

SPECIAL ALL CHURCH
EDITION:
'The Prayer 20/20 Impact'
April 12, 2020 Hallelujah
Resurrection Sunday



Dear Praying Friends, and Partners In Prayer Team, and whole Church Family,

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it." Mark 13:21 (NIV)

"But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.'" Mark 16:6 (NIV)

Happy 'Hallelujah' Resurrection Day, loved ones! When you woke up today, were you glad that you were alive? I was! I am glad that today God has given me life and breath, He is watching over me, He is working in me, and I am thankful for my life today! In fact, when I woke up today, I was glad that I was "spiritually" alive in Christ!" This is what Easter Sunday really is about! There is no question, we are living in a time of unprecedented uncertainty—it is unlike anything we have experienced in our lifetimes. The last few weeks have been full of unprecedented changes in our lives and in our ministries. I know many pastors are trying to figure out how to minister in a period of social distancing, how to serve the most at-risk populations in our communities, and how to sustain ministries as tithes and offerings decline. (Note: Hey, I want to just let you know that Colleen reported this week that \$4,950.00 in offering was dropped off and mailed in by you. In a day when churches are sweating it out, because their doors are closed, thank you loved ones that you are still trusting and being faithful!) None of us have been trained to do this. We've never ministered through an epidemic like COVID-19 before. Fear is everywhere. I'm sure you're wrestling with it, too. But this is Resurrection Day! What do we have that others don't? The world of a difference! We have new life in Christ! We have hope! We have forgiveness! We have everything that matters!

Let's start this Hallelujah Sunday with taking a moment and speaking some praises to our God! I know we can all find some! The Hebrew word "hallelujah" translates as "praise the Lord." What are we going to praise the Lord for? Let me help get us started, loved ones.

1. Start today with moments of Praise!

Just start like this: "My great Hallelujah God, I praise you for....
_____." And then simply fill in the blanks. (Stop reading this letter and do so now! You can do it!)

The temptation in times like this is to allow fear and worry to creep into our thoughts and to rob us of our joy. But in this uncertain world filled with many unknowns, we need to remember what we do know:

- ✓ God is still in control.
- ✓ He is on the throne.
- ✓ He is not surprised by the events in our world today!
- ✓ He is sovereign—nothing happens without His permission.
- ✓ He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

We are loved by God and nothing can separate us from His love. We may feel isolated, but God is near to us through the working of the Holy Spirit. God is ready, right now, to communicate to us through prayer and His Word. We are His children and the Father is ever-present to give us comfort, guidance, and perfect peace.

He is the Great Physician, Jehovah-Rapha, the One who heals. Though sickness surrounds us, God's power and protection goes before us. Nothing is impossible for God. No force is insurmountable for Him to conquer, and no evil is too diabolical for Him to vanquish.

His Word remains a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Our prayers are heard by the great I AM—the light of the world—the Good Shepherd. He delights in His children and longs to give us the desires of our hearts.

He is the rock of our salvation. Our mighty fortress. Our strength. Our help. Our hiding place. Our shield.

And because we are a children of God, we can confidently rest in His providence and protection during this time of turmoil. God is our certainty in uncertain times. So my prayer is that you are healthy, in a safe place, and surrounded by those you love. Many people around the globe are struggling with illness, loss of employment, or are experiencing lonely isolation—we need to keep them in prayer. But on this resurrection morning, start to praise Him!

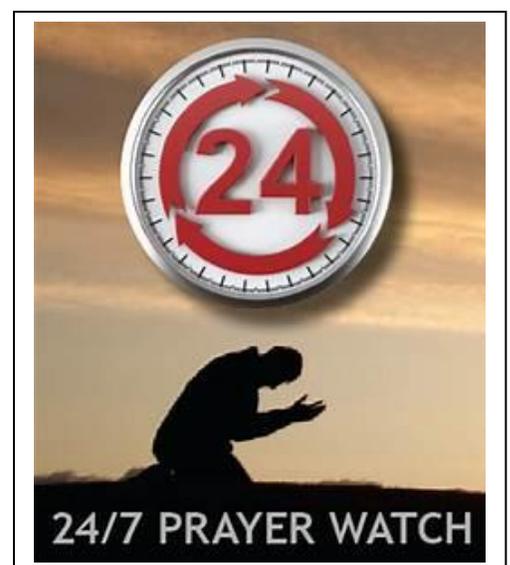
2. Start today with moments of Prayer!

We have just been through an entire week 24/7 prayer around the clock for our community, church, and families. I want to share with you first the scriptures that God gave me on Monday that I claimed through the entire week. My prayer shift was 4:00 AM. It is from Psalm 119:147-149.

*“I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I have put my hope in Your word.*

*My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,
that I may meditate on Your promises.*

Hear my voice in accordance with Your love.”

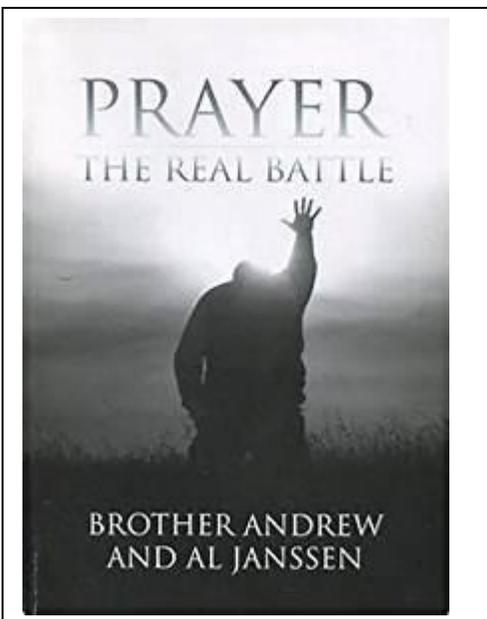


Isn't that fitting? I loved the reference to "watch" that reminds us of the series I did last year on watchfulness. We were "night-watchmen" staying up through the night, and working through the daylight hours; not a moment did our church prayers and intercessions ever stop. There were even other people praying who did not sign up for the prayer schedule that prayed through the day. I thank many of you people for doing that. I call you the "crack-fillers" (not fire-crackers) because your prayers were filling in any and every small moment in time when other's prayers may have faltered or were forgotten. Trust me believers, we are going to see a great working of God as a result of these prayers!

For my devotions, I was praying and reading through the Gospel account of Mark and the stories that lead up to prayer in the garden, of Christ's sufferings for us on the cross, and His resurrection. I just happened to think more about "watching and praying" and found these three scriptures on praying "watchfully".

Scripture #1- Mark 13:32-33: *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is."* Here Christ reminded His disciples just before the last supper with them to be careful about not understanding the times we live in. We are in hard times! We need to pray for His coming! We don't know if it will be today, or not, but we need to watchfully be ready and pray! What I learned from that is this: "We can't just jump into prayer with our own agenda. Have we taken time to ask God what His agenda is?"

One of the books that I made available was called: *Prayer the Real Battle*, by Brother Andrew and Al Janssen. Their chapter on "watch and pray" caused me to think about watching and praying. Here is an excerpt that I want to share with you that they mention:



"The first time you visit a country that doesn't know Christ the experience can be overwhelming. It took time for us to adjust and to see what God was doing in the lives of people in that nation. More important than being aware of the language and the culture of a country is to discover God's heart for people. This requires that we go in with no agenda. We need to start by listening to Him. Even though it seems so natural for us to jump in and pray about a situation as though we already know what God needs to do, this kind of prayer is only a one-way conversation" (pg. 11-12).

keep praying and watching God work. Who can say that people will not return to church?

While I was praying this week with my prayer partner during our 24/7 prayer watch, I was reminded that “living by faith and not by sight” is important for us. Faith alone isn’t about having no problems or ills. Sometime God allows suffering like the Covid-19 crisis to gain our attention so our souls will sweetly tremble at His Word (Is. 66:2; Psalm 119:161). Most people are drawn to prayer- especially in times of hurt and pain. In China there is a great true testimony about how extreme prayer yields faith. When the public Security Bureau officer entered the Chinese prison cell, Sister Wong moved away. This heartless man had arrested and persecuted many Christians, and only days earlier had beaten her as he interrogated her. “Please, Sister Wong, my sister is very ill. She has lost all feeling in her legs. Will you come and pray for her?” Was this the same man who had confiscated hundreds of Bibles and Christian books from her? Now this man was asking for prayer? She worried that this was some kind of ruse or trick. Would God truly have gotten his attention?

Days earlier, as the officer had questioned and abused Sister Wong, he received a phone call that his mother had been hit by a car. When he told his mother what he’d been doing, she told him that his harassment of Christians caused her accident. The officer deemed the warning as mere superstition. The next day, he resumed questioning Sister Wong but got another message that his brother had been injured in an accident. The brother also blamed the officer’s attacks on Christians for the family’s misfortunes. But when his sister became ill, his heart trembled and broke, and he asked Sister Wong for prayers.

Sister Wong saw the opportunity she’d been praying for, the chance to witness to her persecutors. God healed the sister, and through Sister Wong’s actions, God changed the officer’s heart. The officer returned all the Bibles that were confiscated and now supports the church. Most people are strangely drawn to prayer- especially in times of hurt and pain. Loved ones, do you see that is what God is doing right now with our “upper-room” praying church? Barriers against anything remotely religious are dismantled piece by piece when someone requests or receives prayer. Rare is the person who will refuse a no-strings-attached offer for prayer. “I’m praying for you” can be the most powerful words a believer speaks to a non-believer. Why? Prayer is God’s agent of change, it gets results. Sometimes it changes circumstances. Sometimes it reverses decisions. Most often it changes those who are touched by prayer. The Bible says the first recorded action after the conversion of the former Christian persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, was prayer. Who knows the role prayer will play in the conversion of the “Sauls” through this 611 corridor and our neighborhood.

Scripture #3- Mark 16: 6: *“But he [the angel] said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek [another word for watchful] Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He*

is not here. See [a word for fix your eyes and watch and look at] the place where they laid Him.” We know that very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, the ladies came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. What is really amazing is that they went inside. And upon entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. How many are alarmed at the fact of this Covid-19 virus? So many, but they set their eyes on the fact that He was risen. Watch the reactions of people to that truth.

I shared a few weeks ago this same story told through a missionary who was in India who met and was talking to a Muslim about the coming celebration of Easter. During their conversation, the Muslim said, “Look, we Muslims go to Medina and we can look for a coffin and touch it, that is the proof of Muhammad, who was such a great prophet! We know that our message is true! You Christians go to Jerusalem and all you have is an empty grave and you are not sure which site it is!” The Christian smiled and said, “Yeah, that’s the whole point! It’s what separates Jesus from everyone else in the world, He was not there, and still isn’t there! The hope of the resurrection proves that when He died, our sins are forgiven. He paid in full our atonement. So, what do you have to pay to get your sins forgiven?” That is the hope we are holding out during this Covid-19 crisis.

For some of us, we are not able to come out and gather together as a church body for Easter worship. That is okay! Take the time with God’s Spirit in you to make this your worship moment. Remember that first Easter morning, there was no church service. Only confused and running men and women trying to figure out who rolled the stone away. Most all of the early morning appearances that took place were private moments, like when Jesus talked to Mary. Let that happen in your heart right now! We need to do what the health professionals recommend. We need to take the common sense actions that will decrease the spread of this virus. We won’t need to make these changes forever. Our churches will gather again. We will one day come home as a family! Just work at being ready for that day! Watch the services that we will be putting out and uploading to “YouTube”. I know it feels informal, and somehow distant, because nothing is as wonderful as live contact. But it will come. As Elders, we feel it best to wait until April ends. When May begins, we will see if it is time to regather. Keep hoping for that day.

3. Start today to hang onto the truths that don’t change!

The question we all need to ask ourselves is: **“What does the resurrection mean to you in the midst of the present global health crisis?”** At times like this, we need to hang onto truths that don’t change. Friends, you know these truths. You’ve probably even preached them multiple times before. But during times of crisis, it’s really important to remember the fundamentals. The

Bible emphasizes getting the facts before you take major actions in your life. So here are five truths to hang on to if you need something just to grab today.

A.) Not everything you hear is true. Not everyone with an opinion on the Internet, television, and social media knows what they're talking about. You need to be selective with who you listen to during this time. Many people in the coming days will have their own agendas—financial, political, etc.—for this crisis.

The Bible says in Proverbs 13:16, *“The prudent man always acts out of knowledge”* (NIV). In other words, act out of knowledge and not fear. Make it a priority to get your facts from people who are trustworthy. Just remember that what is true is Jesus is alive! His word is true! We can trust Him when there is nothing else we can trust!

B. This will pass. The Bible tells us there will be trials. First Peter 4:12 says, *“Dear friends, don't be surprised or shocked that you are going through testing that is like walking through fire”* (CEV). These are tough times, but they won't last forever.

C. Focus on what's unchanging; not what is changing. There will be many changes to our world, our community, and our ministry in the coming weeks. It's safe to say we don't even know all the changes this pandemic will have on us and our community. You'll do things to serve our community and our congregation you never dreamed of a year ago. Be flexible, but remember what hasn't changed. When I get discouraged, my friend Pastor William Boulet always taught me: **“Don't look at all the things going wrong, even if they outnumber everything in your life. Don't complain, gripe, worry, or woe. Just focus on what God is doing for you right now!”** I love and value those words.

The Bible says, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8 NIV). In the midst of all this change, you can count on that truth. You can also know that God's love for you and our community has never changed. God's call on your life hasn't changed. Don't let all the changes make you lose sight of everything that is still the same.

D. God will go through it with us. This virus didn't surprise God. He will walk through every bit of it with us. You may feel alone at times. You may feel like no one understands what you are going through. But we will never be alone. Remember Hebrews 13:5-6: *“For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man [or coronavirus] do to me?’”*

I encourage you to remind yourself of Isaiah 43:2 during this time: *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the*

flames will not set you ablaze” (NIV). Focus on that truth and not all the noise on the Internet right now. It will replace your worry with worship.

E. This is not the end of the story. The Bible says, *“In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again . . . because we know that God raised the Lord Jesus to life” (2 Corinthians 4:8, 14 CEV).* Easter reminds us that we win no matter what happens. Even if this virus takes our lives, we will go straight into the presence of God. On that day, all of our pain, sickness, and sorrow will be over. There won't be a COVID-19 virus in heaven. We don't know what the future holds, but we do know who holds it.

God wants to use our churches to help others. I know our church is going through an incredible challenge right now. But God doesn't want to just take our church through this crisis. He doesn't just want our church to survive during this period. He wants our church to thrive. This is the difference between how we deal with pain as believers and how the world does. The church sees every need in the world as an open door for ministry. Do you want to know how God sees our church? Do you want to see our ministry from an angel's point of view? This picture was sent by Doug Sisco as a drone shot of our church. It caused me to see our area with different eyes! (Include picture).



I'm praying our church will start many new ministries out of these difficult days. I'm praying we see with different eyes. I'm praying we continue to be watchful. Today we don't even know the kinds of challenges our community will face, but God does. This will be an opportunity for churches to shine.

I'm praying for our church and every 'Gospel' preaching church in our 30-mile radius. This virus didn't sneak up on God. It won't stop the church. Jesus himself reminds us that "all the powers of hell will not conquer" the church (Matthew 16:18 NIV). That is what His promise is—to solve them His way.

That's why we can be reassured that although He listens to our prayers, He sees our heart. He often doesn't give us what we want but grants us what we need. And He gives the reason why in Isaiah 55:8-9: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'*" (NIV)

Trusting in these truths, I found this little prayer online and copied it here for us:

- * I pray not just to see a better tomorrow, but to delight in the best of today.
- * I pray not just for a leap to triumph, but to take each step on firm ground.
- * I pray not just for triumph, but to know how to defeat fear.
- * I pray not to do great things without first knowing the greatness of God.
- * I pray not for a life of roses, but to remove the thorns of doubt.
- * I pray not for knowledge in a lifetime, but for enough wisdom in each defining moment.
- * I pray not for the abundance of my bank account, but to take into account my riches in the abundance of God.
- * I pray not for my own answer to every prayer, but for His every answer to fuel my faith.
- * I pray not for God to take away every trouble, but for me to take the trouble to see His way out.
- * I pray not just for a cure to my illness, but for the healing of my soul.
- * I pray not to trust in my success, but to succeed in trusting God.
- * I pray not to heal my loneliness, but to heed the truth that God alone is enough.

So say a loud "hallelujah!" Today lift up a prayer! Today let Jesus bring change. Let all God's people pray together:

Oh we cry to You our precious Hallelujah Father, we marvel that You sent Your Son to redeem this fallen world. We are filled with wonder at the thought that He took on human flesh and willingly experienced crucifixion, death, and burial. We are knocked breathless even more that He rose from the dead. The empty grave calls forth our adoring honor! 'He's alive! He's alive!' Thank You for your answers, Your solutions and Your victories. Holy Spirit, we thank You that You have been poured out on all nations, bringing all peoples of every race, together in Christ. Give us renewed and resurrected hearts that delight to serve and worship You. Fill us with such a passion for the Gospel that we know our greatest and best job in life is to "follow Jesus!" Grant us wisdom to wait and to trust that Your thoughts and ways are above our own. In Jesus' Hallelujah and risen Name, amen."

God is in control, and Jesus is alive!

Pastor Corvin <><

As I was preparing my sermon for “Ichthus” I was asking the question: “Who is this man Jesus?” And the acrostic for “Ichthus” answers that: He is Jesus Christ, God’s Son, my Savior!” So, this brought to my mind an old favorite hymn that we often only sing at Christmas. It always starts with a question: “Who is He, in yonder stall, at whose feet the shepherds fall?” Then the hymn answers the question like this: “Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! ‘Tis the Lord! The King of glory! At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!” This is His incarnation and birth. But that is only the beginning of the Easter story.

Well, wouldn’t you know that I found a version of this hymn that takes us through the Passion Week?

(His Baptism)

Who is He, in Jordan’s River takes our place as tho’ a sinner?

‘Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! ‘Tis the Lord! The King of glory!

At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!

(The Temptation)

Who is He, in deep distress fasting in the wilderness?

‘Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! ‘Tis the Lord! The King of glory!

At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!

(The Mt. of Transfiguration)

Who is He whose clothes now shine on the mountain top He climbed?

‘Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! ‘Tis the Lord! The King of glory!

At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!

(The Garden)

Lo! At midnight, who is He prays in dark Gethsemane?

‘Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! ‘Tis the Lord! The King of glory!

At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!

(At Calvary)

Who is He, on yonder tree, dies in grief and agony?

‘Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! ‘Tis the Lord! The King of glory!

At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!



(The Grave)

Who is He, that from the grave comes to heal, and help, and save?
'Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! 'Tis the Lord! The King of glory!
At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!

(His Return)

Who is He who comes from heaven ushers in the New Creation?
'Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! 'Tis the Lord! The King of glory!
At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!

(The Kingdom)

Who is He that from His throne rules the world of light alone?
'Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! 'Tis the Lord! The King of glory!
At His feet we humbly fall; Crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all!

Benjamin Russell Hanby (1933-67; with alterations and additions)

