

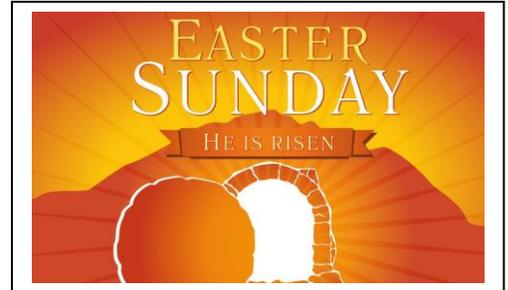
April 4th, 2021 Easter Resurrection Sunday! Also Conclusion of our 24/7 Prayer week!

Partners in Prayer: "Everything We Need!"

Dear Partners in Prayer Team,

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!"
Philippians 1:21 (NIV)

"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame.'"
Romans 10:9-11 (NIV)



Have you ever been truly ashamed? Do you remember the hot tears that flowed down your cheeks, burning your skin? Did your face blush so red that you tried to hide your face in your hands? How would you like to wear your sins like a public sign for everyone to know and see? Wouldn't that be the most unbearable feeling if we feel ashamed? Did you know that Tennessee gives drunk drivers a new wardrobe? The Volunteer State has a special gift for any person convicted of driving their streets under the influence of alcohol. It's a blazing orange vest. Offenders are required to wear it in public three different days for eight hours at a time while picking up litter from the side of the highway. Stenciled on the back in four-inch-tall letters are the words "I AM A DRUNK DRIVER." No doubt they deserve the punishment. In fact given the threat they've imposed upon the highways, they deserve three days of public humiliation. But I wonder why we do the same to ourselves? Why do we dress ourselves in our mistakes and don the robe of poor choices? We step into the hidden shames of our hearts and sort through our regrets and rebellion and, for some odd reason, vest up. We wear: "I disappointed my parents!"; "I wasted my youth"; "I neglected my kids!"

How did shame come about? Where did it begin? When we sin, sometimes we cover the vest with a blouse or blazer of good behavior as Adam and Eve did

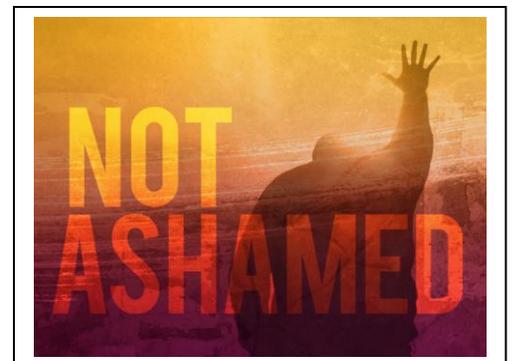


(Genesis 3:7). If you remember the story: "That's a lie!" the serpent hissed. "You'll not die! God knows very well that the instant you eat it you will become like Him, for your eyes will be opened—you will be able to distinguish good from evil!" So the woman Eve was convinced. How lovely and fresh looking the fruit was! And it would make her so wise! So

she ate some of the fruit and gave some to her husband Adam, and he ate it too. And as they ate it, suddenly they became aware of their nakedness, and were embarrassed. They were ashamed! So they strung fig leaves together to cover themselves around the hips” (Genesis 3:4-7, The Living Bible). Welcome to the vest system of shame! People wear signs or vests that say: “Worry!”; “Lust!”; “Rejection!”; “Pride!”; “Lack of faith!”; and “Hopelessness!” Hard to hide it. Harder still to discard it. But we work at doing so. Emphasis on the word “work.” But overcoming the bad deeds which shame us in our lives with good ones doesn’t work.

The Easter story tells us how God’s business is to redeem our lives and take on Him as our vests, so He can cover us with His righteousness. Jesus’ death on the cross is not a secondary theme in Scripture; it is the core! The English word “crucial” comes from the Latin for cross (crux). The crucial accomplishment of Christ occurred on the cross and His resurrection was to remove our sin and shame. As we celebrate Passion Week we have been drawing near the cross. What happened there is not a “sentimental” old story that occasionally moves us once a year, it was a crucial moment. On that cross God dressed Jesus in our vests, each and every one: “I cheated my friends”; “I lied to my wife!”; “I abused my children!”; and “I cursed my God.” As if Jesus deserved them, He wore them. Our sins, our vests were put on Christ: “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). “He bore the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:12). Paul proclaimed that God made Christ “to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter agreed: “Jesus Himself bore our sins’ in His body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24). “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). And when we trust in Him, “As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame’” (Romans 10:11).

But here is the important thing: when you come to the cross, there is only one seat. Look at a cross. They were never built for two. Crosses aren't “two seaters.” There is no room for two. So you must come to the cross and by faith believe Jesus was there for you, or you are keeping yourself on the cross. Puritan Richard Baxter once said about Easter: “We do not preach the cross, and display our own glories upon it!” We don’t try to find our honor. We don’t try to make us feel better by trying to imitate the suffering of Jesus, to alleviate our shame or guilt. Jesus was there in our place! I love what Charles Spurgeon wrote to remind us that we must die at the cross as Jesus asked us to do daily (Luke 9:23): *“I am sure we would increase in that grace if we lived nearer to Christ. O humility, most precious thing, you are most rare! Growing Christians think themselves nothing, but, full-grown Christians think themselves less than nothing; and the nearer we get to Jesus, the smaller self will appear to be. Self and Christ can never come close together. When I*



stand near self, Christ is small; when I stand near Christ, self is small. May God grant to you, dear friends, to grow in the knowledge of Christ! Read the Scriptures more. Seek more the influences of the Holy Spirit upon them; spend more time in devotion; ask God the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh sight of Calvary; be more often at the triumphant entry, in the garden of suffering, in the hall of agony, under the cross of crucifixion; live with Jesus, and near to Him; and so, changed from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord, you shall each one of you grow unto the stature of a perfect man or woman in Christ Jesus.” (Sermon #2700 Grow in Grace, pg. 3).

I know this comes at the close of our 24/7 Prayer week; but I found some great questions for us in Paul David Tripp’s Lenten Devotion, *Journey to the Cross*. This book has had a powerful impact on my life in preparation for this week’s message on “Shame or Unashamed” when we remember the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This reading really gripped my heart and I wanted to share it with you. Read it slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to grip your heart as well:

*“I wish I could say I asked You, but I didn’t.
I wish I had thought that I needed help, but my mind was elsewhere.
I wish I had sought Your wisdom, but I saw myself as wise.
I wish I had leaned on You, but I thought I was standing up straight.
I wish I had cast myself on Your grace, but in the mirror I looked like someone who didn’t need it.
I wish I’d begun each day with You, but I was too busy.
I wish I had ended the night with You, but I was too tired.
I wish I had spent more time in Your word, but I had people to see, places to go.
I wish I had looked ahead to a pathway I couldn’t traverse alone, but I was too focused on the here and now.
I am older now with more life behind me than in front of me.
I mourn my assessments of strength, my appraisals of wisdom, tagging myself righteous, my quest for independence.
I regret the moments lost, opportunities gone, dreams now faded.
I would spend my last days in the cloud of despondency, beating myself up, hoping to get back what is forever gone, if it were not for Your grace.
I would not be able to look up as I look back. You went to the cross knowing every choice I would make, all that Your mercy would need to cover.
I can be honest about my choices.
I can confess it all, and I can rest because Your grace is that thorough and Your love has that much power. Through the years I have learned that to find the strength to look back, I need the grace to look up.” (Tripp, Paul David. Journey to the Cross (pp. 119-120).*

The year 2020 was an extraordinary experience. There are very few who look at the year with gratitude, and the “2020” jokes are everywhere. A whole new set of words have become standard such as Covid19 and social distancing. While

we long for “the good old days,” we look with anticipation for a new, “COVID-FREE” year and people returning to public worship at Easter.

So as we close the Passion Week of Prayer and celebrate our Savior’s resurrection, I am trying to ask myself what we can take away from this week. I hope that the following eight suggestions will be something you share with me as we have prayed! If we believe in the sovereignty of God; if we look for His purposes; if we genuinely believe that He “works all things together for good” to those who are loving Him and called to be conformed to His Son’s image, then we must think Biblically about our prayer week. What has God accomplished through this prayer week, and why?

1. WE HAVE BEEN STRIPPED OF THAT WHICH HAS BEEN DISTRACTING US. The entire world was shut down in early 2020 in six weeks. Many things we lived for were wrenched from our hands: sports, entertainment, travel, independence, health, financial stability, community ... the list is long. The church was not spared. The ministries and norms we held up as a sign of our health were suddenly gone.

Many of these things had become gods to us, idols we worshiped and lived for. Jesus gave a gracious but strong rebuke to a friend He loved because she had been drawn away from that which was most important.

Mary...was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations...But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:29-42)

Few Christians pre-Covid were giving undistracted devotion to Jesus. We had been lured away from Him by cheap substitutes. Our time, money, and attention were more diverted than anyone would want to admit. In 2020, as we celebrated Easter online, most of these distractions had been removed, and we learned there was much we could do without. We would be wise to carefully evaluate what, if anything should be re-introduced back into our lives. We should pray to be a people of discipleship! Remember our “everything is in Jesus” (Philippians 1:21)! And He has given us “everything we need to live for godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

2. WE HAVE BEEN PUSHED INTO NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY!

The most effective moments of real Christianity have always occurred when the church was laser-focused on a few primary things—loving Jesus and our neighbors, studying the Word, prayer, genuine community, ministry, generosity, and a relentless witness to a needy world. All of these were accomplished in the New Testament world with minimal resources. But what they did rely on was the power of the Holy Spirit.

Most pastors I know are re-thinking how to establish the simplicity of Acts 2 Christianity. How has the church survived (and thrived) in persecuted countries? Under harsh government control? When they have had little access to buildings? When there is little money and time for extensive programming? Hasn't an undistracted church been far more effective in its mission?

What if we began the next season with a clear focus on the few things that matter? That would genuinely advance the Kingdom of God. Saddleback Church has reported seeing 16,000 people come to Christ in 2020, and 12,000 were through one-on-one witness. Everyone must learn to do the same. We just celebrated having eight people join our church last month, and are planning the baptism of 5 in July for our Haycock church picnic. We are trusting that God will add to His church. We have prayed that all week!

3. MANY PROFESSING BELIEVERS HAVE LEFT US! And it's not just Palisades Community Bible Church. It's not just little churches like us. It is large churches too! It is every church, denomination, and flavor. The Apostle John noticed a telling reality in the early church. "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19). Okay, are you saying that people who have left us were not real Christians? No, but we can't escape the possibility that what we really live for has taken control of our lives. I have been praying for people to return. So have you! Some will return now that they have vaccinations. Praise the Lord! But not all. Jesus had warned his disciples about this possibility. He prophesied that there would be chaff along with the wheat in the church. The presence of merely professing Christians alongside real believers would open the door to the enemy's presence in the church in debilitating ways.

Everyone understands that many people cannot attend now. But many who attended in the past are not engaging anywhere, even online. But is this a devastating loss? Some of these who have simply left may be disenchanted Christians. But many may not have been Christians at all. Their presence inflated the statistics of the church while giving no spiritual power. Many of these people never gave, never served, and often gave a poor witness to a watching world.

While we all want to reach everyone, could this loss in our churches' inflated memberships be a blessing, trimming the church back to an authentic membership and greater possibility of a vibrant, serving church? I believe we will see a result of our praying this week.

4. LIGHT AND DARKNESS HAVE BECOME CLEARER!

Isolation and loss have brought out the worst in us. In a highly political year, we have seen the depths of our humanity. 2020 was a year of anger, despicable

social media tantrums, rioting in the streets, racism, wanton violence, intense political division, seemingly irreconcilable differences. The value of such darkness's visibility is that we now know, more clearly than ever, what we're dealing with. When 2021 came about, we continued to see problems. A nation that forgets God is in serious trouble. The future will be exponentially worse if we do not repent. A scan through history will tell us what we're capable of if we walk away from our Creator.

The pandemic did not create what we have seen, it just revealed it. It is healthy for the church to see itself and see the world in which we live and how desperate the need for Christ. I believe the "popular church" will soon become distinctly different from "true Bible believing churches" in the next five years. And I really believe the LGBTQ issues are going to be the tipping point. I really believe that we've already lost this newest generation to their acceptance of unbiblical behaviors. The scheme Satan is using is "If you really love as God, you will accept me." I think that when we hold to the truth about what God's word says, we will start to see society call us who still stand for truth, to be unkind and false. So the world is going to paint a "false church" look that will be popular and people will believe that real Christianity is like them. Yes, they are wrong and misinformed, but I think people will no longer just go looking for churches. I think that we must step up our evangelism and have a burden to share our faith "unashamed!" Jeremiah tells us people will not blush anymore or be ashamed of their sins: "Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen, they will be brought down when I punish them," says the Lord (Jer. 6:15). But for us: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

5. FAMILIES HAVE BEEN FORCED INTO GREATER COMMUNITY! This week I received a phone call from people who were asking about our church. I praise the Lord! They are looking for a "strong community" in a church. The final prophecy of the Old Testament concerned the coming of John the Baptist and the Son of Righteousness who would "restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:6).

The downfall of a nation begins with the disconnection of parents from their children; when a society becomes fatherless; and when work and sports and "my time" pull parents away from their primary responsibility to raise the next generation of disciples for Jesus. Even though Covid forced families together. Some resisted this closer proximity, but others embraced it, adjusting their family life and growing dramatically closer. Children have certainly not objected to parents who have been with them, taught them, and blessed them with greater security by tighter family bonds.

God's prescription for discipling the next generation has never changed. It is the only path to spiritual success. "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) We are praying for family discipleship in our church!

6. ETERNITY IS CLOSER! In November of 2020, Matthew Hammerstone, nicknamed "Auzzle", died. I didn't know him, but his funeral card appeared one Sunday near our cross in the foyer. I thought that maybe someone who had lost it, would find it, so I left it there for a month. Nobody has come forward to claim the card. In fact, I've asked several if they know the young man. He was just 21. Also this last year my good friend Robert Hayes was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. When these kinds of moments and death of loved ones happen, it makes eternity very real. Heaven is close. Although hard, we now live in greater ways with the frailty and brevity of life. Eternity has not become a reality during 2020; it was always a reality. But the visibility of death has forced us to realize our mortality. We have seen our frailty and need to prepare ourselves and others for eternity. So many still "fear". We need to ask God to help us get through that fear into hearts and lives. The book of James says, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' 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" (James 4:13-14).

No one should be more awakened by a worldwide pandemic than the church, whose sole mission is to prepare people for eternity. The result of hundreds of thousands of deaths around us should stir us to serve God and others with more evangelistic zeal, more urgency, more passion. But don't forget that the believer doesn't need to be afraid of death.

7. WE HAVE BEEN HUMBLLED! Pastors are wonderful men, devoted to their mission. But if you gathered a group of pastors pre-Covid, you would hear some boasting in all of us. Some was subtle, some more direct, but every pastor struggles with the desire to speak of their attendance, successful programs, financial success, etc.

The problem with this vanity is that God despises it. It indicates to Him that we have forgotten the source. "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it" (1 Corinthians 4:7)?

Three times in the Scriptures, God reminds us that He resists the proud but will pour out His enabling grace on the humble. Pride is the wellspring for every sin. God simply will not bless a proud person, a proud leader, or a proud church.

Most of our boasting ceased in 2020. Our statistical numbers were decimated. Our mouths were shut. We would do well to keep them closed. Perhaps it would open the way for Christ to use us again in ways that simply and fully glorify Him alone!

8. WE COULD BE ON THE VERGE OF A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING! If you have studied church history, you will notice that nationwide revival in the church and spiritual awakening among the lost have always occurred in the darkest times. It is here that the church realizes its depravity and begins to cry out for that which only God can do.

More prayer has happened in 2020 than perhaps any year in recent memory. Millions have cried out to God across the world. And God is always uniquely moved by a united cry. If spiritual awakening comes, the pain of 2020 will be viewed as birth pangs to perhaps the most extraordinary spiritual movement in history. We prayed one year ago during the closing of our church as a 24/7 prayer force. I believe that God answered our prayers and helped us reopen as a church. I believe we've helped missionaries get over to their places to serve again. I believe we've seen hearts and lives changed despite all the problems churches are currently having. Of all the pastors I currently fellowship with, four of them are thinking about leaving their churches or have already left. Twenty percent of them are worried about finances to keep running and paying the bills. They have more buildings to keep up, and no occupancy or offerings to cover costs. We had our prayers answered and ended the year way in the black!

It's time to stop griping about 2020. The year was hard, but a complaining spirit in the midst of Divine Providence is an indictment to us. It's a clear indication that we've missed the point. We have failed to find God, for He is always there and is not silent. Where repentance is needed, we should turn quickly and fully. If the church will return to the Lord and adjust to His simple, unadulterated mission and methods with a humble heart, God will hear and forgive and heal our land. He has promised it.

In *To End All Wars*, Ernest Gordon tells the true story of a group of POW's working on the Burma railways during World War II. The scene was made even more unforgettable because of the movie by the same title.

"The day's work had ended; the tools were being counted, as usual. As the party was about to be dismissed, the Japanese guard shouted that a shovel was missing. He insisted that someone had stolen it to sell to the Thais. Striding up and down before the men, he ranted and denounced them for their wickedness, and most unforgivable of all their ingratitude to the Emperor. As he raved, he worked himself up into a paranoid fury. Screaming in broken English, he demanded that the guilty one step forward to take his punishment. No one moved; the guard's rage reached new heights of violence. 'All die! All

die!' he shrieked. To show that he meant what he said, he cocked his gun, put it to his shoulder and looked down the sights, ready to fire at the first man at the end of the line of prisoners. At that moment the Argyll [Highlander] stepped forward, stood stiffly to attention, and said calmly, 'I did it.' The guard unleashed all his whipped-up hate; he kicked the helpless prisoner and beat him with his fist until he died. Although it was perfectly clear that he was dead, the guard continued to beat him and stopped only when exhausted. The men of the work detail picked up their comrade's broken body, shouldered their friend, and marched back to camp. When the tools were recounted again in the guard-house no shovel was missing. The guard had miscounted. The young soldier who stepped forward had not stolen a shovel. He had given his life for his friends." That is the story of Easter for us as a church. Jesus died for us, and even better an ending than that movie, He didn't just give up and die for us, He rose again to life! He is alive! Our death was arrested. We get to stand this morning at Easter and say: "I choose to be alive, because He is alive! I'm going to live today! 'For me to live is Christ'" (Phil. 1:21)! Have a blessed Resurrection Day!

Pray with me, *[Actually an Easter prayer by Miles Coverdale, simply titled "Easter" (pp.148-49, slightly edited)].

"O God, strengthen Thou our weak faith in the resurrection of Thy beloved Son:

Illuminate our minds, and expel out of us all darkness, through the light and brightness of the glorious resurrection: O strengthen our weakness through the power of Thy Spirit. Raise us from the death of sin, in the same Spirit and power wherein Thou hast raised up Thy Son from the dead.

Comfort and strengthen us in adversity, and make us constant therein; that we may press through the same in steadfast hope to the joyful and blessed resurrection.

Kindle in us the fire of Thy godly love, that with earnest and fervent desire we may seek and find Thee through Christ...

Set up the spiritual kingdom of Christ Jesus in our hearts, that in us Thy name may be sanctified, and Thy will performed; that we may become Thy virtuous children, and never displease Thee, our gracious Father; that we, continuing still in Thy merciful covenant, do never fall away from the company and fellowship of Thee and Thy Son.

And whereas Thou hast given us such knowledge, grace, and understanding, grant that we may make the same known unto many, being always ready through charitable love to serve our brethren. [And all God's people at PCBC said...] Amen."

**Living in light of the gospel,
Pastor Corvin <><**

Quote: "Let every man and woman count himself immortal. Let him catch the revelation of Jesus in his resurrection. Let him say not merely, 'Christ is risen,' but 'I shall rise.'" ... Phillip Brooks

