

**'The Prayer Impact'
Post Advent Sunday of
a Covid- Christmas
December 27th, 2020**

Dear Partners In Prayer Team,

*"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'." **John 14:6 (NIV)***



*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener... I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." **John 15:1; 5 (NIV)***

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ...The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." **John 1:1-4, 14 (NIV)***

Did you know that the Christmas story is a destination story? Through the years I've learned that Christmas is not just an event, it is a journey. It's not about a one time or moment celebration that hits the calendar for just one day a year. It's about an amazing journey that changed everything. It's a story about a place left and a place guaranteed. Only God could have written this amazing story of the two destinations of grace. That baby born in a manger is not the beginning of the Christmas journey. It began even before the times of Bethlehem. John wrote that Jesus, who was the Logos and the divine Son of God, came to this earth by the incarnation of becoming like us in the very flesh. John told the Christmas story about Jesus, becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:1, 14). I love how Eugene Peterson says in John 1:14 of The Message: "The Word [Jesus] became flesh and blood, and 'moved into the neighborhood.'" I love that description. Something Mr. Rogers would say. But that is just how John and the disciples saw Christ's coming- God as human flesh moved into our neighborhood! It was just as real to John in his day as it should be to us. Jesus moving into our neighborhood is just the beginning of the journey that doesn't end at the cross. And John continued by describing the manger-born as: "We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish." It happens that when Jesus was crucified and rose again defeating our sins, that this was not the end of the journey. It was the central part of the story



but certainly not the end. Every year that we celebrate Christmas we are looking forward to that time and place when Jesus leaves the glories of heaven having prepared for us a mansion, and takes us back for a final going home Christmas celebration. I believe that someday in eternity, we will be rejoined with our families and loved ones who have gone before us, and we will end this journey of life with the biggest Christmas celebration of all time. This is

what we should be celebrating not just during the Christmas season but every single day of our lives. This willingness of the One who was God Almighty to leave the splendor of glory, to take on the normal limits and frailty of the human body, and to endure the daily realities of what it means to live in a terribly broken world is the definition of love. So this Christmas remember that what you celebrate is a destination story. Jesus left what was His right, to guarantee for us a place that is not our right but is a gift from His humble hands. So while we still live and breathe on planet earth, we remind ourselves we are on the journey to the ultimate home. I really think that poetess Gladys Billing Braxton capture the truth of going “home” at Christmas:

*“Away from the busy sights and sounds, I take the road towards home;
Back to the hills and valleys, back where I love to roam;
The snow is white and glistening, the stars shine bright above;
I’m going home for Christmas, home to those I love.*

*The folks will be there waiting with a smile and open arms,
I’ll find love and laughter there the wealth of homely charms;
There will be a Christmas tree in the window,
As friends and neighbors gather round;
To sing the songs of Christmas, and joy shall there abound.*

*The roads seems long and winding,
But there’s happiness at the end, for I’m going home for Christmas,
And home is around the bend!”*

Home to heaven is especially sweet when we think of our time with Jesus as the ultimate rest. Don’t you just long for your heavenly home?

As we are wrapping up the 2020 year, (Praise God!!!!!!) I realized that this was my last response to what has been a yearlong prayer encouragement. We are an upper-room church. And our prayers have been the most important and

essential thing we've done this whole year. We've used it to help us "Walk by faith and not by sight!" (2 Corinthians 5:7). So let me just give you some encouragement to our praying. You as a prayer team, and praying members, and praying attenders, have been the backbone of our ministry. We honestly would not have survived this year if you hadn't been praying. I trust that you are encouraged to find yourselves growing in prayer. I read this wonderful illustration of prayer that reminds us how much we all grow in our prayer lives. *"My little girl was quite skeptical about the power of prayer," confessed a minister, "but she was finally convinced. She petitioned the Lord to help her pass her swimming test at school and, in her own words, 'It took Him [God] two weeks, but He did it.'"* (The Fishwrapper, August 18, 2020)

This year I read the book *Prayer* written by Puritan Pastor John Bunyan for my growing benefit and encouragement. What is interesting is that Pastor Bunyan, who we all know wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote this short book as a sermon while he was in prison. During his day, the English Church jailed pastors who were not following the *Common Book of Prayer* which was the state church's authorized and only version of prayer during his time. People in churches were told never to pray their own prayers from their hearts. Pastor Bunyan wrote this sermon to explain that we should not be chained and regulated to a "man-made" rule of prayer, but that we should pray from our hearts to God. That was so unacceptable, and that is why he was jailed. Hard to believe, right? His definition for true prayer was this: *"Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised according to His Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God"* (Prayer, pg. 13). I think that is an awesome and certainly the most complete definition of true prayer ever written. But it isn't weighty that we can't articulate such a definition, as to actually pray! He wrote a one page conclusion with twelve closing thoughts to his church family about prayer. I want to close the year and use his words as our last partners in prayer encouragement. I may just give small comments to his advice, included in the parentheses. Here it is:

"I shall conclude this discourse with the word of advice to all God's people.

1. Believe that as sure as you are in the Way of God, you must meet with temptations. (True really. We never stop facing temptations do we? As we finish 2020, we often feel that we will be so glad when the pandemic restrictions are over, and life becomes more normal again. But guess what? Temptations will come in a new way. Be ready!)

2. The first day therefore that you enter into Christ's congregation, look for them. (So remember when you are ready to return to church, be ready for more temptations to keep you away from the Lord.)

3. When the temptations do come, beg of God to carry you through them. (I say, Amen!)

4. *Be jealous of your own heart, that it deceive you not in your evidences for heaven, nor in your walking with God in this world. (I love this advice. Isn't it true that we are finishing 2020 by 'walking by faith?' I believe it is so true! We don't want to walk as the world does.)*
5. *Take heed of the flatteries of false brethren. (It is true, that if we are prepared for Christ's coming, all through the year I've been warning you to watch for false teachers. We know His coming is closer by the appearance of false teachers.)*
6. *Keep in the life and power of truth! (I can't improve that advice at all.)*
7. *Look most at the things which are not seen! (He is reminding us to look at things above not things on this earth. Not our bank accounts, our physical homes, or our earthly belongings. We don't want them to blind us to living for Christ each day.)*
8. *Take heed of the little sins. (I actually love this reminder. How easy it is to not pay attention to small things in our lives, because we feel good that we may not be enslaved or habitual to the big sins and 'no-no's' of the world.)*
9. *Keep the promise warm upon your heart! (Love it! Let's keep the promises of God's Word always warm each day inside us!)*
10. *Renew your acts of faith in the Blood of Christ. (We do that when we witness or when we come and celebrate communion as a church family together.)*
11. *Consider the work of your generation. (Pastor John is reminding us that we must live our Christian lives as an example to the next younger generation of the church. Who are we praying and raising to take our place at PCBC? Maybe you have never thought about that, so start. Start praying for young people and make it your prayer goal to pray they grow strong and start serving in many areas of our church.)*
12. *Count to run with the foremost therein. Grace be with thee! (His last point is a reminder that we are not at the end of the Christmas journey until we get to heaven.)" (John Bunyan's Prayer, pg. 61).*

So loved ones, remember to finish this year with greater prayer commitment and fervency! Renew your desire to pray each week. Make it your commitment to keep reading and praying for our ministry. The need for praying Christians is certainly reinforced by E. M. Bounds, "*Never has the need been greater for saintly men and women to pray. More imperative still is the call for saintly, God-devoted preachers. The world moves with gigantic strides. Satan has his hold and rule on the world, and labors to make its movements serve his ends. So true religion must do its best work while presenting its most attractive and perfect prayers. No amount of money, genius, or culture can move things for God. When we pray, holiness energizes the soul, energizing the whole man aflame with love, with desire for more faith. More prayer means more zeal, and more consecration- this is the secret of prayer power. These we need and must have. And prayer must be the incarnation of this God-inflamed devotedness.*" (*Power through Prayer* pg. 92)

So as we close this year, and this prayer partner message, let's keep our prayers aflame and looking upwards. I want to close with this wonderful

reminder of our future home in heaven. Wanda Bencke wrote this poem when we think of loved ones who have finished the journey to heaven ahead of us, it is entitled: *Christmas From Heaven*.

*"I see the countless Christmas trees
Around the world below,
With tiny lights, like heaven's stars,
Reflecting on the snow.*

*The sight is so spectacular,
Please wipe away that tear.
For I'm spending Christmas
With Jesus Christ this year.*

*I hear the many Christmas songs,
That people hold so dear,
But the sounds of music can't compare,
With the Christmas choir up here.*

*For I have no words to tell you,
The joy their voices bring.
For it is beyond description,
To hear an angel sing.*

*I can't tell you of the splendor,
Or the peace here in this place.
Can you just imagine Christmas,
With our Savior, face to face?*

*I'll ask Him to light your spirit,
As I tell Him of your love;
So then pray for one another,
As you lift your eyes above.*

*Please let your heart be joyful,
And let your spirit sing.
For I'm spending Christmas in Heaven,
And I'm walking with the King!*

*I know how much you miss me;
I see the pain inside your heart.
But I'm not so far away,
We really aren't apart.*

*So be happy for me, dear ones,
You know I hold you dear,*



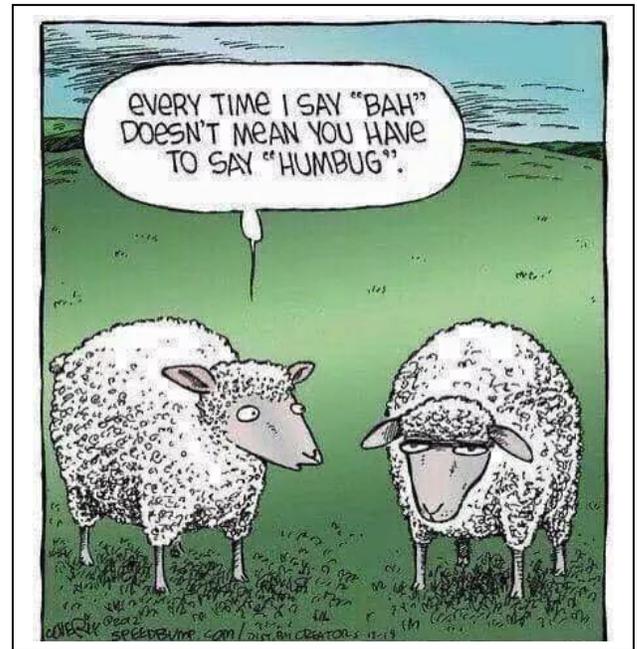
*And be glad I'm spending Christmas
With Jesus Christ this year.*

*I send you each a special gift
From my heavenly home above.
I send you each a memory
Of my undying love.*

*After all "love" is the gift,
More precious than pure gold.
It was always most important
In the stories Jesus told.*

*Please love and keep each other
As my Father said to do,
For I can't count the blessings
Or the love He has for you.*

*So have a Merry Christmas and
Wipe away that tear.
Remember I'm spending Christmas
With Jesus Christ this year!"*



Will you pray with me?

"Our loving and precious Father in Glory, we long to be home with You! We long for our Savior Jesus to come again soon! We know and are so thankful for His preparing a place for us. May we end our year not filled with worry, but filled with faith. Corrie Ten Boom once said: 'Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength- carrying two days at once. Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.' We admit Lord to this truth. We pray that Your spirit will fill us with the power and joy of Christmas all year long. We pray especially for those near and dear to us who need to hear, accept, and believe in our dear Savior. Holy Spirit, please work in our loved ones hearts even now! We want them to celebrate our final journey at home in heaven with You! Please give us the sweet grace of repentance so we can know your forgiveness, and give us the courage of confession. Lord be our 'way, truth, and life!' Keep us ever close to the vine of Your Son, so we can bear fruit. Thank You for the weakness that keeps us near the manger and the cross, marveling at Your rich and overwhelming grace to broken sinners. Oh, come to our hearts Lord Jesus, there is room in our hearts for You. In our Christmas Savior's Name we pray. And all God's people said, Amen."

**Praying for a New Year of life before Christ returns,
Pastor Corvin <><**

