lot. I accidently cut in front of a car causing the driver to immediately become furious. I know this because when I looked at him through my rearview mirror it was obvious! He preceded to quickly pull up alongside of my car to confront me with his anger. As he was rolling down his passenger side window, he began by yelling, “hey you.” However, before he could say another word, I blurted out, “I am so very sorry my friend, I did not did not mean to pull in front of you, please accept my apology, and feel free to go on ahead of me.” Suddenly all of the bulging veins in his neck receded, and his entire demeanor changed. He responded, “OK pal, no problem!” I instantly thought of Proverbs 15:1 “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” The bible works! Words are powerful!

James give us some of the best advice when it comes to the power of the tongue. In James chapter 3 we find two powerful lessons.

1. The tongue is a small part of the body but powerful in nature. (3:1-6) James uses the examples of a bit in a horse’s mouth, a rudder on a ship and how a small spark can start a great forest fire. Such small things can command great power. Controlling a powerful horse with a small piece of metal, redirecting the path of a huge ship with the movement of a small rudder and how it only takes a spark to start a devastating fire all drive the point of how something can be small but have such great power. Thousands of acres of trees, homes, memories, and people have been lost to fires that started with a single spark. In like manner a single word of gossip can destroy an entire life! And so, James says, “The tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts great things.”

This is why James advises us in James 1:19 “let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”

2. The taming of the tongue cannot be done by man alone, we need God’s help. (3:7-12). James again gives examples of animals that can be tamed by man such as beasts and birds and the creatures of the sea. Go to the circus or SeaWorld and we can witness the taming of the wild animals in this world. However, the controlling of our tongues is a much bigger challenge. James goes on the say that out of “the same mouth comes both blessing and cursing.” James wants us to first realize how inconsistent our tongues can be, but his larger point is to not accept it. He says, “These things ought not be this way.” In other words, if we accept this as ok than we will never bring our tongue under control. What kind of tongue do you have, tamed or untamed?

Let’s strive for the right words! It was the right words that brought 3,000 people to Christ in Acts 2! It was the right words that were confessed by them that put them on the road to Glory. It was the right words that were prayed by so many that made such a difference in the kingdom of God! It was the right words of comfort to a nervous group of disciples by Jesus who said “peace be with you” that made a difference. John 20:26. I could go on and on how the right words made a powerful difference in the lives of people who needed to hear them at a pivotal moment! Before God, may we know the awesome things for His kingdom that can be done begin with the right words spoken!

In His service,

Mike

**May 29, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Put up or shut up?” What about “Put your money where your mouth is?” How about this one, “I’ll believe it when I see it?” And I know you have probably heard, “Let me see you walk your talk!” James puts it this way in James 2:18 “But someone may well say, you have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

Some time ago, Margie and I were on our way home from a busy day. We had just picked up a pizza and was now in the drive through lane at Wendy’s to get what we promised the girls that day. Margie was driving and I was in the passenger’s seat as we pulled up to the take out window to pay. When we came alongside the window the girl saw the pizza sitting on my lap and said, Oh wow, you guys have hot pizza! Margie responded by saying, yes would you like a piece? I think it was a nice jester by Margie, expecting the girl to say, no thank you but thanks for the offer. Instead the girl suddenly disappeared from the window for a moment and showed back up with the paper plate! Now it was time to put up or shut up! Walk your talk! To do more than say, be warm and filled, but to actually provide the food to warm and fill! So, Margie opened the box, grabbed the girl’s plate, put a slice of pizza on it and gave it back to her! I thought two things after that happened. 1.That’s what I call having a saying and doing faith! 2. That food that Margie gave away was definitely coming out of her portion of dinner!

In James 2:14-26, James speaks about a faith that is manifested by action and much more than lip service. A genuine faith is proved to be genuine by letting our walk be matched by our talk! Listen to how our brother James tells it. “What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warm and filled, and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so, faith, if it has no works is dead, being by itself.... show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

Faith by itself, if not accompanied by action is dead! Keep in mind that James’ subject here is faith! His point is not that faith is one thing and works are another. His point is that a real faith, a genuine faith, a biblical faith is expressed by ACTION! In other words, a working faith is a genuine faith! The Greek word for faith in the English language actually takes two words to describe it; Trust and Obey! This is why James uses these examples in the text to describe it by saying, if I believe in helping people but I am not following it up with obedience, that it is an incomplete faith! Notice the next three examples as well that drive the point home. “The demons also believe and shutter” Why? Like many people they have an intellectual belief of the Christ, but they do not obey the Christ. This is why they shutter. Saying I believe that Jesus exists, but refusing to obey Him is no different than a word only faith. I talk to people all the time that acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, but still refuse to obey Him. Next James says “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?” This is why the next verse says “You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of works, faith was perfected.” Finally, “Rahab the harlot also was justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.” Action faith with all three examples!

So what’s the point: We are not saved by faith or works! We are saved by grace through a working faith! “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and not of yourselves, it is a gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8. A active faith is our access to God’s saving grace!

There is one more lesson point I would like to make:

If your lifestyle is not matching your convictions, check your faith! In other words, if I believe in prayer, bible study, evangelism, standing for the Lord and more, but rarely do those thing, then James says, check your faith! This does not mean that when I am doing a lot I am saved and when I am not doing well, I’m in spiritual trouble. All people have good days and bad days. We do not flip flop in and out of being saved! We are saved when we are having a good day as well as when we are having a bad day. This is why we are saved by grace and not by works! It is a gift of God, and you can’t earn a gift! What James is saying is that having a genuine faith is all about ACTION and not words only. Talk is cheap as it is said! So, it is time to walk our talk! It may be expressed by giving a slice of pizza to someone simply because you said you would. But more importantly it’s doing more than reading God’s word, studying God’s word, teaching God’s word. It’s all about obeying God’s word! We must be Christians who do more than promote the Christ, but live for Christ! I learned this lesson years ago as I was exiting a grocery store walking to my car. The store bagger was along with me pushing one of the two full shopping carts to my car. He said to me on the way to the car, I see that you are a Christian! I first thought that he must have noticed my positive attitude or reference to being blessed or something. I asked him, what makes you say that? He said well I noticed the T- shirt you are wearing says, the church of Christ on it! Boom! Convicted again that talk is cheap but actions are proof! Is your faith an ACTION faith?

Have a great weekend,

Mike

**May 28, 2020**

Dear Friends,

The Scriptures Of The Day!

Today let’s take a look at some meaningful verses from God’s word on JOY.

• “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Philippians 4:4

• “When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.” Psalm 94:19

• “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” I Peter 1:8-9

• “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalm 118:24

• “Be joyful always.” I Thessalonians 5:16

• “The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save; He will take great delight in you; He will quiet you with His love; He will rejoice over you with singing.” Zephaniah 3:17

• “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” I Thessalonians 5:16-18

There are times in our lives when we feel unhappy! Maybe with all that has been going on in the last few months, you may be thinking that your joy cup is running on empty. While it’s true that happiness and unhappiness cannot coexist, regardless of whether you are either, you can be joyful. Inner joy is never determined by the outer circumstances around us but by the right relationship we have with the Lord above us! Joy is a choice! I choose joy, what’s your choice for today?

**May 27, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Thought of the Week

A few years back I was at the shopping mall looking for a parking space. The lot was fairly full but I happen to notice an opening close up toward the front. I quickly pulled up to the space and decided to back in so it would be easier to pull out when I left. As I was backing up while looking in the rear-view mirror, I could see that a pickup truck was in the space directly behind mine. What I didn’t see was that he had his tailgate down which was actually hanging over into my space some. I was only rolling at about 2 mph in reverse when I heard a bump. I got out to see what happened and to my pleasant surprise there was absolutely no damage to either vehicle About that time the owner of the truck walked up. He was an older man. I explained and apologized to him about what had happened, but for the following 5 to 10 minutes he began berating me badly! My initial reaction was, are you kidding me pal! But before I said a word back, it hit me, that it was time to be patient, and definitely time to pray! When it comes to responding right when we feel that we are being wronged, patience and prayer need to be on the top of our list. They were certainly on the top of James’ list.

In James 5:7-20 James speaks of the importance of patience and prayer! Sounds like a good combo to me! The context actually begins in 5:1-5 with people being mistreated and wronged. It can happen on the job, in marriages, by rebellious children, a gossipy neighbor or even an unexpected encounter with a stranger in a mall parking lot. It can happen when we drive, at the grocery store or even at church! The issue is more about our response! James says “be patient... like ... the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it...you too be patient; strengthen your hearts...” A bit further down in the text in the same context James adds “Is any among you suffering? Let him pray.” There it is, the dynamic duo when faced with life’s challenges, patience and prayer! Let’s take a look at two practical applications.

1. When faced with struggles and challenges, start with patience. This of course is easier said than done! However, it is so very important as well. You may have heard the saying, don’t watch the grass grow. This creates impatience. However, like the farmer waits, patience is key. Especially when being wronged, patience as our mindset is necessary to better ensure a right response. This is where the 50-20 principle helps a lot! About now you are thinking, what in the world is the 50-20 principal? Glad you asked! It comes from the story of Joseph who was wronged by his brothers and others but through his patience God helped him with a right response! Genesis 50:20 says “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.” We need to see beyond the someone who may have wronged us to seeing the big picture from God through patiently waiting. This will keep us from drawing conclusions due to our limited perspective. We don’t need 20/20 vision, but 50:20 vision!

Point: Patience teaches us how we shouldn’t respond: James tells us, 1. Don’t’ blame others. “Do not complain, brethren against one another.” It is sometimes easy after being hurt or wronged by someone to take it out on the innocent. Maybe due to your frustration at work you arrive home and kick the cat, ignore the kids and yell at your wife! Don’t find someone to take it out on or blame. Be patient and wait for God’s help in how to respond. 2. Don’t feel sorry for yourself. “Behold, we count those blessed who have endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job.” Talk about suffering, and feeling wronged! Job lost much of all he had including his children. His questions were why God, and where are you God? For 37 chapters God was silent! Talk about patience! In the end God explains much to Job. Don’t miss the outcome, “the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” This is our motivation for patience.

2. When faced with struggles and challenges, continue with prayer. “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray... is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and a prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up... the prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” Whether physical sickness or spiritual sickness, prayer is powerful! Oil anointing in the scriptures was used in a variety of ways. One was a religious symbol for consecration to God. Both King Saul and David were anointed with oil. Another use was for treating physical wounds as a healing agent. In the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:34 he treated the wounds of the man who was beaten by robbers with bandages and oil. Of course, in the end, the healing is up to the Lord! This is why James says “let the elders pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

Point: God heals, our faith accesses the healer! All prayers are subject to His will! Prayers of faith don’t control God, but prayers of faith can move God! This is contrasted by the faithless prayers James speaks about in James 1:5-8. Prayers of doubt! In other words we need to pray believing and not doubting! Mark 11:24. James give us an example of this with Elijah in the following verses 5:17-18. He prayed in faith for the rain to stop and it did! Believe it or not I know this first hand! Margie and I were traveling back to Ohio years ago from NY in March after attending a wedding. It rained the whole time from when we left. Finally, now in the Pocono mountains on Interstate 80 in PA, I cried out to God, please stop the rain God, just like you did for Elijah! Twenty seconds later the rain stopped, and suddenly, poof, it started to snow! I actually laughed out loud thinking, God answers prayer, but also has a sense of humor!

When faced with a challenging situation, exercise patience and prayer, you can’t go wrong!

Blessings,

Mike

**May 26, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Good afternoon!

Today I send along some meaningful verses from God’s word on LOVE.

• “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are.” I John 5:1

• “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” I Peter 4:8

• “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Colossians 3:14.

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

• “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

• "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Psalm 86:15

• "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved." Ephesians 2:4-5

• "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law." Romans 13:8.

• "A friend loves at all times." Proverbs 17:17.

• “Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth.” I John 3:18

Do you ever feel like you use the word love a little too lightly or freely? Please take the time to ponder these verses and the implications of saying to another “I love you.” Let’s truly be ready to live up to the love we profess to one another and the Lord, with the actions of love that should follow. Amen?

Blessings,

Mike

**May 25, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Happy Memorial Day!

Does the value of blood vary depending on who’s blood it is? I read a story one time of a lady who showed up at a church with her dog. The poor dog had just been hit by a car and killed. Still bleeding and in the arms of the woman, she spoke to the preacher asking if he would perform a funeral service for her dog. The preacher responded, “We don’t do that here.” The woman asked if he would please reconsider. Still the preacher was not willing to budge. After a third attempt with no change in answer from the preacher, the lady said, “Well I like this church but I guess I’ll just have to go back to the church down the block where I used to attend and offer them the $5,000 to do it.” The preacher quickly said back, “Oh, wait a minute, I didn’t know the dog was a Christian!” It’s funny how values can change about bloodshed depending on circumstances and who’s blood it is! Although the blood of animals has value the bloodshed by the Christ is of the greatest value! This is reflected in the song that we sing “What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” In fact, Luke tells us in Acts 20:28, when it comes to Jesus and the church that “He purchased...the church... with His own blood.” It’s the blood of freedom!

This is a weekend of Celebrating Memorial Day. It’s a day to remember those fallen in battle. Those who died that we could live free, that we could have liberty! The price of freedom has always been high. I wonder sometimes if we take the blessings bought with blood too lightly. The interesting thing about blood is that without it there is no life. Blood is the very essence of life. Leviticus 17:11 tells us that “for the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you... to make atonement for your souls...” Hebrews 9:22 tells us that “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” In Exodus 12 the Israelites were told to take an unblemished lamb and kill it. Then they were to spread the blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. God said the He would “go through the land of Egypt and strike down all the first born in the land of Egypt.” However, for those who spread the blood over their doors God said, “when I see the blood, I will Passover you.” He then instructed the Israelites saying, “Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord.” In the years to come God instructs the people to say when their children ask them why they are continuing to celebrate the Passover feast “that you shall say, it is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians but spared our homes.” Without the shedding of blood there is no freedom, liberty, deliverance, forgiveness, protection, mercy or atonement! In like manner, because of the shed blood of the perfect Lamb of God Jesus, we praise God for the memorial that we celebrate each and every Sunday! Praise God for the Lord’s blood of protection, freedom, deliverance, mercy, liberty and atonement for our sins to save our souls!

There are three brief points to keep in mind as we celebrate Memorial Day.

1. The Passover and the Lamb: May we truly appreciate the origin and history of God’s protection and freedom of His people who were in physical bondage for so many years. He set them free from slavery hindering their enemy while at the same time protecting them from harm by the blood that was shed. Each and every year when God’s people celebrated this Passover memorial day, they did much more than plan a cook out and a quiet day at the beach. They remembered How God delivered them from their bondage! May we remember this point of history as well so that we can better appreciate our freedom too!

2. The Passover and the Lord: In I Corinthians 5:7 we read “for Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.” Just as the perfect lamb was sacrificed in Exodus for their physical freedom, Christ who is the perfect Lamb of God has been sacrificed for our spiritual freedom. Because of His shed blood, we are covered and protected from spiritual death! We have been washed in the blood, redeemed, delivered, protected, saved, atoned, shown mercy, love and forgiven. Just as they were set free from physical bondage, we have been set free for spiritual bondage! Praise God for the shed blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

3. The Passover and the Lord’s Supper: In I Corinthians 11: 23-26, we read about the taking of the Lord’s Supper. This was a memorial celebration of remembering Jesus sacrifice for us. Paul says “as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” As God’s people celebrated the Passover lamb being mindful of the shed blood and freedom that followed, we too celebrate this memorial moment, remembering the shed blood and freedom we enjoy in Christ. Taking the Lord’s Supper weekly is like a silent sermon proclaiming His death, burial and resurrection to life.

Peace,

Mike

**May 22, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Good afternoon!

Have you ever turned a dessert into a main meal? There is a great donut shop in Wilmington NC, on the beach called “Britt’s Donuts.” They make the donuts fresh on sight. Deep fried dough in boiling oil and then covered with glazed sugar. Better than Krispy Kreme, and I love Krispy Kreme! One time when we were at Britt’s I ordered a dozen. Still hot in the bag, I sat down on a bench and had one. It melted in my mouth almost like cotton candy. The instant sugar rush was intense. But, like Lays potato chips I couldn’t just eat one, so I had another, then another. Before you knew it, I had eaten way too many! My stomach was starting to get very mad at me for consuming all of that sugar. This entire good experience suddenly turned unto a bad one. I thought how could something that tasted so good become so bad? Here’s why? A dessert is meant to enhance the main meal not be the meal. Making a meal out of a dessert was not what it was designed to do!

In Matthew chapter 12 the religious leaders fall into the trap of prioritizing the wrong things resulting in a bad experience. The trap was making something the main emphasis that it was never meant to be. We can learn two very important lessons from their actions to be sure we don’t fall into the same trap.

\* Trap Number One: Elevating The Rules Above The Ruler. The chapter begins with the Pharisees approaching Jesus because “His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of the grain to eat.” v.1 The Pharisees said to Jesus “behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” v.2 What seemed to really bother the religious leaders was not so much that it was sinful, or an offence to the Lord, but that it was against the rules; their rules! This was against what they had made as their law. Jesus responds, “Have you not read what David did when he became hungry...they ate the consecrated bread... or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? But I say to you something greater than the temple is here... for the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath.” 3-8. What Jesus is saying is that there is something greater than the temple building, the system, and their laws. It what was the creator of all of these! These things were all meant to be a vehicle to an end and not an end in themselves!

The Point: The church assembly (or Sabbath day for them) is not an end in itself. It’s important, necessary, commanded, scriptural. But the purpose for it is to glorify God! Our peace and fulfillment should not be in the fact that we came to church, but what we came to church for! We don’t come to worship the assembly but the Lord of the assembly, the Son of Man who is the Lord of the Sabbath! Doing the reverse is like making the assembly the main meal rather than the God of the assembly! Folks God has called us to faithful attendance, being benevolent, hospitable, being a sacrificial giver and servant in His kingdom. But remember, Satan is a schemer. If you are not careful, he will have you elevating your attendance alone and getting your deeds box checked as a proof of your relationship. When this happens, before you know it your attitude, heart and motive and reasons for why and what you do disappear. Let’s not be faked out by Satan and be left standing before the Lord when our time comes saying, Lord, Lord, did we not give in your name, serve in your name, attend church faithfully in your name and more. May we keep the main thing the main thing by worshiping the Lord of the Sabbath as the main meal and be serving Him in every other way because of our relationship with Him! Let’s be sure the Ruler is above the rules!

\* Trap Number Two: Thinking That I’m Not Really Opposing Christ Even Though I’m Not Fully Committed To Christ. “But the Pharisees went out and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.” v.14 Clearly the religious leaders were against Jesus. However, Jesus goes on to say further down in the text “he who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.” v.30. Many people say to themselves, when it comes to Christ, that they are not against Him, like these Pharisees were, but just not fully committed to Him. Some believe that being natural is an OK place to be. They reason, well I am a good person, I pay my taxes and treat people nice, and obey the laws of the land and more. Don’t paint me as being against Christ.

The Point: Jesus is saying that there is no such place as the middle ground, no grey area! Jesus is saying that unless you are fully with Me you are in effect against Me! Have you ever considered yourself against Jesus? I haven’t! You may say as I have, hey I’m no Pharisee plotting to kill Jesus. But do you consider yourself fully committed to Him? There is a danger is settling for the middle where a line can be drawn before the Christ. Some say, I’m a really good person but there are some areas where I just have to draw the line. Maybe it has to do with a practice that needs to be stopped or a relationship that need to be restored, a stand that needs to be made at your job or at home. In each and every case there should never be a line drawn. Folks erase the line! Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that the neutral zone is an OK priority rather than the fully committed zone.

Have a great weekend!

In His service,

Mike

**May 21, 2020**

Brothers and Sisters,

Good afternoon!

Do you have true peace in your life? You may have heard people say that they just need some peace and quiet! Sometimes we think that peace means quiet. Not necessarily! I remember driving home one day after a very stressful afternoon. The silence of the car was so welcoming! I pulled up to a traffic light to stop and my peace and quiet came to an abrupt end. From the car next to me the music was so loud that it looked like the windows in his vehicle were vibrating. He must have had 10 stereo speakers in the car. The worst ones were those big base speakers. All I could here was booooom.... baboooooom over and over again. When I looked over to see who it was that was causing the racket, it appeared that nobody was even driving the car! All I could see was a wrist and hand hanging over the steering wheel because his seat was so far reclined that he was out of sight! I said to myself, this guy is ruining my peace and quiet! But you know peace and quiet does not always go together. Real peace begins with God from within us not from the circumstances around us!

Got Peace? In James chapter 4:1-10 we learn about true peace. Jehovah SHALOM means the Lord of peace. In 4:7-8 James says “submit therefore to God... draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” This is peace by way of submission to the God of peace. The result is being near to God, and Him being near to you in a special way that brings a unique peace in any and every situation. It doesn’t get any better than this. I remember as a young boy when I was upset, restless or unsettled about something, my mother used to have me come sit on her lap and put my head up against her body holding me close. I remember hearing her heart beating. Soon all my problems were replaced with peace. This is what God does for us when we draw near to Him!

There are two things in this text that we need to learn when it comes to peace by way of submission.

1. The Problems To Peace. 4:1-6. James says that the source of the peaceless problems “come from your desires that battle within you.” This is an inner conflict! He goes on to name a few areas of conflict like “you want something but don’t get it...you quarrel and fight...when you ask... you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” I have talk to some married couples that quarrel a lot, they want something but they don’t get it, their motives are all about their own pleasures first. They end up saying, I just need some peace and quiet! They stop talking. It’s quiet in the house but they have no peace! Paul said in Ephesians 4:14 that Jesus is our peace. There may be the absence of war with some foreign countries, but that is very different than being at peace with them. There is a big difference between external peace and internal peace. External peace may be the lack of war or fighting but still having the inner conflict and unrest going on, but internal peace only comes when we submit ourselves to the God of peace, resulting in real peace regardless of the circumstances surrounding us!

The Point: When the focus of our lives is our own pleasures rather than His purpose, we create our own inner turmoil! When we lived in Ohio, we went to the Ohio State Fair. This was a big deal for a city slicker like me to see! I remember eating funnel cakes, homemade fudge, huge ears of corn soaked in butter! For lunch I had a sausage, pepper and onions sub and washed it down with a few cokes. Later in the day I had more of the same. Do you know that my stomach had the nerve to have an attitude! It was really upset with me and within me! This was a self-inflicted wound! I hear folks say, I can’t believe my life is in turmoil when the source of the problem is the conflict within them. Jesus said it best in Matthew 6:24, “no one can serve two masters.” Duel Lordship is an impossibility! True peace will only come by way of complete submission to Him.

2. The Solution To Peace. 4:7-10. James says “draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” The Hebrew writer tells us “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:16.

The Point: James gives us 5 ways to draw near. 1.“Submit therefore to God.” Yield completely to His will and authority. Commit your life to His control. When we choose submission, we can draw near and find true peace. 2.“Resist the devil.” The good news is that as we resist the devil he will flee. He may be a deceiver and an accuser, but he is a total looser! 3.“Cleanse your hands.” In other words, lead a pure life. A pure life begins with a pure heart. Purity is not about an external separation but an internal one. I Samuel 16:7 says “man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.” 4.“Grieve, mourn and wail.” This is about sincere sorrow for our own sins. 5.“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.” This is all about recognizing that our true worth comes from Him and only Him, therefore we come before God in total humility and submission. The result is that “He will lift you up.” It doesn’t get any better than that! Shalom!

In Him,

Mike

**May 20, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Good afternoon!

A few years ago, Margie and I were at our kid’s school for a special event. When we were through, I went to get the car to pick Margie up at the front door. As I was pulling out of the parking space, I cut the wheel to the right too much and I heard a crunching sound! I quickly looked in the sideview mirror. Nobody was in the other car. I thought, somebody must have come out and moved that car closer to mine while I was inside! Not really! I tried to back up but just made the problem worst. I knew that the only and right thing to do was to take ownership of my problem, find the other driver and pay for the damages! About this time, I saw Margie walking up toward the car in the parking lot. When she got close enough to see what had happened, the first thing she said was “are you OK?” There was a side of me, in order to lessen the embarrassment that wanted to say I may be hurt, I didn’t sleep well last night or something! But before I could say a word she said, “It’s just a car, nobody is hurt, we have insurance, it could have happened to anybody, relax it’s OK.” I thought now that’s what I call grace! As a result, I felt gratitude! The key to our gratitude and truly appreciating God’s grace; undeserved favor, is to never take it for granted, feel entitled to it, believe that in some way we have earned it!

In Matthew chapter 20:1-16 we read a parable about the “Laborers In The Vineyard.” Laborers that needed work would gather at the market place waiting for an opportunity to get hired for the day. In the story a landowner goes out “early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard... he agreed with the laborers. to pay them... a denarius.” 1-2 Then... the vineyard owner “went out about the third hour and saw others standing in the market place; and to those he said... go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you. And so they went.” 3-4. In total he goes out 5 times all throughout the day to get additional workers, even up to the last hour of the day! The story continues with “when evening had come the owner of the vineyard said... call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.” v.8 The workers that were hired at the last hour of the day received a denarius. This got those who were hired in the morning very excited thinking that they would now get much more than what they originally agreed to since they were there working all day in the hot sun! When they only got what they originally agreed to “they grumbled.... and said...you have made them equal to us” 11-12 At first reading this it doesn’t seem fair! However, they did get what they had agreed to and the others received from the landowner what he chose to give them. The landowner responded to the grumblers, “did you not agree with me for a denarius?” v.13. He continues, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?” v.15. In other words, I can give people what they don’t deserve if I choose to! It’s my money! This doesn’t change what I have promised you. This is called grace! The bottom line is that whether you received payment from me early or late in the day, what is important is that you all received what I chose to give to you! Rather than complaining about how long you served in comparison to the others and elevating your worth above the late comers, you should be joyful that in the end all received the same grace that each needed. When it comes to grace, the ground is level at the foot of the cross! When you receive undeserved favor, God’s amazing grace, it should result in gratitude no matter when in life it comes your way!

Two short lessons:

1. Working in God’s vineyard should not be motivated by fairness or reward but rather by gratitude. Folks the eleventh hour workers didn’t get what they did because they earned it. They got it because of grace! In like manner we all come to God receiving what we do not deserve. This is call God’s undeserved favor! The result for what we received early in life or late in life needs to be the same, gratitude! If we are not careful, we can fall into operating in His kingdom on the basis of fairness rather than grace. The result is that you may miss the higher calling of gratefulness! Remember, whether you were baptized into Christ like my daughters were at age 11, or at 91 like a man I met in NY, Mr. Johnson, don’t forget that God’s grace is deeper than any ocean and wider than any sea and this is why His grace reaches me.

2. God’s grace is deserved by no one but offered to everyone regardless of who they are. Listen friends, even grumblers get grace too! Have you ever treated somebody in church as if they were less valuable than you? Less important than you? Less deserving than you? In I Corinthians 6:9-11 there is a list of church members who were previously, “fornicators...idolators...adulterers...effeminate...homosexuals...thieves...the covetous...drunkards...revilers...swindlers.” But then Paul says “And such were some of you.” No matter who you are or what your background, we are all equal because of grace. God sees us all as equal in value in light of His unmerited favor. The question is, do we see each other the same way? Do we treat each other the same as well? Nobody is better than anybody else when it comes to the kingdom of God!

In His service,

Mike

**May 19, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Good afternoon!

When you live in a house full of females as I do there are certain things you pick up that don't necessarily apply to men or that men don't usually pay much attention to. For example, you can't wear the same earrings and accessories with every outfit, although men do wear the same watch and rings with every suit. You must color coordinate in all areas, things must match, however, men don't seem to mind wearing a variety of styles at the same time, nice khakis with black sneakers and a white T-shirt for example. Women usually need to have multiple pairs of shoes to go with many different combos of clothes, where men typically need a lot less! In the house, furniture and window treatments, etc. must all go together. Most men on the other hand can be perfectly happy with less than perfect matching sets. Well, over the years I have learned a lot. I have been groomed in the art of what matches, color coordination, and what should go together. Thank you, ladies! All this learning, fine-tuning, preparing finally paid off one day while I was shopping in a department store in the bathroom accessories section. A woman was trying to match up a carpet with a plastic wastepaper basket. She looked over at me and said, excuse me but can you help me decide what matches? I said, of course! Definitely go with the deeper maroon wastebasket with the marble finish, that will really go with that carpet! She added, you really think so? I said, listen lady, I have been prepared for this moment!

In Matthew chapter 10 Jesus is preparing His disciples for the big moments ahead in their service of the Lord. "And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits...these twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them...as you go, preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 10:1-7. In 10:16-28 Jesus tells them “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves.... but do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul." In other words, if you choose God, no matter what happens in this life you can't lose! This in a way, was like the 2000 world series that was between the NY Yankees and the NY Mets. They called it the subway series. Being from NY, when I was asked that year who I was wanting to win, I would always respond New York! No matter what happens I can't lose! Jesus is telling the disciples, (like a manager in the dugout in a huddle before the big series) listen this is going to be a tough game, but I have prepared you for this moment. But know that before you go out there you have already won!

Now that the disciples have been prepared to perform, how do we apply all of this training? In the next chapter (Matt. 11) we find three practical applications for us today.

1. Remember, even the strong need encouragement and reassurance to keep on marching in His kingdom. In 11:1-15 we find John the Baptist in prison. He sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him "Are you the Coming One, or shall we look for someone else?" v.3 John had been bold in the wilderness preaching about Jesus. John now seems to struggle with some doubts about Him or the situation he is now in. He may have been thinking, why am I in prison if you are the Christ? Should I be suffering like this for doing the right thing for You? Notice Jesus’ response in 11:6, "blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." In other words, I hope your situation now does not change your faith in Me. Hang in there John! Jesus goes on to say, "there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist" v.11. I think some of the most overlooked people in any congregation are those who seem to be the strongest! May we be the encouragers for others that Jesus has prepared us to be!

2. Remember, the world's attitude no matter how oppositional can be addressed with boldness and success for the sake of the kingdom. In 11:16-24 Jesus condemns the attitude of that generation that seemed to take the opposite view of all that the Lord said, "Woe to you, Chorazin... Bethsaida... and Capernaum...you...will not be exalted to heaven..." These cities saw Jesus first hand and still refused to repent. Being sinful and needing to repent is one thing, but looking into the eyes of Jesus, knowing who He is, and still refusing to repent is worse! Such bold talk as Jesus showed us in this text is rare these days! However, when souls are at stake boldness needs to be present! Folks, we have a message of boldness that we have been prepared to share. Let's tell it! Let's share the all-powerful message of God. The word never misses a true searching heart!

3. Remember, Jesus frees all people from their burdens for the sake of the kingdom. In 11:25-28 Jesus says "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." When I think of Jesus, I think first of Him as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Mighty God and so much more. But Jesus chooses to say that He is gentle and humble in heart. He adds that His yoke is easy and that we can find rest for our souls. Jesus has prepared us to convey to this world that no matter your life situation, in prison as John was, entrenched in an evil culture like the cites He mentioned were, oppressed by persecution or weary from life, that you have a place alongside the Lord to rest and have peace. Jesus frees all people from all burdens in life!

In His service,

Mike

**May 18, 2020**

Good afternoon!

On a Wednesday night while we were living in Wilmington NC, Allison my daughter spoke to me after bible class and said that there was a problem in the women’s restroom. Apparently, one of the sink fixtures broke and the water wouldn’t shut off. I followed her in but first making sure that there wasn't anyone in there. I said to Allison, I'll take care of this, and I rolled up my sleeves and went to work. Allison then left the restroom but I didn’t notice. After a few minutes, the door opened and a woman walked in. As I then noticed that I was alone I quickly called out, "I'm in here!" After a pause the woman looked at me and said slowly, "Yes but why?" Ever feel like you would prefer to be absent from one place and be in another? The Apostle Paul said it this way in Philippians 1: 23-24 "I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ.... or.... to remain on in the flesh"

Many of you know that my sister Elise passed away last week suddenly. I want to thank you for the kind words of comfort and prayers that you offered. It made such a meaningful difference. Thank you! When I got up to speak at her funeral on Thursday a thought crossed my mind. I thought, I wish I didn’t have to be here doing this! She's not that old! This was so sudden and unexpected! I have spoken at many funerals, but when you look down at your notes and see your own sister's name on it, you don’t really want to be there, but rather be someplace else! For Elise, the fact of the matter is, her body may have been there but she was absent and already somewhere else! She was with the Lord, and Paul says "that is very much better" v.23. You see in reality, life is short but eternal life isn’t!

James tells us in chapter 4:14-15 “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." What do you spend your life living and planning for? Let me make two suggestions.

1. Don't leave God out of your plans. What are your dreams, plans, or goals for the future? Maybe completing an education, or getting married and beginning a family. For some it’s traveling to a distant land, for others it’s a new car or maybe just getting a car! It could be moving up in your company or buying a new home? My sister Elise, like most of us, had lots of future plans. She had just recently retired. Less than a month ago we spoke on the phone and talked about it all. Three weeks ago, she was planting tomatoes in her garden! Life really is a vapor! However, because she was a Christian, her future plans included heaven! Do yours? In Luke 12:13-21 we read about a man who spent his life planning for the wrong things. He left God out of his plans. He was doing very well in life materially and said to himself "Take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." However, “God said to him, you fool! This very night your soul is required of you." You see there were some things that the man forgot! He forgot that man is more than he owns. He also forgot God! This person made plans for many years but he only had one day left to live! I hear people say all the time, I've got time! How foolish it was to spend his whole life striving for a vapor of time! Basically, for things he would leave behind! Foolishness is leaving God out of your plans and building a life around the wrong things! How concerned are you about your house, your cars, your job, money, success? By comparison, how do you feel when you don't get time to study God's word, pray, build a relationship with God, family, and brothers and sisters in Christ? When our time comes the only thing that will matter is our relationship with God!

2. Don’t' leave God out of your plans or your plans may leave you out of God: "you are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." When I was in boot camp, I was told one time to go get a bucket of steam. This was an exercise the senior officers would impress upon us in order to establish obedience to their commands under all circumstances. Of course, 5 seconds or less after you had captured steam from hot water at the cafeteria the steam was gone. Like that steam our life can be a mist, a vapor, tentative at best. The real question is not how long will I live but am I ready when my time comes? Luke 16:19-31 tells the story of a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus who died. Lazarus went on to be with the Lord, and the rich man was separated from the Lord. Important questions arise from this story. What does God want? 1. God wants us to be justified with Him not man. The question is not what will impress people at the end of our lives, but what will impress God! People got up at my sister’s funeral, including me, and said such wonderful things. Facebook had hundreds of incredible posts about Elise and she deserved them all! But most importantly she lived a life of service to Him. That’s all that really matters when we breathe our last breath! 2. God wants us to be ready. My sister wasn't planning on transferring her membership to glory so quickly but she was ready just the same! Are you ready? We need to be at all times! When I was in the Navy, I was told that I always needed to be "Sea-Bag Ready." What that meant was that we needed to have a mindset of having our sea-bag packed and ready at all times because you never knew when Uncle Sam would call you to a new assignment in a moment’s notice. That happened to me on several occasions and I was glad my bags were packed and ready. When Elise got her call, she was ready to go and be escorted to glory. Being absent from this life and present in the next life with Jesus is a wonderful place to be! Again, as Paul said in Philippians 1:23, going to be with the Lord is "very much better." But what makes it better is being ready when He calls! Are you ready?

Blessings,

Mike

**May 11, 2020 (2)**

Remembering my wonderful sister-in-law, Elise McCullough, who passed away last night losing her short battle to aggressive cancer. As a family, we are all shocked at our sudden loss. She was the Matriarch of the family since losing our dear Rosie so many years ago and will be sorely missed as a wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, and friend.

Hug your family and tell them you love them whenever you have the opportunity - it's important for you and for them. Our last family gathering was this past Thanksgiving and we always share lots of hugs and kisses!

Elise taught us many things

How to love your husband for 51 years

How to take care of your children and grandchildren

How to accept everyone

How to manage a budget

How to make pizzelles

How to organize anything

How to play pinochle

How to roll out the pasta dough

How to make the best butter cookies

How to laugh

How to make gift baskets

How to drink sherry

How to love your friends

How to love God

and on

and on...

She was a believer and is now at home with the Lord. I love you and miss you

[Elise McCullough](https://www.facebook.com/elise.mccullough.3?__cft__%5b0%5d=AZV3-uHd31bhjVX38Sjysrz2x1EgbUaXl9llV982fY9MrpdJT1XtMo8GSkv8MX7PoGhuqP_TcbI_Msh9v17GkYegxMc5ArT7qfh-fDoqmoSuzFlnAR3tP-W3IaDM51YTmLA&__tn__=-%5dK-R)

. Rest in peace.

**May 11, 2020 (1)**

Dear friends,

Late last night my sister Elise lost her short battle to cancer and went home to be with the Lord. She passed just before midnight but was surrounded by her immediate family. Elise was a faithful Christian and member of the North Raleigh church of Christ for many years. She will be missed dearly. I ask for your prayers for our family.

Today I share a few scriptures of comfort and encouragement to any who needs to be lifted up.

“He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who morn are lifted to safety” Job 5:11

“The Lord is my light and my salvation.” Psalm 27:1

“The Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.” Psalm 116:15

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

“Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surly I will help you. Surly I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our afflictions with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this.” John 11:25-26

“Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would not have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.” John 11:1-2

“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and now behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” Revelation 1:17-18

Thank you,

Mike

**May 8, 2020**

Good afternoon!

If I could take an x-ray of the spiritual condition of your heart right now, what would it reveal? People, in general, seem to have a tendency to conceal certain private things from others, and would rather present an outward image that is much different. However, occasionally they show an inward side of themselves by simply speaking their mind from an unhindered heart! I have a good friend who works long and hard hours at his job. He is kind of a strong, tough, hard-working person that does demanding physical work. I was talking to him one day, and I asked him “how do you relax?” Before he had time to catch himself, he said, “I knit at night.” I just had a hard time picturing him in the recliner at home with a ball of yarn in his lap, knitting a sweater for his wife! It was a reflex response but it was true. People tend to wear masks in life at many levels. The closer the relationship the fewer masks they tend to wear because of the developing trust. I’m not sure that anybody ever removes that last mask to anyone if they are perfectly honest. Why? That is when we are completely vulnerable and fear the possibility of rejection. What I love about God is that He already sees behind all of our masks and chooses to love us unconditionally! Hebrews 4:13 says, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” I Love that! He loves our open heart and all with all of our flaws! No rejection!

In Luke chapter 5:1-11 we see Peter who reveals his inner heart to the Lord Jesus. It helps us connect to the real condition of our hearts and the need to keep our hearts in the presence of the Lord.

The story begins with Jesus doing some teaching but “the multitude...was... pressing around Him.” So, Jesus steps into one of Peter’s boats “and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the multitude from the boat.” The text tells us that there were two boats by the shore and Peter and the fishermen were out of the boats cleaning their nets. The work is not nearly done after being out all day fishing. Then comes the mending, washing of the nets not to mention all the fish that would have to be cleaned as well. This all made for a very long day! So, as Jesus is preaching and Peter is cleaning, Jesus now needs a pulpit of sorts to address the people. But what comes next Peter never expected. Jesus says to Peter, “Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Peter's reflex reaction is genuine. “Master we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at your bidding I will let down the nets.” Fishing all night was certainly hard work. You can almost hear Peter saying to Jesus Master we worked hard alllllll night, put back out, really? It was almost like a mild rebuke! But you see what came out of Peter’s mouth at that moment revealed his true heart! I know you Jesus, but does a carpenter know more about fishing than an experienced fisherman like me? I think I know better but because it is You that is asking, I will do it! In the next scene we see that so many fish were caught that the “boats began to sink.” v.7 Now Peter says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” V.8. Peter is hit by the reality of whose presence he was in; a holy Lord, a powerful Lord, a divine being! So, his heart reaction reveals the reality of his conviction. Suddenly he was faced with his own personal sinfulness, unworthiness and humble place in the life of Jesus.

In today’s lesson we look at two things.

1. How we respond when we are taken off guard is the best evidence for the true condition of our heart. You see Jesus caught Peter off guard. He surprised him first by asking him to put out in deep water to fish. Then came the big catch! Just as Peter’s unprepared response revealed his heart, a skeptic and a sinner, what pops out of our mouths at times BEFORE we have time to disguise it usually reveals the truth about what lies in our hearts as well.

2. How does your heart respond when you are taken by surprise? Are you happy with what you see and hear? I don’t mean when you are called by a parent or to the boss's office and you have time to decide how you want to respond. I don’t mean when you are angry about something or with somebody at home and the phone rings and you have a moment to put on a new tone. I don’t mean when you are very tense in the car on the way to worship Sunday morning and then you collect yourself to put on your church face before you go in and meet the brethren.

I mean more like when you are driving down the highway and you suddenly get cut off by a reckless driver and something comes out of your mouth and you say “where did that come from.” I mean when your spouse says something that hits a cord and before you know it, you are needing to apologize. Maybe it’s when someone confronts you with something you shouldn’t be doing and the first thing you do is rationalize it away rather than say, Lord I am a sinful man! Don’t forget the next thing that Jesus said to Peter after his honest response to the Lord. “Don’t be afraid” v.10. Peter didn’t need to be afraid just honest! The same is true for us!

Have a great weekend, be back with you Monday!

Blessings,

Mike

**May 7, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Teaching your children to drive can be a very exciting experience! I taught all three of my girls. It brought very special memories. Today, all three are great drivers but probably because they were quick learners and were very focused on being aware of everything around them. Aside from all of the basics that I taught them there were two things that I wanted them to especially get and really be aware of. The “Blind Spot” and “Seeing the Big Picture.” When it came to the blind spot, I told the girls, all you have to do is remember BLT like the sandwich! B for put your blinker on first, L for look over your shoulder toward the blind spot, and T for then turn into the next lane. It’s works well and is east to remember! The next idea of seeing the big picture was simply trying to help them drive and move their viewpoint from right in front of the car to looking down the road along with regular checking of the rear-view mirror and glancing from side to side periodically. Of course, at times when I would say “hit the big peddle NOW” (Brake), it would always have to be obeyed!

Being aware of the blind spots and seeing the big picture spiritually speaking is very important when it comes to seeing the truth in God’s word.

In John Chapter 9 we read a story of a blind man who ends up seeing all the blind spots and big picture about Jesus better than those in the story who had real vision! When you read the story, it is about a man born blind that Jesus heals and is then brought before the Pharisees who question him about his healing and who was responsible for doing it. In addition, the man’s parents are brought in and questioned as well to confirm the facts about their son and if he was indeed born blind and if they had any knowledge of how he was now healed. We learn three lessons from the three main characters in this chapter about the importance of blind spots, seeing the big picture and what hinders this needed view of the truth.

1. The Pharisees where wearing magnifying glasses. Back in the day before cataract lens replacement surgery was popular people who had cataracts (cloudy lenses inside their eyes that hindered sight) were given very thick convex lenses to compensate the removal of the lens. These thick glasses worked well with one exception. Like a magnifying glass you could only see well close up. The Pharisees had the same problem! Here was a man that was obviously healed of his blindness by Jesus. When asked by the Pharisees what happened he explained “He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed and I see.” v. 15. You might expect the response of the Pharisees to be, wow, amazing, we need to meet this miracle worker, but instead they said wait a minute “He does not keep the Sabbath” v.16 Some went further and suggested that because of this, Jesus was a sinner! How the Pharisees wanted to see things became their god instead of the God that was right before their eyes! They were hindered by their blind spot of how they wanted to see it rather than simply seeing the factual truth! They missed the big picture! We all have grown up with different traditions, cultures, religious backgrounds and more. That’s all good, but when these preconceived dispositions are elevated to the same level of scripture, they can develop into someone’s personal doctrine that creates blind spots to the truth! Let’s always be open and honest to the truth of God’s word!

2. The Parents where wearing shaded glasses. When the Pharisees called in the parents of the blind man to question them about how their son was now able to see, they responded “Ask him; he is of age, he shall speak for himself. They said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed, that if anyone should confess Him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.” 21-22. The parents had a motto that some followers seem to adopt, “Let’s not rock the boat... we don’t want to get kicked out of church! So, they go along with what is being said from the leaders even despite reading or seeing the truth right before their eyes! Wearing shaded glasses or what some call rose colored glasses brings about the same result, blind spots and missing the big picture of the truth about Jesus found in His word! Let’s not be afraid of embracing the honest truth we read in the bible ourselves!

3. The Man was wearing God’s glasses: You can’t help but fall in love with the pure honesty and clarity of the now seeing man. Also refreshing was his growing respect for Jesus regardless of the resistance he was getting. He begins by referring to Jesus as “the man.”v.11 Next he says, “He is a prophet” v.17 Then he actually becomes evangelistic after the Pharisees repeatedly ask him the same questions saying “I told you already, and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?” I love that don’t you? Here is a man who is completely unhindered by the fear that stifled the parents and the self-absorbed Pharisees that felt they knew better. He was completely set free by Jesus of so much more than physical blindness. He now could see the most important thing to see, the truth about Jesus and who He really is from His word and the boldness to act on it not hindered by the blind spots of others. Do you see the big picture about Jesus? Don’t let anything or anyone decide what you should believe or think. Leave it up to the word of God!

In Him,

Mike

**May 6, 2020**

Good afternoon!

While living in New York, every Columbus Day weekend we would travel to the Amish country in Lancaster, Pennsylvania for a time of fun and relaxation. The food was incredible, the country side was amazing and the Amish lifestyle was fascinating to see. Horse and buggies, handmade oak furniture, beautiful hand stitched quilts and so much more. On every trip without fail the one place that we would always visit was the Mennonite auction that was held under a huge white tent at the same location each year on this particular weekend. I can still taste the homemade chicken and corn soup and the slice of shoo-fly pie that I would get when I arrived there. Yum! Among the hundreds of items on the platform for auction was always a few of those beautiful hand stitched quilts on display. One year, Margie said that she really would like to have a certain quilt that was especially beautiful. After the auction was well under way, the quilts were then put up for bid. I only remember how fast the moment went and also how quickly the price increased as I sat there frozen in the moment. Before you knew it, the beautiful quilt was gone. Margie leaned over to me and said, “well are you going to bid on anything?” I determined to bid on whatever was the next thing up for auction and not miss out. As the next item was presented my right arm shot up in the air holding my assigned number. To my surprise my bid was the only one made, there were no counters! The next thing I heard was “Ok, three kittens sold for a dollar a piece!” Margie leaned over to me again and said, “you know I’m allergic to cats, right?” I had to give the three kittens away.

Missed opportunities come in many forms and with a variety of results. Today’s lesson is about realizing that when opportunity strikes, we need to take it and make the most of it or you just might end up with kittens instead of quilts! In the gospel of John Chapter 7 we see three missed opportunities that take place.

1. Jesus’ brothers missed the opportunity to have a unique relationship that some would never have. At the beginning of the Feast of Booths His brothers were prodding Jesus to go down to the feast to show Himself. However, their motive was not genuine as the text says, “not even His brothers were believing in Him.” v.5 Think about the wasted and missed opportunity of the brothers. They grew up with Jesus and had a built-in unique closeness from the beginning. They grew up playing together and working together, elbow to elbow in the carpenter’s shop. Now it turns out that their big brother is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! What an opportunity to team up with your big brother in the greatest cause there is, the kingdom of God! With already knowing each other so well, having a brotherly bond already, it was a huge missed opportunity! Folks: We need to be people who don’t miss the opportunity of having a special relationship with our older brother Jesus! Let’s not just live off a memory of Jesus but have regular reunions with Him in prayer and study of His word daily.

2. The Jews, High Priest and Pharisees missed the opportunity to learn deeply and serve powerfully. “But when it was now the midst of the feast...the Jews therefore were marveling saying, how has this man become learned, having never been educated...” 14-15. The highly spiritually respected and educated leaders who knew the word of God had hang ups! Where were Jesus’ credentials? How could this son of a common carpenter have anything to teach us? They were hung up on the wrapper and missed the content! These leaders sent to have Jesus apprehended! However, when “the officers therefore came to the chief priests and the Pharisees and they said to them, why did you not bring Him?” The officers answered, never did a man speak the way this man speaks. The Pharisees therefore answered them, you have not also been led astray, have you?” 45-47. These spiritual leaders were so focused on their own academic snobbery of who they were and what high position they had achieved that they missed the incredible opportunity of combining their spiritual influence, their teaching abilities, bible knowledge, and so much more to the greatest cause of their lives! It was all about them when it needed to become all about Him!

3. The Crowd missed an opportunity to have a confident conviction about Jesus but instead settled for confusion. “And there was much grumbling among the multitude concerning Him; some were saying, He is a good man; others were saying, no on the contrary, He leads the multitude astray.” v.12. They continued by saying to Jesus, “You have a demon” v.20. “But many of the multitude believed in Him.” v.31. These were just a few of the thing’s said concerning Jesus in this chapter. The bottom line is, Jesus said, “he who believes in Me as the scripture said, from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” v.38. Today people want to debate all the different viewpoints of man about Jesus and who He is resulting in a missed opportunity of who we know He is from scripture! The opportunity for confidence should never be missed or wasted by settling for confusion of who His is. You can truly and clearly know Him and have life in His name!

In His Service,

Mike

**May 5, 2020**

Good morning!

Hope all are doing well.

Today’s posting is an article that I wrote some months ago for the House to House Heart to Heart newsletter. I felt that it was a topic that would compliment yesterday’s Thought Of The Day about the mission of Jesus as well as ours, so I felt compelled to send this out as kind of a part two. Water baptism plays such a big role in the preaching of the gospel. Jesus Himself spoke to Nicodemus in John 3 about it saying “unless one is born again of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” John 3:5. Then beginning with the book of Acts moving forward it is all through the writings of the New Testament. Let’s take a close look at why water baptism by immersion is so important!

“Water Baptism By “Immersion”

Why is baptism by immersion so important?

I Peter 3:21 says, “baptism now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

In the book of Acts alone there are 10 accounts of conversions, where people believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, obeyed the gospel and were saved. However, the one common action in addition to belief, confession and repentance that completed the salvation process that is recorded in all 10 accounts was water baptism by immersion!

The bible does speak of different types of baptisms in addition to water baptism by immersion. Some examples are the baptism of John the Baptist, baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire and more. However, by the time the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus the only baptism that remained was water baptism by immersion into the Lord Jesus Christ. Eph. 4:4 “There is one body and Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” At this point in time and moving forward, the only necessary and valid baptism was water baptism by immersion into the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved!

First, let’s take a look at the word baptism itself. The Greek word here for baptism is “baptizo.” It means to immerse or submerge. “Rhantizo” is a different Greek word that means to sprinkle. “Cheo” is a third Greek word that means to pour. In today’s world people seem to believe that one is no different than the other, however in scripture these words are never used interchangeably. Conclusion: To be baptized biblically, one must be totally immersed in water.

There are Two reasons that I would like to share as to why water baptism by immersion is so important.

First: It is a symbol of death to an old way of life.

The bible says in Rom.6:3-4 “or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life”

Water baptism means to be immersed, and for good reason. It is symbolic of a death to one way of life and raised to another way of life. Have you ever been to a graveside funeral service where they only sprinkled or poured dirt over the casket? When one is buried, they are immersed 6 feet under! No different in scripture with water baptism.

Second: It is a vehicle or transition point unto salvation.

I Peter 3:22-21 says, “Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Just as Noah and his family were brought safely through the vehicle of the water from an evil world to a place of safety, water baptism is a vehicle thought which one moves from a lost condition to a saved condition. This clears our conscience! The waters of baptism are not magical but serve as a transition point through which one contacts the cleansing blood of Jesus and comes into safety by the saving grace of Jesus, because of His resurrection! Baptism is where: sin is removed, the Holy Spirit is received, and we transition into salvation. Acts 2:38/22:16.

The focal point is faith in Jesus as Lord! One could be baptized without faith; however, one with a genuine faith in Christ will always be led to repentance and baptism.

Although belief, confession and repentance are prerequisites to baptism they should not be looked upon as minor steps to baptism.

Water Baptism is the response of genuine faith and repentance. (It is not a work)

When one is being water baptized by immersion he is saying in the very act, I believe in Jesus and want to make Him Lord of my life! I die to my old self and trust He will raise me in newness of life receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and wash my sins away.

Blessings,

Mike

**May 4, 2020**

Good afternoon everyone!

Hope all had a good weekend.

Have you ever been on a mission for something? My daughter Liz when she was about seven years old was on a mission to memorize the books of the Old Testament. I have the New Testament books of the bible memorized but I never really put to memory all the books of the Old Testament without singing that song. Well one morning after Liz had been practicing her memorization, she came to me asking for some help. She said, “dad I think I’ve got it down can you listen and see if I get it right?” Sure! As she began to rattle off the books from Genesis and on, she was doing great. When she got to the minor prophets, she began to hesitate some. After saying Obadiah, she stopped to think. Then she looked at me and said, “dad can you please give me a hint?” “Who’s next?” “You know it, you’re the preacher!” While, trying to remember who was next without humming the song, I said, “I’ll tell you what, how about a hint?” She said “OK what?” I said, “he’s a prophet.” Just as I was about to confess, she said, “Oh yea, Jonah, thanks dad!” I said, “No problem!” Liz was on a mission, and when your mission is clear it helps to reach your goal!

Jesus was on a mission! His mission set the pace for our clear life mission here on earth as well! Matthew 18:11 says, “For the Son of Man has come to save that which is lost.” Notice that it doesn’t say that He came to heal the sick, although He did so out of His love for people. It doesn’t say that He came to feed the hungry, again He also did so out of compassion for His people. Mark 10:45 says, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for the many.” In John 17:4 Jesus Himself says “I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do.”

Two points:

1. The mission of Jesus teaches us that there is a major difference between the work others people wanted Jesus to do and the work His Father in heaven gave Him to do. When Jesus left this earth, many hungry people remained hungry, blind people still remained blind, ill people remained ill. Why? Didn’t Jesus say that He accomplished, completed, finished His work? How could that be? Because the mission of Jesus was not primarily for the healing, feeding or curing of people. Although He did so out of compassion, and can still do so today, this was not His primary mission. They were stepping stones to His mission! Because Jesus loves people He did all these things but never allowed these things to sidetrack Him from His primary purpose for His coming, “to save that which was lost.”

Question: Is your service as a Christian in line with God’s calling or have you settled for the stepping stones? There is nothing wrong with feeding the hungry, or helping the sick. Frankly, I’m guessing that we probably need to be doing more than we are. We are called to reach out and do so out of compassion without ulterior motives. But God did not call us to be good deed doers as an end in itself! All these things should come from a heart of Christian love for sure. Let’s not take our eye off the ball when it comes to what will have a lasting eternal impact on a lost soul! Salvation! II Cor. 5:18 tells us that Christ “gave us the ministry of reconciliation.... we are ambassadors for Christ.”

2. The mission of Jesus teaches us that He desired to not only keep the saved faithful, but to bring them to maturity. In Mark 3:14 we read that “He appointed the twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach.” Jesus didn’t want people coming in the front door of church to just end up going out the back door! His goal was for them to mature, grow and become grounded by spending time with Him, followed by them being prepared to go out for Him. The apostle Paul put it this way. “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we might present every man complete in Christ.” The Greek word for complete here is mature! Paul echo’s this thought in Ephesians 4:15 where he says that “we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.” In other words, Paul’s goal with fellow Christians was not just to become spiritual buddies as an end in itself!

Question: Have you settled for church activity with fellow Christians, with no real direction or purposed goal? Some folks reading this may remember Zig Ziglar the motivational speaker. He said one time, “Are you a wandering generality or a meaningful specific?” This is not about being busy in the lives of people, but having a meaningful purpose in the lives of people. How much of a difference has your life made in the lives of people in view of bringing them to Christ and then guiding them to maturity in Christ?

This was the mission of Jesus, what’s yours?

Blessings,

Mike

**May 1, 2020**

Good afternoon!

At the age of 89 my dad moved to Wilmington NC where I was living at the time. I would visit with him daily in his new apartment. Since he moved to town our relationship grew closer. I could tell how comfortable he was with me by the things he would say to me. Because he was very old school, he approached things much differently than I did. On one occasion while I was visiting him, I could see that his hair was cut short. I said, “dad, did you get your hair cut?” He said, “yea, I cut it myself!” I said, “OK, well why don’t I take you to get a haircut and let them do it?” I added, “You can get your hair cut these days for a good price, my treat!” He said, “you don’t need to spend any money.” Then he wanted to show me how he was cutting it himself. He showed me a number of mirrors that he had set up in the bathroom so that he could see the back of his head. Then he picked up the electric razor that he was using to do the job. When he snapped on the buzzing razor in his shaking hand I had to speak up. Because of our relationship, I said to him, “dad I will save you the time and money, let me cut your hair because it may be cheaper than the emergency room bill!” He looked at me and said, “son I got this!”

You know close relationships express themselves in many ways. The apostle Paul says in I Thessalonians 2:8 “Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become so very dear to us.” When it comes to the body of Christ, I cannot over emphasize the importance of strong personal relationships! God never intended our place in the body to be detached from the rest of the church! Imagine a liver without a body, a lamb without a flock or a child without a family! Over 50 times in the New Testament the phrase “one another” or “each other” is used. We are called to pray for one another, encourage, admonish, greet, serve, teach, accept, honor, forgive, submit, be devoted to, bear one another’s burdens, and so much more! Picture how it would be if everybody took to heart the responsibility of putting into practice the one another scriptures! Our relationships in Christ would become a powerful foundation for the building up of the body of Christ!

Lesson:

1. The body of Christ is much more than what we believe together, but also how we relate to each other. You see getting our relationships right are just as important as getting our doctrine right! In other words, we serve the same Lord, we believe the same word of God, we hold the same truths in His word and we are co-workers in Christ together! But we are also brothers and sisters together in one body! Paul said in 2:7 “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.” Can’t get much more relational than that! When you think of the apostle Paul you may think of this rugged man of power, position and passion! Someone who confronted false teachers with strength and boldness! Someone who was stoned, afflicted, persecuted, and so much more. Now he says to the church here that he wants to also have a personal relationship characterized like that of a mother does with her family. What I believe Paul is getting to here is that we need to stop allowing a belief system to be the only basis of our family ties!

It’s time to let our mutual sharing of the Lord be coupled with our mutual sharing of love! Let more than doctrine and beliefs bind us together. Let it be love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, affection, encouragement, comfort, gentleness and more!

Peace,

Mike

**April 30, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Over the course of many years I have ministered in many different churches of Christ, visited even more! Small congregations, new start up churches, large in number bodies of Christ. Churches in the north, south, east and west and even in a foreign country! When I am out of town and visiting other churches, I am always looking for new insights and ideas that might be helpful. I’m looking for something to learn, and example to follow, a model to observe. One time some years back while I was visiting a church in Florida, I got a real education. At this point in time our kids were young. Since I am usually preaching on Sunday mornings Margie watched over our children while I was up at the pulpit. However, this time we were just visitors and since I was only an observer, I offered to care for the kids and give Margie a break. When the girls starting acting up and it became a bit distracting, I decided to simply take them to the nursery. When I got there, many parents were also there with their kids! There must have been about 25 kids in that nursery playing and being somewhat loud. Most of the parents were trying to keep them under control but not with much success. As time passed, what was only about 15 minutes, seemed to be more like an hour! At one point as my patience was wearing thin, I spoke up to the some of the parents and said, “just how long is this preacher going to preach?” I learned two things from this parent responsibly role reversal at church services. First, I have a new respect for parents with small kids during service. Second, I’m glad I get to preach each week!

While there is no such thing as a perfect church, there is such a thing as a model church! Paul says in his letter to the church in Thessalonica “And so you became a model to all the believers.” Let’s take a look at two things that we need to learn from this model church.

1. They were powerfully impacted by the gospel. Paul says, “our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.” These folks were deeply affected and impacted by the gospel in their lives. Because of this it was more than just being convinced by biblical information but a conviction of their hearts! You see folks, we have not been saved by the gospel only to attend services each week, or to only take the Lord’s Supper weekly. These practices are good and need to be obeyed as scripture tells us, but remember what Paul said in Romans 1:16. “the gospel... is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” May we not intellectualize the gospel only! Our Christian lives are not to just be a long collection of facts. It is a powerful life changing message in our lives and the lives of others! It certainly was to the model church here in Thessalonica who received the gospel with great power and deep conviction!

Let’s remember when God first stirred our hearts! If need be let Him stir it again to be once again powerfully impacted by the gospel!

2. They were powerfully evangelistic with the gospel. Paul continues, “The Lord’s message rang out from you... your faith in God has become known everywhere.” The Lord’s message didn’t leek out, squeak out or spill out. It RANG out! Like a trumpet call! Jesus said “you are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” Matthew 5:13-14. It’s time to think BIG! We should not be motivated to ring out this message from guilt, but out of gratitude! This message is true! Paul said in Romans 1:14 “I am obligated both to the Greeks and the non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel...” The word eager here in the original language is the idea of a track runner at the starting line of a race anticipating the pop of the gun to bolt out!

Those of the model church were sold by the gospel so deeply that they therefore told others about the gospel. They had a deep personal ownership of their faith. Remember how thankful you were to the one who shared this saving message with you. Let God use you to do the same! “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” Romans 10:15.

Blessings,

Mike

**April 29, 2020**

Good afternoon!

While serving in the Navy I was given an assignment to travel from Norfolk Virginia to the Azores islands at Lajes air force base out in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Portugal. I was to be part of a team to repair one of the TA4-J jets in our squadron that had to make an emergency landing there. We were going to be taking a C-130 aircraft to the location. The C-130 that we were to be flying on is a large plane with 4 turbo prop engines that carries mainly cargo and has a huge tail ramp for loading and unloading. You have probably seen these planes on TV on the news from time to time. We took off from Norfolk and were heading east to the small island when it happened. After hours in the air and over a thousand miles out over the ocean, there was a sudden noise coming from one of the port (left) turbo prop engines. I went to the cockpit to talk to one of the 4 Marines that were flying the plane to ask about the engine. The pilot said that he had to disengage the engine due to some mechanical failure, but that there were still three good engines so not to worry. I said, me worry? I asked what would happen if we ended up going down in the ocean. How would we be rescued? He said, with kind of a sarcastic smile relax, when these C-130 planes go in the water they sink like rocks! Gulp! Well we made it to the island safely with three engines a few hours later. A week later, after the jet we came to fix was repaired, when it was time to head back to the United States, guess what we flew on? Another C-130! The whole trip home I was pinned to the window looking out flinching from time to time from every noise I heard.

Life is filled with uncertainties! So many people live with their lives pinned to the window of what may happen!

The 23rd Psalm is probably the most popular psalms of all. It is a psalm that pictures a shepherd that provides peace and security to sheep that have their noses pressed against the glass of the window of uncertainty in life. Let’s take a look at two things.

1. The Sheep: Sheep typically lack a sense of direction. They are also virtually defenseless. Unlike most animals that have claws, sharp teeth, speed, ability to hide or even a keen sense of smell, sheep are lacking. Sheep tend to be slow, awkward, weak and don’t even have an angry growl. Their main protection is their ever-watching shepherd. In addition to being frightened easily, sheep need the shepherd at the end of each day to help keep them clean. The shepherd spends the time daily removing any scraps of grass or dirt that may have gotten into their wool. The Lord is our shepherd too! Heb. 13:5 says “I will never leave you nor will I ever forsake you.” As we stand before Him in need of His cleansing, He cleans away our sins and makes us white as snow. I John 1:7 says “the blood of Jesus His son cleanses us from all sin.” No more uncertainty! Thank you, Jesus, our Good Shepherd of security.

2. The Shepherd: David says, “The Lord is my shepherd.” It’s a personal statement! Try filling in the blank with your own name. “The Lord is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ shepherd.” May we all come to a place in our lives where we can take a deep breath of peace and security and say, “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want!

“He makes me lie down in green pastures.” In our aspirin, hectic, stressful age that we live in there are times that the shepherd forces us to lie down and rest by way of circumstance that call us to be patient. This is for our own good.

“He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul.” Sheep are instinctively afraid of rushing water knowing that if they get wet and caught by the current, they could drown. Shepherds would use their staff to loosen a few rocks and create a dam of sorts creating a pool of quite waters for the sheep to drink from.

“Even though I walk through the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me.” The journey in life at times is dangerous, fearful and filled with uncertainty. Remember, our shepherd is leading the way, and He is with us all the way!

“Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” I read one author who wrote about middle east shepherds and their practices. He explains that shepherds don’t just turn their sheep loose in fields to graze. First, they inspect the area for vipers that lived underground. The vipers would frequently pop up from the ground and nip the nose of the sheep resulting in infection. The shepherd would spread the grass back around the hole on the ground and cover it with oil. He would also coat the nose of the sheep with oil. When the snake would then attempt to pop up from the ground it would not only slide off of the nose of the sheep but slip back down into the hole that was lubricated. The result is that the shepherd could prepare a table in the meadow and the sheep would be able to graze in abundance right in the enemy’s presence! Amazing!

“Surly goodness and lovingkindness will follow” .... as we .... “dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Have a great day,

Mike

**April 28, 2020**

Good afternoon!

I’m sure you have heard the quote “Love is a many splendored thing.” Perhaps you remember the song “What the world need now is love sweet love” (did I hear you humming the tune?) The word love these day gets used and thrown around constantly and even carelessly at times. People attribute their deep love to things like coffee, chocolate, cars, pets, football, naps or maybe even a noontime meal. People say, “I love it!” Even Cold Stone Creamery has included love into their products with their three size ice cream cups named “Like it” – small, “Love it” – medium, and “Gotta have it” – large. When we are giving this level of affection to a dessert it may be time to rethink the word love and it’s meaning.

In I Corinthians 13 the apostle Paul speaks about love. There are three things here that we should know.

1. The Principle of Love. (1-3). Without love all else is void! Paul says “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noising gong or a clanging symbol.” You know teens these days speak a foreign language at times. My daughter Liz is one of them. She said to me one time recently, “hey dad how about we have DP for dinner?” I said what’s that? She said Domino’s Pizza. I responded, SEOBG. She said what’s that? I said, Speak English Or Be Grounded! You see it doesn’t matter how many languages you know here on earth or in heaven above. Anything we do that is not love motivate is fruitless! You see whether you have the “gift of prophesy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge...all faith” and more, without love it is of little value!

2. The Practice of Love. (4-8). Love is an action!

Love is Patient. A patient love is when your two-year-old wants to dress herself and you’re late for an appointment, but you take the time you need to show her. It’s being wronged by somebody and having the power to avenge but you don’t. It’s taking the time to teach and not being stressed. It’s standing in line at the grocery store with one item and the person in front of you doesn’t let you go ahead and you’re still smiling. Patience is a state of mind not a wait in line!

Love is Kind. A kind love is not having an attitude of criticism but being sensitive and kind to mishaps and mistakes. 2 Timothy 2:24 says “The Lord’s bondservant must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all.”

Love Does Not Envy. Envy says I should have gotten what others may have received. It also feels resentful for what others have gotten. This is not love.

Love Does Not Brag. I remember when I played football in high school. I was made the caption of the team. I also remember letting the fact that I was team caption slip so that people would know. My dad would tell me son, nobody likes people who brag! Months later I found out from an outside source that my dad had been the captain of his football team in high school. He had never told me! He made the point without saying a word. Amazing!

Love in Not Arrogant. It’s not impressed with self-importance. It knows correction and instruction is still needed.

Love is Not Rude. Being courteous, polite and respectful are all part of love’s habits.

Love is Not Self-Seeking. There are those who never forget what life owes them, and there are those who never forget what they owe life. Which person are you?

Love is Not Easily Angered. When you lose you temper you lose much!

Love Keeps No Record of Wrong. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” God made history out of our past. Love does the same.

Love does Not Delight in Evil. Some people seem to be more attracted to what is wrong than what is right and good. What’s your focus?

Love Rejoices in Righteousness. Love rejoices with the truth. Whether the truth is painful or not love welcomes it!

Love always Protects. It seeks to save, help and guard.

Love always Trusts. In relation to God it takes Him at His word.

Love always Hopes. It refuses to take failure as final, it looks forward and sees what people can become in Christ.

Love always Perseveres. This is a conquering attitude. It looks to restore and stay protected by God.

Love Never Fails. When all attempts are made to solve a problem by human effort and it all comes crashing down love stands alone!

3. The Greatest of These is Love. (8-13) At all cost love! Love is most excellent! Why? Because faith without love is cold. Hope without love is grim. Love is the fire that kindles faith! Love is the light that turns hope into certainty! The greatest of these is love because God Himself is love!

In His Service,

Mike

**April 27, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Hope all had a good weekend!

What are some names these days that parents don’t use anymore when it comes to naming their kids? Maybe like Jezebel or Judas for obvious reasons. What about unusual names like a boy named Sue (Johnny Cash song) or maybe like a man I heard about named Hillary! What about names for our pets and other things in our care like dogs, cats, cars, boats, or more? I have a GPS in my car that I named Abigail, after the Abigail who is recorded in I Samuel 25! The reason is simple for me. This is a story about a woman who saves her husband’s neck when his actions took a wrong turn! The way I figure it, my GPS Abigail has saved my neck a number of times from making wrong turns!

Listen, almost every husband I know has a story about how his wife rescued him in one way or another. Now, before any of the men reading this start to get their feeling hurt, I know plenty of men as well that have done the same for their wives many times! However, the story in today’s text does lift up Abigail, so I will as well. I have heard many times men say or do something that may have been a bit off only to come back later and say, you know I’ve been thinking, and reverse what they had said or had done. What that usually means is, I went home and spoke to my wife and now I see it differently! I can’t tell you how many times I have missed something happening with someone at church services, only to have my wife Margie talk to me at home and say I think it would be good if you gave so in so a call. Women are usually living intuition relationship assessors! Abigail was such a woman!

In I Samuel 25, the chapter begins with stating that “David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.” v.1. This was very far south of Israel just above Sinai. Long story short, in this setting David is on the run from King Saul who is looking to kill him, so he goes to this area which is a barren land or what we may call no man’s land hoping not to be followed that far out. He is currently accompanied by 600 men. v.13. The problem is that anybody who lives in this place had to pretty much fend for themselves. So, while living there it seems that David and his men became sort of self-appointed peace keepers, and kept an eye on Nabal’s flock for him. 25:14-16, 21. Nabal “was very rich and had three thousand sheep and three thousand goats. v.2. Now, self-appointed peace-keepers like David and his men usually came along with a traditional arrangement. We will keep an eye on your flock and protect it from rustlers, and wild animals and you voluntarily compensate us with some of your flock for food to eat in this wilderness! David sent some men to approach Nabal to see if he would be kind enough to “Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David.” v.8. But Nabal was rude, rigid, unappreciative saying “Who is David.... shall I take my bread and water and my meat... and give it to men whose origin I do not know?” WAY WRONG ANSWER! With that David and his men pick up their swords and ride in to straighten out old Nabal and his attitude permanently! This is not David at his best moment!

In steps Abigail. She hears about what’s happening and quickly goes into action. First, she prepares a huge meal for David and his men. Next she meets David, gets off of her donkey and bows before David recognizing who he is and acknowledges the foolish actions of her husband. It turns out that the Hebrew meaning for the name Nabal is “fool.” I guess you can add that name to the list of names that are never used these days. In a nutshell she says, look ahead David, don’t stain your reputation before you take the throne! God will bless you! Let God deal with Nabal the fool! David makes a good choice and listens to Abagail’s appeal. Abagail chose to save Nabal not because he deserved it or because he was good, but because she was good! The story ends with these words from David to Abagail “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed, and from avenging myself by my own hand.” 32-33.

Two short closing points:

1. Patience and restraint are the path to God’s best plan. Prov. 15:1 says “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Wise words from God!

2. Being teachable at all stages of life is key. Before David met Abigail, his mind was made up. Nabal was going down! After listening with an open-heart David realized that he was capable of correction. We should be as well!

Blessings to all,

Mike

**April 24, 2020**

Good afternoon friends!

When we lived New York, behind our house there were lots of woods! This may come as a shock to some of you because there are some folks who have never visited New York and think the whole state is like a cement jungle. Manhattan maybe, but on Long Island things are different. My daughter Brooke, when she was a young teen, decided to walk around in those woods behind our house one day despite my telling her that there was lots of poison ivy back there and that she needed to stay away. She not only walked through the woods, but she did so barefoot! If my daughter Brooke is reading this, about now she is saying, I remember that! Also, I’m sure she remembers the incredible blisters that she ended up with from the poison ivy as well! It was so bad that she had to use cutches for a while until her feet healed! I remember thinking at first when it happened, well you got what you deserved! She was a cripple on crutches, but needing a dad who would show mercy not judgment! That’s when God’s grace came to mind. Imagine if we all got what we deserved? Suppose God didn’t show us mercy?

In II Samuel 9:1-10 we read a story that takes place between a person who was a cripple in his feet and a King who plans to show him mercy and grace. David had recently been enthroned. Now, usually any decedents connected to the family of the previous king were removed so that there would be no threat or challenge to the present king. Chapter 9 begins with David saying “Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show kindness for Jonathans sake?” (You may remember the covenant relationship and loving bond David and Jonathan had, I Samuel 18:1-4). The Hebrew word here for kindness can be rendered mercy, loving kindness or grace. Notice that David doesn’t say, is there anyone who is deserving, qualified or who is in good shape that I can use in my army. He just says, anyone! The question is dripping with grace! Now Ziba one of the king’s servants responds, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet.” If you kind of read between the lines, Ziba makes sure he notes that the person is a cripple. Ziba also says that he is living in Lo-debar. This was an area of stark barrenness, a wilderness wasteland. Jonathans son’s name is Mephibosheth (try saying that three times fast) and he may have been living in a place like this to avoid being found, especially by the king who succeeded his grandfather Saul. When David sent for him and had him brought back, Mephibosheth fell down before David on his face and said “here is your servant!” David responds by saying, “Do not fear, for I will show kindness to you...and restore to you the land of your grandfather Saul; and you will eat at my table.” But notice Mephibosheth’s response to David. “What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?” He knew he didn’t deserve all of this grace, mercy and kindness but got it all the same!

Two points:

1. Be a grace giver. While some folks seem to be big on pointing out what’s wrong with other people; shortcomings, deficiencies, weaknesses or what is crippling them, others like David are looking to share grace! One big reason why some folks are like this is because that’s the way they think God is! To them He’s a God who stands in heaven frowning down on us all saying, well Jones you ought to be ashamed or not to bad but you could have done better! People like this can never satisfy God. They live with lots of guilt, shame, and pressure to perform better, but believe that they can never really truly please God! The result is that they tend to do the same to thing to other people! They use guilt trips to motivate, shame techniques to move people. But in reality, God in choosing those who are most unworthy and showing them mercy, grace and making them the objects of His unconditional love. Shouldn’t this move us to do the same!

2. There are so many people who need grace, beginning with us. Did you see how Mephibosheth felt about himself? “What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?” He looked at himself as a dead dog! Why me? I’m a nobody! A guy like me doesn’t deserve any mercy and grace. I’m a cripple, useless, a burden to so many. David tells him, “you shall eat at the Kings table regularly.” In other words, as far as I’m concerned now you belong at the Kings table eating on a regular basis, not because you deserve it, but because of grace!

Folks is it any different for us today? Is your life or your feet blistered by the poison effect of wondering in the wilderness of this world? As humans, we are cripples in many ways, undeserving in more ways! But because of God’s grace, we still have a place at the table of the King in the kingdom of God! The cost of our ticket for a seat at this honored place is the blood of our Lord and Savior. May we never take it for granted!

Blessings to all,

See you on Monday - Mike

**April 23, 2020**

Good afternoon!

In Washington DC in the Arlington National Cemetery there is the “Tomb Of The Unknown Solider.” So many have given their lives for our freedom, some known to us, others unknown. Their sacrifice was great! Although many are unknown, they are not insignificant soldiers by a long shot! Today we hear about so many servants on the front lines working in such a public way, but there are also so many behind the scenes who may be unknown to us but certainly not insignificant servants. I visited “The Wall” in Washington DC one time. It bears 58K names of Vietnam war veterans. Margie and I went there to see the name of a close friend of the family that we knew. He was special. But are not the names of all the other thousands special to others? From the leaders in public view to all of the workers serving behind the scenes, all are playing a very significant part in the service of our country. In like manor, the same is true for those who are working in the service of our Lord publicly and privately. From the public encouragement from all of the spiritual leaders to the silent prayers of a child, all are very special and significant acts of service!

In Exodus 31:1-6 God called Bezalel and Oholiab into service. Have you ever heard of these guys? I’m guessing, probably not! Who are they? What did they do? Why don’t we remember? These were the lead craftsmen called by God to construct the original tabernacle. If you take the time to read these verses you will find out that Bezalel was son the of Uri, who was the son of Hur. Remember Hur? When Israel fought against Amalek in Exodus 17 Moses needed help holding up the staff of God to bring about victory when his arms became tired. Aaron, who was the older brother of Moses, held up one arm, and Hur held up the other. Because of their help it was a great victory! Maybe when people thought of Bezalel they said, hey that’s Uri’s boy Hur’s grandson! One time when I was 18 years old my friend Kenny and I drove to St. Genevieve Missouri. This is where my dad, whose name is Buddy is from. I hadn’t been there since I was a small kid. When I pulled up to the driveway of the house where he had lived, a few of my cousins came out and approached me, but they didn’t recognize me. They said who are you guys? Before I could say a word, my grandfather who happen to be sitting on the porch who did recognize me started calling out “It’s Buddy’s boy, It’s Buddy’s boy!” I was apparently unknown to my cousins, but still special and know to grandpa! The names Bezalel and Oholiab may have caused us to say, who are those guys? God said these are the ones “I have filled with the Spirit of God and wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge...” These are My boys! Unknown to us, but known and special to the God in heaven!

Two Points:

1. Life is full of unknown servants who are living very significant lives for God. I’ve heard grown men and women say, I had the best Sunday school teacher growing up. I can’t quite recall her name, but I’ll never forget what I learned. I’ve listened to people who have come to visit at church who I’ve spoken to on a follow-up phone call say, I got the greatest welcome, and warm genuine smile from some folks who were at the front door when I came in. I don’t know their names, but it made a significant impression on me as a visitor! On a personal note, my two girls, Liz and Allison have had a Christian sister who teaches at their high school who has made more than a deep loving impression on them. To some reading this you may not know her by name. She is unknown to some, but people of significance, known and unknown can make a big difference in the lives of others! You know I could go on and on and give you one example after another of what seems to be insignificant service to the Lord which in reality turned out to be special and significant action to people! King David in his final days reflects back on who was important to him in his life. In II Samuel 23:8-12 David names a few. There was Adino, Eleazer, Shammah and more. Thirty-seven men in all are mentioned. These guys are largely unknowns to us, but at the top of David’s list to thank in his last days. Again, people of significance, known and unknown make a big difference!

2. Every person serving the Lord makes a difference, including you, but ultimately, we all serve the One who gives us all value, God! It was Jesus who went to the cross for everybody! And all of us known and unknown are to live a life of significance for Him! He is the one who gives us significance! Serving is one thing, but who you serve makes all the difference! There is no better calling than this! Know that God has called us to live lives of significance! Whether public or private, known or unknown the key to living a life of significance is not measured by how many people know your name, but by the God in heaven who knows your personally!

Blessings,

Mike

**April 22, 2020**

Good afternoon!

As a tradition on Easter weekend we go up to visit with my daughter Brooke and her family in Raleigh NC. Of course, this year due to all that is going on we stayed home. However, this reminded me about what happened last year on our way up to Raleigh while we were traveling on Interstate 95 in our car. First, the low-air-in-tire light came on. Then, before you knew it the right rear tire was flat. I got off at the next exit and pulled into a gas station. They sold only gas no tires. Also, because it was a Saturday and later in the day everything else close by was closed. So, Allison, my teenage daughter, and I got out of the car to start changing the tire and putting on the spare. As we began to work on finding the jack and how to let down the spare that was underneath the floor of the car, Liz, my other teenage daughter, who was still sitting in the car said dad you guys don’t have to do all of that work. I got this! I thought really, how’s that, do you plan on doing the job from your seat? She said, I have AAA and I’ve already made a call to have someone come out and fix the flat, so why struggle to do something yourself when it’s already been provided? Of course, even though it was already provided, Allison and I still went ahead and did the work ourselves. I didn’t even give poor Allison a choice! Sounds almost a bit foolish to do it that way doesn’t it?

In Genesis 25: 19-24 a young man named Jacob struggles and fights for something that God had already provided for him! God had already said to Rebecca his mother who was with twins “Two nations are in your womb... and the older will serve the younger” Genesis 23:25. God tipped His hand to Rebecca saying that He has already made His choice of Jacob to a particular blessing and role from which Esau will be excluded. Since Esau would be born first, this position would have normally been his. However, concerning these two nations that these two sons represent, Edom and Israel, God’s choice would be Israel to be blessed! Yet all through the story that is recorded here, both Jacob and Rebecca struggle, fight for something that was already provided by God! Sounds almost a bit foolish to do in that way doesn’t it?

This is a familiar story of Jacob stealing his brother Esau’s birthright. It’s a story of how Esau first despises his birthright by giving it up for a bowl of what he called red stuff, (sounds like chili of some kind). It is also about how Jacob seized the opportunity to capitalize on Esau’s hunger and poor judgment by asking him to trade his birthright for food during a vulnerable moment. And to make matters worse, Rebecca encourages Jacob to deceive his father Isaac into giving him the blessing that was supposed to go to Esau. This was achieved with Rebecca’s help by Jacob dressing himself up to appear to be Esau before Isaac, who’s eyes were bad. Folks, through it all both Jacob and Rebecca, deceived, stole, manipulated, took advantage of, created deep hurt and so much more to gain something that God was already going to provide!

Now before we become too hard on Esau, Jacob and Rebecca, lets notice two related thoughts and how they can apply and help us as well.

1. As Christians, our spiritual birthright should never be disregarded, unappreciated, taken for granted or sought to be achieved by works! As Christians when we obey the gospel, we received a new birthright! Galatians 4:4-5 says that “God sent forth His Son... to redeem us... that we might receive... the adoption as sons.” Our spiritual adoption as sons and daughters allows us to receive all of the blessings as a child of God! Our spiritual birthright is not based on our works or struggling to get it, but it is in fact based on what Jesus did for us already! You see, once I’ve obeyed the gospel, and continue walking in the light (I John 1:7) I remain a covenant blessed child of God. It’s time to simply appreciate, enjoy and celebrate it!

2. As Christians, God has additional great blessings in store for us in His time. God had great plans for Jacob in view of his role to Israel becoming a great nation. Jacob didn’t have to try to help God along by tricking his brother into giving up something that God was already planning on giving to him. Do you ever feel at times that you try to orchestrate your own future and its blessings? Try just letting God use you powerfully His way and in His time. Jacob was looking to rush God along in this process! You can probably think of people in scripture, good people, who did this when they became impatient with waiting on God. The results were usually bad! I have a plaque in my garden that reads “Bloom Where God Plants You.” It has always been good sound advice!

Peace, Mike

**April 21, 2020**

Good afternoon all!

You know some say when you are 20 years old, 30 seems old. Then when your 30, 40 seems old. Again, when you hit 40, 50 seems old. But when you turn 50 years old, 60 suddenly seems young! (you may be chuckling about now) When your 60, you are looking forward to making it to 70. When you get to 70, you are happy to be alive, and at 80 your happy to be anywhere! As you may have heard, getting older is not for sissy’s! Let me say right up front, this thought for today is a lesson for all ages! It’s about having the right attitude at all stages of life!

Jenny was a woman that I had the honor of baptizing into Christ many years ago when I lived in NY. At the time she had an adult son who was also baptized into Christ. I don’t know what Jenny’s age was at the time, but she always had the disposition of a 20-year-old. I would be driving home and see her walking to her house from the grocery store with both arms carrying heavy bags. I would pull over and say, hey Jenny, would you like a ride? She would always respond, thanks Mike but I got this! Just two days ago a friend sent me a recent picture of Jenny who is now 99 years old! What stunned me wasn’t that she was 99, but that she looked the same to me when I would see her alongside the road. Her physical appearance changed some (not all that much it seemed to me) but that determined attitude on her face was the same! I had a phone call about two weeks ago with Louise, who is also 99! After my call with her I said to myself, if only I could be so upbeat and driven like Louise!

Folks you may be feeling that over the past few months life has brought on some grey hair; aged you more than usual because of all that we are going through. If so, let me tell you about Caleb! Numbers 14:24 says, “But My servant Caleb because he has a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring him into the land which he entered, and his descendants will take possession of it.” As time passes and the years added up on Caleb, one thing that didn’t change was his determined attitude; even at the age of 85! Take a note of this passage, “now behold, I am eighty-five years old today. I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now...” Joshua 14:10-11. Even at 85 years old he had not lost any of his enthusiastic zeal! He may not have been able to do as many push-ups as before, but he maintained his vigor, and like Jenny and Louise, that determined attitude in his heart was the same!

Two Things:

1. Caleb’s biblical example on aging should be ours: I hear some older people say at times, it’s tough to hang in there! They look at all the young people surrounding them and say, let them do it! There is no need for me, I will just back off! At times they go on to say, I’m not very capable, useful, needed anymore! I’ve done my time. OK, now please hear me. I am not minimizing the idea that at times “the spirit is willing and the flesh is weak,” but should all that wisdom and experience be wasted? Should I give up when God says keep going? May God forbid! Let’s not relax, but rather arise!

2. View life as a challenge not a threat: Who can predict our tomorrow’s? No one! Refuse all temptations to hibernate, worry, curl up, fold up or dry up! Grab each day and accept each hour as a challenge! Know that some challenges are reachable! Remember guys like Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Joshua and more. In the end they may have looked a bit old, but remember age is only skin deep! Caleb’s attitude was to follow the Lord fully! Joshua 14:8-9. Caleb was consistent all through his life, may ours be as well! Folks, aging is not life’s toughest time, but life’s greatest opportunities for achievement for God!

Final Thought: How do you view the person inside your own skin? Struggling with fear? Uselessness? Guilt filled? Do you feel it is just too late? Brother Johnson was baptized into Christ at 91 years old when I lived in NY. I watched as someone rolled him up to the microphone every Sunday to lead the closing prayer! It’s never too late to make a difference! My wife Margie and I use to drive my mother-in-law Wanda, at age 94 or so to her doctor visits when she was still living with us. It was not uncommon for her to walk back out into the lobby after her appointment, with the doctor in tow, and introduce him to me, saying, Michael, I invited doctor Jones here to church, and I just wanted to be sure that he got to meet the preacher! Amazing! What doctor does that? And he wasn’t the only one she did this with! I could go on about the calls she made to people, cards she wrote to people and rarely missed a worship service. She was probably one of the most evangelistic people I have ever met, not only at 94, but at any age! That’s what I call the attitude of Christ! May we all have Caleb’s attitude no matter where we are in our walk in this life!

Have a super day!

Mike

**April 20, 2020**

Good afternoon all!

Recently on TV we have heard about the plan to re-open America! Presented were “Gateway Protocols” followed by a three-phrase approach to getting back to life! Depending on where you live in the country or what your health situation or job circumstance is this may give rise to a number of different reactions! The other day I was out picking up my mail and a neighborhood teenager rode up near me to stop and talk! “Hey Mr. Hipes, how’s it going?” My first instinct was, don’t move any closer, you are only about 10 feet from me at this point and you don’t have a mask or gloves on! Folks, we have been in a situation where we have never been before, and moving forward into a re-opening mindset in a way that we have never done before! After all that we have been going through, this is going to call us to step out into uncharted territory! For any Star Trek fans out there, Captain James T. Kirk may have said it best “Our mission is ... to boldly go where no man has gone before.”

In the first few chapters of the book of Joshua, we see a man that has recently stepped into the shoes of Moses to prepare the people to cross the Jordan and go where they have never been before! God sends words of encouragement and faith to help Joshua and the people to rise up for the task! God says, “Be strong and courageous.” The phrase is repeated in chapter one 4 times! This call to step out where they have never been before would call for great faith and trust in God! If you spoke to me when I was 22 years old and said, Mike soon you will be a full time preacher and you will be going to places that you have never been before, like Russia, then live in Ohio, followed by the Carolinas in the south, and eventually you will be preaching lessons on Facebook Live, I would have said “Hey, I’m from Queens NY, I love NY, no way in heaven that would happen.” Yet here I am in SC and right where I know God has called me to be! And as technology deficient as I am, each week recently, I preach into my cell phone and hundreds of people join in! Incredible what God can do! Stepping out in faith at times can be a bit scary, but the key is stepping out with God!

There are two things I would like to point out:

1. By faith God calls us at times to step out of our comfort zone. In chapter 1 “be strong and courageous” was the message before the crossing of the Jordon river. By the time we get to chapter 3 we see that the Jordon was overflowing its banks due to the season of the year. The Levites were to step first into the river carrying the ark of the covenant. I can almost hear the conversation between some of the ark bearers, “OK, so why did we want this job carrying the ark?” But as soon as their feet touched the water, it “rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam... while all Israel crossed on dry land.” Joshua 3:16-17. I can almost hear the ark bearers changing their tune as they saw what happened before their eyes! “Did you see that...WOW that was awesome, this is a great job we have!” The city of Adam was almost 15 miles away! That’s a wide opening! Amazing! Folks, things have been and will be different in the way we have reaching out to one another, helping one another, sharing with one another, serving one another and more. Right after 911 happened, people were very in-tune to God working in their lives and letting God use them in some new found ways. Soon after however, people seemed for the most part to slide back into their normal way of life. Friends, let’s keep the momentum going and build on what awesome things God has started in our lives and continue moving ahead!

2. We must maintain the stones of remembrance in our lives. When the Israelites finally made it to the other side of the Jordan, the first thing that Joshua had the people do was to set up what I like to call “The 12 Stones of Remembrance.” “And Joshua said to the sons of Israel, when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying what are these stones, then you shall inform your children, saying, Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.” Joshua 4:21-22. Going forward to places we have never been before first requires never forgetting where we have been! My we never forget the great things that God has done even in the middle of this crisis on our lives. May we remember that despite the hardships, all the incredible doors of new opportunity that God has brought about! Back when 911 happened it was something that will always be engrained in my heart. Leaving Long Island on the day before it happened, we were heading back to Ohio where we were living at the time. We were coming from a wedding. As we crossed the George Washington Bridge, we looked left at the skyline as we always did. Now 20 years later when my kids ask me about what happened there that day, I can easily recall not only the tragedy, but the powerful things that God did and how He used people during that time. May we not forget todays stones of remembrance that have taken place here in our nation as well during these challenging times. May we never forget! Also, may we continue to remember in the days ahead! Let’s be reminded and also be ready to tell our kids; this is what God did in this place! And to God be the glory!

Blessings, Mike

**April 17, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Can’t believe it’s Friday already! I want thank you all for your prayers and thoughts concerning our dear friend Donna who when home to be with the Lord on Wednesday!

Probably one of the most popular verses in the book of Philippians is Phil. 4:13. “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” I hear people say all the time when faced with a difficult situation in front of them, “I can do this!” Looking close at the verse, notice again what it doesn’t say. It doesn’t say I can do all things through education or money or worldly success or good friends or positive thinking or political office..... but through Christ! You know why it says that? Because nothing else fits when it comes to being empowered with the strength we need!

Two Things:

1. Never again should we confess “We Can’t.” “I can do all things through Christ....” Start by putting your name in the blank, “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ can do all things...” Paul is saying I can, which means you can, Amen? You may be thinking Mike, I don’t know about God using me to do the extraordinary! But remember, it’s not about you, but all about God in you! The highly important and amazing accomplishments of faith have been typically done by everyday ordinary folks in the kingdom! When we lived in Texas my daughter Brooke and I were walking in an older neighborhood asking people if they wanted to ride the Joy Bus. This was back when we looked to bring kids to church with a bus on Sundays. Brooke was only about 4 years old at the time. I figured having a small child would make it a bit easier for people to talk to me. As we walked, I remember that there were some shady characters across the street giving us the eye, so I said to Brooke, just keep walking kiddo. The next thing I knew I heard the voice of a little 4-year-old girl calling out to that group across the street in a very loud voice, “hey you guys want to ride the Joy Bus?” One of them quickly headed toward us. When he got close, we froze. Just as I though this is it, he knelt down on one knee and said to Brooke, I don’t think that the Joy Bus is for me but thank you so much for not ignoring us but asking! Completely convicted by my young daughter’s faith, I thought ...If Brooke, a 4-year-old can do all things through Christ, I can too, and so can you!

If God can speak the universe into existence, cause a flood to cover the whole planet, part the Red Sea, cause a virgin to become pregnant, heal the incurable, calm the seas, walk on water and raise the dead, do you think He can get you through anything else? Of course He can! Luke 1:37 says “For nothing will be impossible with God.” We serve a water walking God and He lives in us! All we need to do is start living like it my brothers and sisters! Alright, sorry I know I was preaching a bit there!

2. Never again will I forget “The Real Power Source.” “through Christ who strengthens me.” You see it doesn’t really matter how rich we are, or how many stimulus checks we receive or how influential you are in politics. Without the real power source in us nothing else really matters when it comes to truly getting through! 2 Timothy 1:7 says, “God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power...” We’ve got the power! Not power in a worldly sense but in a godly sense! Inner spiritual strength! This is the kind of power that provides strength to sing in prison, to go through the fiery trials of life’s difficulties, the power to fight negative feelings, thoughts of depression, attitudes of defeat, worry to the point of despair or facing this pandemic. We can do this with strength and hope! This is the power of God in us to rise up!

Remember Peter in the middle of a storm on a lake, got out of the boat to head toward Jesus! (Matthew 14:22-33) He was doing good as long as he kept his eyes on the Lord. It was only when he noticed the huge waves surrounding him that he began to sink! Jesus responded to Peter, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt.” We usually tell this event from the perspective of the Christ, but how would you see it through the eyes of the other disciples who stayed in the boat? When the Lord called Peter to come and Peter got out of the boat they may have thought, what are you crazy getting out of the boat Peter? Knowing what we know now from our side of history, knowing that Peter can do all things through faith in Christ who strengthens him, I believe that we would have been cheering Peter on saying “you can do this Peter!” Folks, when it comes to this and any challenge of life, know that we can do this, by His power and strength in us! Amen!

See you on Monday, Mike

**April 16, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Have you ever tried to make believe that you know someone that you really don’t know? Maybe it was a long-distance phone call that you got from someone who seemed to know you, while at the same time you were trying to figure out who it was on the other end. Have you ever gotten a wave from a stranger thinking who is that, as you sheepishly waved back in wonder? I was in the supermarket one time waiting at the deli counter with a group of people. A woman in the distance began to wave at me trying to get my attention. I didn’t recognize her but I thought who knows she could have been in the audience at church while I was preaching this past Sunday. Wanting her to feel welcomed I started waving back. As she started heading toward me, not knowing how I would address her, I simply extended my hand to greet her. She promptly walked right past my extended hand to a woman who was standing right behind me! Major embarrassment! Trying to know someone when you don’t really know them can be tough!

Do you really know God? Paul says in Phil. 3:8-11 “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings...” What does it really mean to really know God? Paul begins by saying that when you really know God you never really think of what you may lose, only what you have gained! Paul had a trophy case of honors, circumcised the eight day, of the tribe of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, also to the Law found blameless...” and more! With no regrets, when he found the pearl of great price, he counted everything else as “rubbish” by comparison! The things of this world just don’t matter like they used to when you really know Christ!

I had a woman in the community say to me one time while we were talking about church, “do you have a personal relationship with God? I thought to myself, I have heard the gospel, believed, repented, confessed and was baptized into Christ; I go to church, call on the sick, give at lease 10% to God, I’m good to people, pray for people, I go to the hospitals, teach classes, preach sermons and much more! So, I responded yes, of course I do! But somehow something seemed to still be missing. I thought of those in Matt. 7:21-23 that said that they prophesied in His name, cast out demons, and performed many miracles, but still Jesus responded “I never knew you.” I think Jesus was saying when you really know God things in your life will change from the inside out, not just in your outward actions for Him, but in the depths of your heart because of your love for Him! When you really know God, you may not watch the things you use to, or even think the things you used to. Who you hang around with, what you buy, where you go, will change and more! Lies will get caught in your mouth and your conscience will challenge you. This is all because God doesn’t let people stay the same inwardly and outwardly when you really get to know God!

Two Lessons:

1. There is a major difference between knowing a great deal about God and really knowing God! You may not know this, but I met actors Michael J. Fox, and Al Pacino and other famous people as well. I talked with them in NYC when I saw them! I met and spoke to Don Drysdale (famous pitcher for the Dodgers) in an elevator one time. I met them and know a lot about their lives from TV, but I don’t really know them! Likewise, some people know me, but not like my mother did, or my wife Margie does! See the difference? One is knowledge by way of information of a person, the other includes knowledge but leads to a bonding personal relationship with that person! When it comes to Jesus, do you know Him, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings? Spend time walking with Him through the scriptures, experiencing His life with Him. Spend time alone in prayer and meditation with Him. Open up your heart to Him. Get to truly know Him! You won’t be disappointed but refreshed!

2. We serve a God who wants to be known by His people! Jesus said in John 17: 3 concerning His disciples “and this is eternal life, that they may know Thee” In Jeremiah 24:7 God is speaking of His people who are in Babylonian captivity and of their future return to freedom, God says, “And I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God.” Point: The more you can know someone is directly dependent on how much they open up to you or allow you to see them inside! If we want to keep someone at an arm’s length distance in a relationship, we can control that. If we want to take them in on the inside of our lives, we control that as well! We serve the Almighty Creator, maker of heaven and earth, the One who spoke the universe into existence. This God wants to have a deep relationship with you personally! God wants to know us personally! God wants us to know His word and His heart (maybe like David who was a man after God’s own heart). God wants to be known by you! What an incredible opportunity! God sent His Son in the flesh, to live among us, die for us, and be raised for us! Spend time with God in prayer and in His word getting to know Him better. Let God into your heart, and allow God to change your heart! Praise the Lord, when we really know God!

Blessings, Mike

**April 15, 2020**

Good afternoon!

Paul says in Philippians to rejoice, to be joyful! At times it seems so very hard because of the situation that we are facing in our lives about now! This current situation in the world has a way of sucking the happiness away! I received news early this morning of the passing of a very dear and close friend in NY whose name is Donna. She lost her battle to COVID-19, she passed but she won! You see as a Christian she is now in glory! As sad and unhappy as I am, I have joy for her victory in Christ! Nobody said that this life was easy! People say to me when life is difficult, Mike my life right now is filled with sorrow, heartache, pain and unhappiness! I hear you! But you know there’s a huge difference between happiness and joy! Happiness and unhappiness cannot co-exist. However, unhappiness and joy can! How? Because joy has nothing to do with a circumstance but with a relationship! A reporter one time in the middle of a war zone found a group of men inside of a broken-down shelter laughing together even while they were under enemy fire. The reporter asked them, how can you be laughing in a situation like this? The men responded by saying “it’s not so much about where we are as much as it is about who we are with.” This is the point that Paul is getting at in this writing from prison! I may not be happy about where I am, but I have joy because of who I have a relationship with, Jesus! You see joy is a choice!

In Chapter one of Philippians Paul offers two lessons for us today:

1. Choosing joy begins with joyful memories with brothers and sisters in Christ. (3-11). “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.” When Paul thought of the Philippians it made him smile, he remembered good memories, he nursed no grudges. You see the prominent thing Paul thanked God for concerning his brothers and sisters was their relationship with God, the mutual love for the Lord they shared, and their partnership with him in the gospel v.5. They both had ownership of this mission for Christ, and this gave Paul great joy! Were they perfect? No! Were they super saints? No! Did they always doing everything right? No! Paul knew, as we need to as well, that “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” v.6 In other words Paul saw people for who they could become and were becoming in Christ more than where they presently were. That brought great joy! May we do the same! Wherever you are in your Christian walk, the beginning, middle or near the end. Whether you are on the mountain top or in a valley, growing, struggling, hurting, doubting, worrying, wavering, running or more, what brings great joy is knowing not that any preacher, elder, teacher, husband or wife will complete a good work in you but God will! So, rejoice!

2. Joy is a choice that has nothing to do with external circumstances. (12-14) “Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.” Remember Paul wrote this letter from a prison! If you remember the story in Acts 16, he and Silas were imprisoned there, but were actually singing in the prison! Why? Probably not because the food was wonderful or that the sleeping arrangements were like a Holiday Inn, but rather because when you are on the road to glory, no matter what is happening around you, like the soldiers in the old shelter in the middle of a war, you can still have joy! We all live by two lists in life! The list of problems and the list of joys. On one list there are struggles, car problems, lack of money, economy issues, and COVID -19. On the other list is salvation, freedom, grace, mercy, love, family, going to heaven and more. The choice is yours to make! Jesus said in John 16:22 “No one takes your joy away from you.” Only you can choose to give it up! Let’s choose joy in every situation! We are still on the road to glory, so why not sing!

Blessings,

Mike

**April 14, 2020**

Good afternoon everybody!

What is God’s drawing power?

While I was in the service and stationed in Jacksonville Florida I suffered and eye injury to my left eye. While working on my car pulling tightly on a spring toward me with a pair of needle nose pliers, my grip must have eased up and the pliers inadvertently snapped back and hit my eye. I was instantly blind in my left eye, at the age of 19! After being rushed to the main hospital by ambulance I was soon in surgery. Captain Medder’s my doctor, was still not very hopeful about me keeping my eye. Over the months that followed however, along with a series of additional surgeries, I was able to keep my eye but to this day I have only very little sight in it.

While I was in the hospital recovering from the original trauma and surgery, I was visited by a clergy who came up to check on me. Up to this point in my life, I had not been a true follower of Jesus. When the clergy came to my bedside, I almost dismissed him before he said a word. But before I could say anything he said, “Can I ask you a question?” I said sure. “Do you have any sins that you would like to confess?” Really, sins! You want to hear my sins! So that what, I can be further punished? He responded, “why of course not, don’t you know, that we serve a God of rich mercy, great love, and amazing grace!” It wasn’t until years later, after giving my life to Christ that I realize that he was referring that day to Ephesians 2:4-5. His answer that day was a turning point for me. This is when for the first time I was truly drawn to God! You see God’s drawing power is not judgment, fear, anger, and the like, but His rich mercy, and great love, and His amazing grace!

In chapter two of Ephesians the apostle Paul gives us three things to consider:

1. Where you don’t want to be: Out of Christ! (2:1-3) “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” All of us at some point or another were on a one-way ticket to the wrong spiritual location, unable to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We were in a hospital bed of spiritual sickness! Wounded and blinded by the sins of this world! Needing someone to come to the side of our hospital beds and offer us the grace of God! Nobody wants to be there! Folks listen, there are some places that we defiantly don’t ever want to be! You don’t want to be in some areas of cities at certain times at night. You may not want to be in a hotspot location of this virus without a mask or gloves. But the one place you never want to be is out of Christ! That’s where we all once were without His grace! But praise the Lord for His rich mercy, great love and amazing grace! This is God’s drawing power!

2. Why you don’t have to be there: God’s Mercy, Love, Grace! (4-10) “for by grace you have been saved through faith; and not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not as a result of works.” All through history God has been showing mercy, love and grace to His people. I heard a story one time about a married couple that had an argument. The husband stormed out of the house got in his car and was speeding down the street in anger. After five minutes in the car he realized that he was wrong and acted poorly and wanted to go back home. However, he first stopped at the store to pick up some candy and flowers to give to his wife. When he got to the door, he presented her with the gifts and said please forgive me. She said, we are married, and have a covenant relationship, of course I forgive you, not because you brought flowers and candy, although I do like chocolate, but because of our covenant of love. We need to get past the idea that we flip flop in and out of grace based on our daily deeds and need to continue to work our way back into God’s good graces instead of simply confessing our shortcoming and receiving His amazing grace! This is what that clergy person was trying to get me to see! Yes, we do serve Him with good works, as the text says, “we are His workmanship, created in Christ for good works.” However, we serve and obey out of gratitude of being saved rather than trying to achieve being saved!

3. Result of not having to be there: We have Hope! (2:11-22). “remember that you were ...separate from Christ, excluded.... having no hope... but now in Christ you ... have been brought near by the blood of Christ...He Himself is our peace... through Him we have our access... to the Father.” I heard a story one time of a man who was attempting to cross a desert on foot but who ended up stranded and dying of thirst. A good friend located him from his GPS on his phone. He flew to his location by helicopter and quickly gave him water from his canteen. Do you know what saved that man? The water! You know why? Because you can’t drink a canteen! However, you need the canteen to access the water! In like manner our faith is like that canteen, but God’s saving grace is like the water in that canteen! We are saved by grace which we can access through our faith! Praise God for His rich mercy, great love and amazing grace! This is God’s big draw! Allow Him to draw you in!

Blessings, Mike

**April 13, 2020**

Good afternoon everybody! Hope all had a good weekend!

Have you ever thought these days, what’s the plan Lord?

When I graduated high school, I can remember planning to buy a Harley Davidson motorcycle. I was planning on traveling cross country, living it up, not having anybody tell me what to do anymore! No teacher, no parent, no brother, no sister, nobody, period. Then I was drafted! #12 in the lottery, soon to be in Uncle Sam’s army where everybody tells you what to do! I signed up for the Navy and they took me first. Things don’t always turn out the way you plan! Margie was my first real crush back in school. After I got out of the military, we started dating and my dreams of traveling the country now included her with me. After being newly married, with my long hair leather jacket and her on the back seat of my new chopper, I remember planning a life of no responsibility, no restriction, just freedom and fun! Then she became pregnant! Next thing you know, the motorcycle was sold, we bought an old Chevy Impala four door car, and my daughter Brooke was born! Things don’t always turn out the way you plan!

Joseph in the book of Gen. 37 was young full of life and had dreams of big things happening in his life ahead. However, he had a similar situation happen is his life, as many of us in ways have had. He now had to trade in his multicolored coat and favored position with his dad to being in a much bigger crisis in his life at 17 than being drafted! He was sold into slavery by his brothers! I can almost hear Joseph as he was being carried away by strangers on the back of a camel saying, “OK guys, I can take a joke... Reuben... Simeon... Judah... can you hear me? Instead, he probably thought hey, I didn’t sign up for this my life is definitely not going the way I planned! Things don’t always go the way we plan, but they always go the way God plans! Trust Him!

There is a main theme all through the story of Joseph; God works out his providential plan in our lives!

If you think about it, God’s providential plan is exact! To summarize the story for the sake of space and time;

God allowed Joseph to get sold to the right BAND, (Band of Ishmaelites) who sold him to just the right MAN, (Potiphar, Pharaoh’s officer) to get him into just the right HOUSE, (Potiphar’s house) only to get him thrown into just the right PRISON, (this is where he meets Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker to interpret their dreams) to talk to just the right FORGETFUL CUPBEARER, (who forgot to tell Pharaoh about Josephs ability for two full years) who remembered at just the RIGHT MOMENT, to get Joseph before Pharaoh at just the RIGHT TIME, to make Joseph the prime minister OVER THE LAND, to save the people in the day of FAMINE, that the seed line of Israel might CONTINUE, that JESUS MIGHT LIVE... that we can be SAVED! Things don’t always go the way we plan, but they always go the way God plans! Trust Him!

Two lessons:

1. Our need to have a total trust in God and His grand plan. All through the narrative we read that “the Lord was with Joseph.” It calls us to try to see the big picture! Sometimes seeing the picture is hard when we are either in the moment or looking to close! When we do puzzles, looking at a single piece of the puzzle is a real part of the true picture, but only a small part of the picture. Not until the puzzle is finished do we get a full view. I have been to many NY Mets baseball games in my day. Box seats at a baseball game are great, you can see what’s right in front of you very clearly but it is hard to see the game as a whole with any clarity. This is why the news reporters sit up in the press box seats. It’s further up in the stands where there is the perfect view. What we need is insight from God not short sight from man!

2. Our need to not only accept but choose God’s divine direction and plan in His time. After I arrived at boot camp in the service, I remember calling my dad whining and saying to him, “hey I didn’t ask for this, I don’t want to even be here! I will never forget his response. “Son, you’re not going to be OK until you decide to choose to be there, and realize you need to be there!” That was a pivotal call. I became content to faithfully finish my time! The story of Joseph teaches us that the journey and the needed lessons along the way are just as important as the final goal! God was preparing Joseph to perform so that when the time was right, he would be ready. He is doing the same for us! The story ends with Joseph learning that all that happened to him from the time his brothers sold him into slavery to the time he was reunited with his family all worked out in God’s providential plan. It is also what we all need to know and learn as well. Gen. 45:5-8 say it best. “And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.... And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now it was not you who sent me here, but God...”

Things don’t always go the way we plan, but they always go the way God plans! Trust Him!

Blessings... Mike

**April 10, 2020**

Good afternoon everybody!

I pray that all are well and are staying safe!

I don’t know about you, but each morning I turn on the TV waiting for some better news than the day before. I am thinking that if I hear good news today then that should set the stage not only for the days ahead but for our future in general! Recently, I have heard the word “hope” used a lot in the reporting each day. We are hoping that this medicine will.... We are hopeful this testing can.... We are hoping our country will be back to work when..... and so on. I do believe that we are moving in the right direction! However, as Christians we have a better hope, a living hope.... Jesus! When our hearts are pressed by the circumstances of life, our living hope, Jesus, restores our soul!

In I Peter 1:3 Peter writes, “Praise be to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” I can almost see the expression on Peter’s face when he was writing this. I often wondered if he had in mind the message he received from the disciples after they had been to the empty tomb; “...go tell His disciples and Peter.” Mark. 16:7. As down as Peter must of felt after his three denials of the Christ not long before, to hear his name specifically mentioned must have brought great hope! Maybe he even began to sing out “My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” (Well that’s if that song had been written at that time...)

Notice: “The Four Hopes” in the verses that follow. (4-9)

1. The Cause Of Hope: v.3 There has been a RESURRECTION! Folks the best news to look forward to each day that should set the stage for the days ahead and for our future as well is not necessarily that you got money from the federal stimulus that has gone out, or that you are an essential worker and get to keep working. Although these things are good and appreciated so very much during times like this, the best news is and always will be the ultimate cause of hope, The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! Amen?

2. The Contents Of Hope: v.4. We have “an inheritance that will not perish.” As Christians, our reservation for our mansion in heaven will never time out! This hope will never spoil, never fade, it will never be destroyed by fire, or storm, or a deadly virus! This is an eternal hope!

3. The Conserver of Hope: v.5 It is “shielded by God’s power.” We have a great caretaker of this hope! Folks listen, the Army, the Navy, the Marines, the Air-force, the Coastguard, are all good protectors! But better than them all, our hope in Christ, is protected by the power of the living God! Amen!

4. The Cheer of Hope: 6-9. We have a great hope to cheer about, to rejoice about, to praise God about! What is it? Peter says it is “the salvation of your souls.” Now he does say in the prior verses rejoice, though now for a “little while you may have to suffer....” Folks no getting around going through the difficulties of our times, but let’s keep our eyes on the real hope, the living hope, the resurrected hope, Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen!

Keep on keeping on folks!

Have a great weekend.... be back with you on Monday!

- Mike

**April 9, 2020**

Good afternoon folks! Continue to hope and pray that all are doing well!

As a teenager I was attacked one time by a group of bullies. One guy had me pinned down on the ground hitting me while laughing and taunting me the whole time. At one point I managed to momentarily push him off of me, slip away and run to a nearby restaurant. He and his friends followed but would not come inside. I knew that the moment I left the safety of that place that I would be in for big trouble. So, I knew it was time to call for help! I called my dad! By the time dad showed up the group was bigger and louder. My dad came inside and said to me “let’s go son, don’t worry, you’re with me.” As we exited the restaurant on the way to the safety of the car, the bullies continued to taunt me, but never laid a hand on me. When you have a partner like that by your side, we have strength and safety even in the midst of our enemies.

In I Samuel 17 we read the familiar story of David and Goliath! As a boy, David faced an over 9-foot-tall Philistine warrior, and defeated him with a stone in a sling! As a result, David gained instant popularity! It also created jealousy in the heart of king Saul, but a bonding friendship, and deep love, with Saul’s son Jonathan. David faced and would continue to battle challenging times ahead, but with a partner like God, David had the strength of God by his side, as we do too!

In I Samuel 18:1-4 Jonathan makes a covenant with David. “Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself” v.3. The text continues by saying “Jonathan took off his robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.” v.4

Typically, back in David’s day when one made a covenant with another, as we see here, three things were exchanged that held specific significance. These three things also hold special significance for us:

1. The Exchange of Robes. The exchange of robes expressed the exchange of identity and ownership. It is saying that all that I am and have is yours; and now I receive all that you are to myself as well! What does that say for our covenant relationship with God? We enter our covenant with God saying, God I give you all that I am, and all that I have. However, what we receive back is incredible! Imagine Jesus in heaven exchanging and stepping out of His robes of splendor and glory and putting on the robes of flesh for us! Incredible thought! Why? So that we can receive Him and be clothed with His love, forgiveness, mercy and grace. We are clothed with Christ! Gal. 3:27. What an incredible exchange for us!

2. The Exchange of Belts. The exchange of belts was a symbol of the exchange of one another’s strengths and weaknesses. As covenant partners these two men would compensate for each other’s weaknesses with their strengths. In other words, all my strength I give to you and all my weaknesses I lay before you. When it comes to God, we don’t really have much in the way of strength to offer. All we have to offer back is weakness, but we gain all of His strength! Can you beat an exchange like that? We get unlimited power to be victorious! We actually have His power working in us! Eph.2:20, Phil.4:13. What a trade! As covenant brothers and sisters, we have the strength of God in us! No giant, no bully, no enemy too big to be defeated!

3. Exchange of Weapons. This exchange carries the idea of having a mutual defense allegiance for one another, holding in common each other’s enemies. In other words, we now fight as one. We fight for each other; we have each other’s backs! I will come to your aid, and you will come to mine! Covenant partners are each other’s defenders! God has committed Himself to fight by our side, to stand in my defense against any enemy we may face. When we are attacked by any giant of sorts, evil in this world or difficult challenger, His will fight for and with us. We are not alone! Incredible power is at our disposal! Amazing!

May we know during this time and at all times, that we have a God who slays the giants of this life, no matter how overwhelming they may seem! As a covenant partner, He comes to our side with all of who He is, all of His power and strength, defends us and stays with us through it all! Praise God for our Covenant Partner!

Blessings, Mike

**April 8, 2020**

Good afternoon all!

I’m hearing a lot these days in the news about the importance of getting tested if you are feeling ill.

However, as you know, there are many types of tests in life. Coronavirus tests, blood tests, stress tests, drivers test, eye tests, written tests, even tests of our faith! The purpose of any test is the same; to reveal or surface the results of how we are doing one way or another. Sometimes the test is to search for something seen or physical and other times the test is to search for something unseen or spiritual?

Mr. Lacey was my 7th grade Social Studies teacher. One morning at the start of class he announced that he had lost his grade book and wondered if anybody in the class could help him by remembering any of their past test scores for the year. I listened as some of the class goof-offs on the back-row chimed right in calling out test scores of 90’s and higher! I remember thinking this is not a test about memory but a test about honesty! It is true, tests are very revealing! In case you were wondering, he was testing us!

In Gen. 22:1 the bible says, “...that God tested Abraham...” As we read 1-14, we see that this is the story of when God calls Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar. “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering...” v.2. What was the purpose of God testing Abrahams loyalty? Well, one thing was for sure, it was not for God to find out how loyal Abraham was, (God already knows all this) but it was more for Abraham to find out how loyal he himself was! God wants to reveal the same thing for us! Hey says, hey \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (put you name in the blank) I want you to be clear on what your commitment level is during a difficult time of testing. During this time of testing and having to stay at home, I have found myself snacking more and more on junk food! I discovered something about myself during this time of testing and being confined. I’m not sold out on eating well! OK, Lock me up! But seriously and more importantly, during times of testing, I need to know that I am sold out on my loyalty to the Lord! What truth is being reveled about you spiritually during this test time? Now in the end, God stops Abraham before he goes through with actually sacrificing his son Isaac. “...the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven... do not stretch out your hand against the lad...” 11-12. For Abraham, in his mind, he was prepared to be loyal regardless of the test. Finally, God provided “a ram caught in the thicket” for the sacrifice. Abraham called that place “The Lord Will Provide”

Two Lessons:

1. God wants to reveal to us His faithfulness when we are going through a test. This is all about God’s faithfulness to His people during times of testing! However, one way for us to be reassured of God’s faithfulness, especially during times of testing, is for Him to put us in or allow us to be put into a “stretch position” where we will see Him come through and provide! Now the problem is, who likes to be put in a stretch position? Nobody I know, including me! Most of us, if we are honest, are great at being strong and loyal in our faith while our faith is not being stretched and tested. But, like taking a stress test on a treadmill, until we are in the stretch and stressed position, we really don’t know the condition of our loyalty. What we do need to know however, is that regardless of our faithfulness God is faithful and will always provide in any and every stretch position in life!

2. God wants to reveal to us the promise He gives us when we are going through the test. As noted above “...the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven... do not stretch out your hand against the lad...” 11-12. God promises to control the testing! He will never call us to go beyond what we are able to handle. The apostle Paul put it this way in I Cor. 10:13, “God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able...” Ever call out, “Lord I can’t take this anymore!” I can’t take the pressure, I can’t take another few weeks in the house with my kids, I can’t take... etc. God, says, because I am faithful, I will not give you more that you can bear! Now the beautiful thing about this growing process, this stretching of our faith, is that God is involved in the process. “He who began a good work in you will prefect it until the day of Christ Jesus” Phil. 1:6. God promises us His companionship through the testing! “He will never leave us or forsake us.” Heb. 13:5. As God was close with Abraham, all through his time of testing, He is with us as well through ours!

Have a great day, Mike

**April 7, 2020**

Good afternoon friends! Hope all are doing well!

Yesterday I started the “Thought Of The Day” talking about Ezekiel’s vision of his time in the valley as well as God raising up a great army! I ended the lesson with saying “See You On The Mountain Top”

I happen to find a song entitled “God On The Mountain” that many have performed including this version by Lynda Randle

Take a look at the lyrics.... it is very encouraging for today’s thoughts as a follow up!

If you have time and would like to listen to the song, I have included the link to listen!

Enjoy... Mike

Lyrics

Life is easy, when you're up on the mountain

And you've got peace of mind, like you've never known

But things change, when you're down in the valley

Don't lose faith, for you're never alone

For the God on the mountain, is still God in the valley

When things go wrong, He'll make them right

And the God of the good times, is still God in the bad times

The God of the day, is still God in the night

You talk of faith when you're up on the mountain

But talk comes so easy, when life's at its best

Now it's down in the valley of trials and temptations

That's where your faith is really put to the test

For the God on the mountain, is still God in the valley

When things go wrong, He'll make them right

And the God of the good times, is still God in the bad times

The God of the day, is still God in the night

The God of the day, is still God in the night

Lynda Randle - God On the Mountain (Live) - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCTl4tUYIAg>

**April 6, 2020**

Good morning friends!

Hope all had a good weekend.

When I first went into the military, one of my first mornings of boot camp in the Navy, was a very interesting experience. There were about 80 of us in the barracks one morning waking up when the Chief, our company commander, showed up for the first time. Someone yelled out, “attention on deck” and we all quickly stood up at attention at the foot of our bunkbeds. “Everyone pick up your piece (our piece was the rifle we had been given to carry during drills when marching) and hold it out straight in front of you” said the chief with authority. He was kind of a shorter man and a bit slender. As we held our rifles straight out in front of us, he did the same. For the next few moments there was silence. Then one by one, as our arms gave out from the strain, all 80 men dropped down. There were a few guys who held out for a bit longer, but in the end, the only one still holding his rifle straight out was the chief! A risky but effective move! Following the last man to drop, the chief said, “I’m in charge, but I will raise you up to be a strong company!”

In Ezekiel chapter 37, Ezekiel finds himself in the middle of a valley that is filled with dry bones! A large group of people that had finally succumb to life’s pressures, but would soon be raised up by God to become a strong company! In fact, a great army for God! God asks Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?” Then He continues “Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.” Before you knew it there was “a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone.” And soon after “they came to life.” The result? “an exceedingly great army.” What we see here is that an in-charge God raised up a valley of fallen arms, legs, and more, that had given out from the strain of life and raised them up to be a strong company for God! Life is filled with time in the valley but with mountain top experiences as well!

There are two things to see in this powerful vision:

1. We are part of the great army of God where the truth keeps marching on! “the valley... was full of bones” I wonder if that valley of bones may have included strong arms like Samson’s, or the legs of folks like Abraham who sojourned so far, or the skulls of those like Solomon that housed the wisdom of God, or even ribcages of that of David that held a heart after God’s own heart. Whoever they were, one thing is for sure, all that has gone before us, is evidence of what can happen with us going forward! As it was their turn to rise up, it is our turn to rise up as well! You may believe that you are down in a valley, but God is calling us all to rise up and climb to the mountain top! Folks, no matter how deep the valley in life, God can use us all to be a great army of encouragement to many all over our country, reaching out with the truth of God’s word, “to hear the word of the Lord,” to lift up and raise people up with the strength of God, because the truth keeps marching on!

2. We have been called to life! “I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life... and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together.” You may remember the song; the foot bone is connected to the .... ankle bone, the ankle bone is connected to the... leg bone... etc. Maybe you have been wondering about yourself these days, can these old bones live? Can they make a difference in a world so oppressed right now? Last time I checked Phil 4:13 was still in the bible! “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Amen? Our attitude needs to be, not can I, but I know I can with God’s help! He puts the breath of life into our bones! He causes us to come to life! It is His power that works in us, Eph.3:20. Folks, never reduce your life to the reasoning and power source of this world! God is our power! He is our resurrection and life! He is our life giver! And remember, God doesn’t just stop at resurrecting corpses, He has big plans to make and use us in His great army! He never wanted us to simply exist in any situation, but to have life and have it abundantly!

Friends, God is our great restorer! If He can raise up, from dry bones in a valley a great army, just imagine what He can do if we just let Him use us now! Reach out to someone today! Share the encouraging words of truth with someone! As we have been called to life, God’s word will bring life to others! Remember, God is in charge, and He will raise you up to be a strong company!

See you on the mountain top! - Mike

**April 3, 2020**

Good afternoon folks,

Well it’s Friday! Hope all are doing OK.

After yesterday’s thoughts on prayer, I thought that ending the week with a one more day of the same would be a good thing!

You probably remember the show “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire.” I remember watching one show where the person playing the game lost. But what was unusual to me was how he lost! Yes, he answered the question wrong, but without using any of his lifelines! I thought, why would anyone disregard a lifeline, a resource of help, when so much was at stake?

Folks we have a lifeline with God, it’s called prayer! A powerful resource that we need to use when so much is on the line, and at stake! A Christian’s life without prayer is like that contestant who decided to go it alone! We have help, it’s just a prayer away!

In the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah has a burden on his heart due to the difficult situation that is happening around him. He knew that his people in captivity were in great distress, and the wall of Jerusalem was broken down. The text says that he “wept and mourned for days... and was fasting and praying before the Lord.” Neh.1:4 Nehemiah had a burden on his heart and he handled it by going to God in prayer! I believe that a prayer burden is a good thing as it takes us to the lifeline we need! If you have a burden on your heart today, don’t side step the burden! Let the prayer burden bring you to the true source of strength, Our Father in heaven!

There are three things that I would like for us to remember about prayer for today:

1. A Prayer Burden That Started With One Became A Team Effort For Them All! By the time you get to chapter 4, the effort of rebuilding the wall and dealing with difficult circumstances became a team effort, “So we built the wall, and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work” Neh.4:6 However, as the difficulties surrounding them persisted, we see that dealing with it all through prayer became a team effort as well! “But we prayed to our God” Neh. 4:9 Folks let’s all be praying together, Amen? In Acts 12:5 it tells us that “prayer for him (Peter’s imprisonment) was being made fervently by the church” The results were amazing! Let’s pray for one another, pray for the leadership of churches and countries, pray for our sick as well as all those who are continuing to help the sick that are in harm’s way. Remember what James said, “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” Jas. 5:16. If this is true, imagine what the effective prayers of many righteous people can accomplish!

2. Prayer Is A Prescription For Anxiety: The result of Nehemiah and the others turning there difficult circumstances over to God in prayer was that that they were able to rise up with renewed strength, by overcoming the discouragement and anxiety at hand. Nehemiah remined them in 4:14 after they prayed together, “Do not be afraid” The apostle Paul said it this way in Phil. 4:6-7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” Worried? No need... bring it to the Lord in prayer! The result? “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

3. Prayer Is Powerful: Nehemiah and the rest of the servants, in the end, were able to complete the wall, regardless of the opposing pressures. “So the wall was completed... in fifty-two days” Neh.6:15. Amazing! Talk about crushing the curve! Bottom line, lets utilize our lifeline, our power prayer source! Let’s not forget the absolute power of prayer! Jeremiah 33:3 tells us “Call on Me and I will answer you...” Let the calling begin and let’s be strengthened by it! Amen?

Remember 7 days without prayer makes one weak!

Lord willing, be back with you on Monday.

Blessings, Mike

**April 2, 2020**

Good afternoon everyone!

Hope all are doing OK today.

OK so for the next two weeks they say we are going to be heading up the curve, and then back down! Reminds me of a roller coaster ride! A few years back my daughter Allison and I rode “The Intimidator” roller coaster at Carowinds in Charlotte NC. We waited for the front seat, (what was I thinking). On the way up the big curve all I thought about were two things. 1. Everybody on this ride was is a lot younger and could handle the physical stress better than me. 2. It’s time to PRAY! When it was over, I only thought about one thing... I hope I never have to go through that experience again!

Folks I hope that we never have to go through this experience again, but as we head into the curve, it’s time to pray! Amen?

In Luke 11:1-13 the disciples ask Jesus a question. “Lord, teach us to pray...” Amazing! Why? The way I see it, Jesus is the greatest preacher and teacher, but the disciples never asked Jesus for a sermon outline or how to preach or teach. In addition, Jesus is the greatest miracle worker, but the disciples didn’t ask Him to be taught how to preform miracles. However, when they saw Him praying they said, “Lord teach us to pray” I think they knew, what we know as well, that when it comes to twists and turns of life and especially when you are heading into a big curve, it’s time to make it a priority to pray! Frankly, prayer should always be a priority!

In the words of Jesus Himself, after He instructs the disciples about how to pray the Lord’s Prayer, we learn at least two things from the story in verses 5-13:

1. We Need To Pray With Boldness And Persistence! Jesus tells us, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.” The NAS says “because of his persistence” The neighbor does not respond because he is a friend, but does respond due to the boldness, shameless audacity and persistence! Folks lets pray with absolute boldness for the situation in our world, one another, and for God’s sovereign healing hand to be upon us all!

2. We Need To Make Prayer A Priority: The first thing that the disciples asked Jesus was, “Lord, teach us to pray...” I Tim. 2:1-2 says, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority...” Friends, let me say this..... First, before we slide out of bed in the morning..... First, before we take a shower..... First, before we start our day..... First, before we start work..... First, before we check the news... First, before we have coffee, and eat breakfast... First, before we make an appointment..... and on and on ..... Pray, Pray, Pray, Pray! Amen! Folks, let’s begin and continue each day with prayer! Let’s pray with boldness and persistence! Let’s remember that prayer is powerful and it works! And let’s above all pray believing! As Mark 11:24 says, “all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you.” Amen!

Thank you Lord ahead of time for hearing our prayers! Remember, the Great Physician is always on call!

Remember, the Great Physician is always on call! Why not call on Him today!

In Christ,

- Mike

**April 1, 2020**

Good afternoon all!

Hope all are well!

Having confidence in the midst of uncertainty these days, with all that continues to go on, sounds like one of those things that are easier said than done! Am I right?

In Acts 27-28 Paul sails from Rome only to get caught in a storm, that went on to become a shipwreck, only to finally make it to the shore alive to be bitten by a poisonous snake! Talk about going from bad to worst! Regardless of all that happened to him, God not only got him through it, but used him in the midst of it to make a great difference in the lives of those who were with him through the whole ordeal! Through it all he remained confident in the midst of uncertainty! You will have to read the chapters to truly appreciate the situation here! It’s a good read! Do you feel like you are kind of going through the storms of uncertainty? I do! Almost seems like we are we going from bad to worse as things continue to escalate! How do we stay confident in the midst of all this uncertainty?

Three things to consider:

1. Believe God will do exactly what He says. In other words, trust in the promises of God! In verses 27:9-24 Paul says a number of things like “men you ought of followed my advice and not have set sail...” v.21 “I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only the ship” v.22 “I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told” v.25. Folks Paul was in the midst of uncertainty but was standing on the promises of God, and we can too! Amen? Romans 8:38 says “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” God didn’t promise us that all things would always be good, but that He would work out all things for good! Let’s believe that God will do exactly what He says!

2. Stay onboard through the burdens of life. As the ship was soon to run aground, some of the sailors were trying to escape from the ship.... v.26-30. Paul continued with the sailors and said “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved” v.31 When we find ourselves in the middle of a crisis, such as we are, we need to stay the course! Don’t give up on God! Don’t quit, don’t run, don’t bail out due to fear and doubt to the point of despair, but remember God’s promises! Heb. 13:5 says, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” Remember, God doesn’t let anyone down! Continue to hang in there my friends!

3. Be encouraged, for He can use anybody anywhere! It is amazing to see how Paul went from the prisoner to the pilot so to speak during this time of uncertainty. The text says that “Paul was encouraging them” v.33 The result was that “all of them were encouraged” v.36 If God can use Paul while being a prisoner during a shipwreck, to encourage and help people going through the storm, guess what? He can use you as well even during this time of crisis in our lives! Try giving a call/text/e-mail of encouragement to someone today! Let them know that not only are we are all in this together, but that we can have confidence in the midst of uncertainty!

Hang tough....

- Mike

**March 31, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Good afternoon!

Hebrews 12:1 tells us “Therefore since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...”

When I was on the track team in high school, one of the events that I participated in was the relay race. I was a fast runner at the time but was not that good at receiving the baton handoff when it came to me. At one of our big meets while competing against a rival school, our stands were full of parents and supporting students as we had the home field advantage. At the start of the event, we were off to a lead, but when it came to my turn to receive the baton, I dropped it on the ground. Feeling like all was lost, I stopped in my tracks and was going to give up. However, in an instant, the surrounding stands that were filled with people, starting calling out to me, “pick it up...pick it up... you can do this!” With encouragement like that it motivated me to go for it! What seemed like too long was only just seconds, so I grabbed the baton and ran like lightning to my next teammate and passed it on to him. We actually ended up winning the event! I believe that all of this was due to the fact that I was surrounded by encouragement!

In Hebrews 12 the writer tells us the same! Referring back to chapter 11, which we commonly refer to as the “hall of faith,” we see so many men and women of faith there! We know their stories, and how God has used them to do the extortionary, even during the trying and challenging times of their lives! Whether it was Noah who built and ark, or Abraham, who went out when God called him at 75 years old, or Moses who was used to help free God’s people from Egypt, or all the rest in that great chapter, they are all up on the stands in the clouds; witnesses surrounding us, saying “you can do this... you can do this” We are facing some big challenges about now! In a sense, the witnesses surrounding us are saying to us, we have faced the same and just as God gave us the victory, God will give you the same! Amen?

Three Points to consider:

1. Encouragement of great faith from the past: “Therefore since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us...” God is saying, let Me show you what can happen, by what has happened! These are our brothers and sisters in faith, and what they have done by faith is proof of what God can do by faith in our lives as well! They are our cheering section!

2. Pressing on in the present: “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...” Endurance says, I’m not giving up! I’m not giving in! I will pick it up... I can do this” and I will run with all of my might! How? Fixing our eyes on Jesus! This is how we press on in the present!

3. Being excited about the unseen future: “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...” The joy set before Him...” Folks we have heaven, victory, salvation, being with the Lord set before us! This is a glimpse of the glory to come! That joy is what gets us through the immediate event of this life! Hang in there brothers and sisters!

In His Service,

- Mike

**March 30, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Good afternoon! Hope all had a good weekend!

Well it’s official, the word from the President is that the social distancing guidelines will stay in place for 30 more days at this point! Tough but probably a good thing! Need a little more endurance about now?

James says, “Consider it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Jas. 1:2-4

How well do you do when your faith and life in a challenging situation is being tested? Do you consider it all joy? Do you have the endurance? Have you ever felt so excited and joyful as a Christian that you felt that you could put hell out with a water pistol? So confident about your sins being forgiven, and headed to heaven that nothing could put out your inner fire? So strong in your faith that you could handle it no matter what came your way? But then it happened.... The testing of your faith! A difficult life challenge, maybe like the one we are facing at this time. How’s it going now? The point is that how we respond during times like these reveals the depth of our Christian walk and faith, and the opportunity to make it deeper.

You see thinking we are good at something, and actually being good at something is two very different things!

For example, I’m good at dieting, until I get hungry! I have faith that all will be OK if I am out of work, as long as I’m still working. I’m great at being sick, as long as I’m well! (The truth is, I’m a real whiner when sick) However, the key is, to notice how we respond when our life is being tested! Do I still consider it all joy? The NIV say “Consider it pure joy”

So how can all that we are going through be considered pure joy?

Two things:

1. The joy is not in the trial itself, but in what the trial brings! “...the testing of your faith produces endurance” James not only assumes the trial is coming, but expects people to profit from it! It’s not about liking the trial, the difficulty, but liking how God molds us through these trying times. Remember, we are the most moldable when we are the most vulnerable.

2. The times of trial should be seen as a vehicle to growth and maturity in Christ! ...And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Tests like we are all going through now are not to make us fall, but to make us soar! They are not to defeat us, but to make us undefeatable! They are not to weaken us, but to make us stronger! The Greek word here for testing implies a trial or test directed toward an end goal. The goal is to make us stronger and more mature in Christ! This is the good news!

Blessings to all.... have a joyful day!

- Mike

**March 27, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Good afternoon! Can't believe its Friday already! Hope everyone is hanging in there!

In Revelation 2-3 Jesus writes to seven churches. One of which was the church at Smyrna.

At the time of John's writing the church at Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) had been enduring and going through some hard times. I wonder, if some were feeling like, I don't know how much more of this I can take? Their situation was difficult, the future was uncertain, however despite their trying times along with the poverty they were experiencing they were spiritually rich! Jesus said, "I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich." Folks regardless of our current situation, spiritually speaking we are rich! Eph.3:8 says that we have "unfathomable riches"

However, even with knowing this, it is true that regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, social status, age, and more, all people share the same language of life's challenges and times of difficulty. We may not be able to relate to different cultures, like China, Italy, South Korea, even NYC and people in other parts of our country and the world, but from the mountains of Siberia to the plains of Texas, for every human being, times of hurting are the same. Our situation with the Coronavirus is a world pandemic. We are all united by this experience. As has been stated on TV, we are all truly in this together, and therefore it is so important to keep encouraging one another! Send out a text, a note, make a phone call, send a picture. Let someone know that we can do this.. together, with God's help!

The good news is that like the church at Smyrna, in the midst of their trying times Jesus had a message of hope! "Be faithful"..... In other words, don't give up, hang in there and "I will give you the crown of life." In Smyrna the Christians were experiencing trying times, but never lost sight of the possibilities of not remaining faithful! Their attitude was, nothing will cause me to give up. No person, no situation, no financial problem, no Coronavirus, or anything of its kind will keep me down. I will keep on keeping on with Jesus! The writer of Hebrews says it this way, "fixing our eyes on Jesus...,who for the joy set before Him endured the cross" Her.12:2.

There is one lesson I would like to point out at this point.

\* Helpless situations do not exist when you have a relationship with the living hope, Jesus! Whether Wall Street crashes, the virus goes on for longer than we like, one thing can't be taken from us, our hope in Christ Jesus! As Christians, our salvation is sure, because He is our living hope, and He will give us the crown of life!

We need to see not only the hope we have in the midst of life challenges now, but the hope we have beyond the difficulty after! We have a living hope! Peter put it best this way in I Peter 1:3--4 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you..." Just like the song... My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness..... On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand... (I think I heard you singing along ... LOL)

Hope these notes of encouragement have been giving you a lift!

I will see you back on Monday!

PS Hope to be with you on Sunday's Facebook Live @ 10am.

[https://www.facebook.com/MountPleasantChurchofChrist/](https://www.facebook.com/MountPleasantChurchofChrist/?__cft__%5b0%5d=AZUqng7hh1p3ylniSC63Sz75NDY3_aARlOvpakv6Ih-frkTCtczqFzmpp_-d97Yr10ZPkvo10rVLXhkIk9jEpTZBz4Y8BhmfIMGESGhvV7bKHo2SuBlkyiZC0B7_bQO6Iag3JHEKWyoCtIqQDy2G7fMI&__tn__=kK-R)

Blessings to all,

- Mike

**March 26, 2020**

Hi Family, ,

Good afternoon to all!

I have been putting together a "Thought Of The Day" for folks in the church here in SC. Just thought I would pass it on to you as well..... This was todays thought Thursday 3/26

I also send the past two days as well.... Hope you enjoy!

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[Mike](https://www.facebook.com/mike.laurenzo?__cft__%5b0%5d=AZXCAEDyMVKZhlyzSmWf_5aXVWjmuy1Tky4CXgk3LIOsjrT36NyvVZcgxIwq2-pWKw2yFJ1GU2g5pNbob4U_dfuHaUqUxPMQ__MDzBaCoPUrpUQOB6tJLpFNcckdndl0GWg&__tn__=-%5dK-R)

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Brothers and Sisters,

Good afternoon!

Have you ever said.... "You now I never looked at it that way" Today I would like us all to consider having "Eyes Of Faith!

In a story recorded in 2 Kings 6:8-17, Elisha and his attendant find themselves surrounded by the great Syrian army! When morning came and the attendant saw this he went back to tell Elisha, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" v.15

I love Elisha's response to having the great army of Syria sent against only two servants of God. "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who were with them." v.16 What? I can feel the attendant saying to himself something like, let's see two against hundreds, really brother Elisha?

But then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the servants eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." v.17

Suddenly Elisha and his attendant were surrounded by the unseen majority! The heavenly army of God! Wow!

There are at least two striking points in this short story for us to see!

1. Having eyes of faith means that we need to be looking past the present problems to the promises of God! If you feel a bit surrounded by our situation now, overwhelmed, don't loose heart, ask God to open your eyes and see not only the unseen heavenly army around us but the promises that God has given to us as His children! Don't get distracted and too focused on what's wrong, but rather what's right... this enemy will be defeated! Do not fear!

2. Having eyes of faith means that we can't always control what happens to us and around us, but we can always control how we will respond! Faith is not knowing what the future holds, but who holds the future! Elisha and his attendant had absolutely no control over being surrounded by the Syrian army, but they had total control over how they would handle it! Eyes Of Faith.... through prayer! You may be saying with all that is happening around us now, hey this isn't what I signed up for as a Christian! But through eyes of faith and prayer, we can respond by saying, it will not defeat us! I will not be crushed, heartbroken, nor controlled by this situation and problem! I will stand on the promises of God! Amen church?

Folks, let's remember what Elisha's first response was when he was when he realized the depth of his situation! He prayed! When life knocks you on your knees you're in the perfect position to pray! Amen?

How all are staying well and safe! Let's keep praying for one another and the world!

Blessings to all,

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[Mike](https://www.facebook.com/mike.laurenzo?__cft__%5b0%5d=AZXCAEDyMVKZhlyzSmWf_5aXVWjmuy1Tky4CXgk3LIOsjrT36NyvVZcgxIwq2-pWKw2yFJ1GU2g5pNbob4U_dfuHaUqUxPMQ__MDzBaCoPUrpUQOB6tJLpFNcckdndl0GWg&__tn__=-%5dK-R)

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Wednesday, 3/25

Brothers and Sisters,

Good afternoon church!

In Genesis 12:1-2 God said to Abram..... "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your fathers house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great..."

Three things strike me as I read these verses.

First: Abram is 75 years old when he gets the call.

Second: God tells him to go forth, but never really gives him any details on the game plan or the time line of the trip.

Third: God does tell him that He will show him, He will make him great, He will bless him and make his name great!

Imagine being 75 years old and God asks you to head out with the family with no real game plan? Wouldn't that kind of make you a bit uneasy? When the wife and family say, OK where is our first stop, the Holiday Inn? Do you have the GPS? What's for dinner? How long is this going to take? Uh, aren't you kind of old to be doing trips like this aren't you? Why are we leaving the security of our home where we have been living for quite some time? Don't you know that we've got roots there?

Yet in Gen. 12:4 it says.... "Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him" I think I know why! Because Abram discerned the difference between where he was going and who was going with him and showing him the way. The presence of God always trumps the unknown problems ahead.

Seems to me that the days and road ahead are still filled with concerns, questions and still be a bit fuzzy for us presently, but one thing is for sure, God says to us I will not only show you the way, but I will be with all the way! Praise God for His continual presence in our lives!

- Mike

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Tuesday 3/24

Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

Hope all are doing OK today and hanging in there!

The apostle Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 1:3-5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

During these stressful times, two things are for sure! 1. No matter the depth of affliction, God's comfort is near! 2.This experience that we are going through is preparing us to help others to get through it or something similar in the future as well! On the job training!

Jesus' words to Paul, even after the Lord left this earth were "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you" Acts 18:9-10. As we learned in Jeff Bryant's class recently, Jesus is still involved in our lives from heaven, encouraging us to keep on keeping on. He is still with us all the way! Amen to that!

On a lighter note, I heard yesterday that one congregation had services last Sunday in a very unique way. The members showed up in the parking lot and stayed in their cars, rolled down the windows. The preacher preached from the rooftop of the church building! Now I've heard it all! It reminded me of Acts 20:19 in reverse. Eutychus, who was listening to the preacher (Paul) from a high place (window) fell down and died! Thankfully Paul came to his aid and revived him! What happens if the preacher falls from the roof?

Hang in there folks!

Blessings,

Mike