

Transformed Through Truth - February 2016

#1 The God of Second Chances 2/1, 2/26

Happy New Year! How's it going? By now some of us have tried and failed to implement new habits. Have you felt frustration, guilt, shame? Hey I'm an over-achiever with high goals and I get frustrated when I miss the mark. Guess what, you and I are in the same club, no worries – God is the God of second chances. God is ready and willing to help us get up and start over again. I am praying for those of us who have already failed to follow through with our commitments.

We must refuse to let last year's failures define us. Go forward even if the path ahead is unclear. With God, the possibilities are endless. Maybe you have set your goals too high? Ask yourself, "What does *God* want me to accomplish? Am I relying on His strength? How does He want me to glorify Him through my time, talent, treasure?" I hope this helps as we begin this year for the glory of God! Go. Risk. Believe. Expect.

My Goals for 2016:

1. Love God "Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and

greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Matt. 22:37, 38

2. Be Still "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted above the earth." Psalm 46:10

Let's pray, "Heavenly Father, thank you for a new beginning, a fresh start. Thank you for allowing me to start over. In Jesus' Name, Amen"

#2 Expect the Best 2/2, 2/27

Expectations – do you love em or hate em? For decades, I've struggled with expecting positive reactions from people—to be treated a certain way or be given a specific amount of attention. As you might guess, I've been hurt by others not following through the way I think they should. I've stepped back to examine why I feel this way. In His generosity, God gently has spoken to me, "Sheryl, expect to receive from me, not people. People will always disappoint you. I never will. I Am everything you need." Now my expectations, once my enemy, now are keeping me focused on the only One who can exceed my expectations, this 2016, my ONE WORD IS Expect!

I am anticipating God's power to be released. I stand in my authority and *Expect the Best!* No more looking back with regret, I am moving forward

with resolve. “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past, see, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.” Is. 43:18

I am anticipating God’s peace to rule. God’s peace will be the plumb line for every decision and direction for ministry. “Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.” Ps. 62:8

I am anticipating God’s presence to reach the lost. It’s all about Him, right? Pastor Craig Amos said, “Expectancy pays off for eternity.” As we see needs in our community, we can ask God what our responsibility to advance God’s Kingdom. Matt. 19:26 says, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

#3 Let Go of Grudges 2/3, 2/28

“How could church people be so mean?” I thought to myself. Just a few hours earlier, my pastor- husband had been told to turn in his resignation. Now, I was the sole supporter of our little family of four with only a part-time job. Bitterness and anger raged inside of me. I vowed, “I will never forgive the men who did this to us.” All of us will have opportunities to forgive, but some of us will have many opportunities. Forgiveness is a choice, a decision, a crisis of the will. Jesus reminds us in Luke 6:36, “Be merciful, just as

your Heavenly Father is merciful.” God has shown us mercy that we don’t deserve. When we show mercy through forgiveness, it is a way to keep the lines of communication open between God and us. In 2 Cor. 2:10,11 we are told, “We must forgive, so that no advantage is taken of us by Satan for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

If we want mercy, we are commanded to be merciful through forgiving those who don’t deserve it. Jesus is our substitute, who literally became sin for us. John 1:29 “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus’ crucifixion wounds belonged to us, He was punished in our place to satisfy God’s requirement. His sacrifice provided for our righteousness. “Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God.” 2 Cor. 5:21. Won’t you choose to forgive your offenders, even if they don’t deserve it?

Dear Heavenly Father, You know who hurt me, what they did, how it happened. Lord, you know I’ve carried this pain around for a very long time. I am thankful for the mercy you’ve shown me. I forgive them for hurting me with their harsh words. I release them into your care. Thank you for healing my bitterness and anger. In Jesus’ Name, Amen

4 Don’t Repeat Defeat 2/4, 2/29

Is it possible NOT to repeat defeat? Absolutely. Do you feel frustrated, defeated and like you want to give up? You haven't made it even a month or two to achieve what you've set out to do. If you've accepted your responsibility and confessed sin, then the next and best thing to do is look up.

Psalm 121:1,2 says, "I lift up my eyes to the hills- where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth."

When we take our eyes off our circumstances, and look up for God's help, it's like cancelling our own 'pity party.' This can only happen when basking in God's love, His affirmations override our negative feelings. God helps us do battle His way, as we keep our minds filled with God's word. 2 Cor 10:3-5 says, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Keep your mind set on Him, your defeats will turn into victorious living.

Joyce Meyer says, "Where the mind goes, the man follows." The Bible talks about having the mind of Christ, in Phil. 4:8, TLB: "Fix your thoughts on what is true, good, and right."

Let's pray, "Father thank you for your love, your presence and the mind of Christ. Let our thoughts be your thoughts as we keep looking up to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

#5 Godly Goals 2/5

Love this refreshing advice from Kay Arthur: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." – 2 Timothy 2:15

3 Goals for Life Change:

- Make your #1 life goal to obtain God's approval in all that you do.
- Work with such diligence that you are not ashamed of the quality of your work.
- Present the gospel accurately by not perverting or distorting it either verbally or in your lifestyle! Are you up for it?

Be careful to stay focused on Him. "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you." Is. 26:3

Be confident in God's power. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and fawning fear) but (he has given us a spirit) of

power and of love and of a calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control.” 2 Tim. 1:7 AMP

Be certain – God is going to do something you least expect. “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Cor 5:17

Let’s pray, “Father, thank you for your presence as I am careful, confident and certain you will move this year. Let me be flexible to let you move me where you will. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” —Mark Twain

#6 Same-O, Same-O 2/6

Do you ever get bored of routine? Me too. Yet healthy habits are a result of faithful living committed to the end result of a life that makes a difference in our world. What’s the why for you? Why do you want to be healthy? When I faced stage 4 cancer, after I got through 9 months of chemotherapy, the doctor told me he could find no more cancer. I made a commitment to live a

life that makes a difference for eternity. Psalm 90:12 says, "Teach me Lord, to number my days, that I might present to you a heart of wisdom."

Zumba instructor Charise Richards says, "Did you know that if you eat right & exercise YEAR round.... you won't have to do RESETS & CHALLENGES.... if you eat SUPER SUPER healthy Sunday evening through Saturday noon... taking off Saturday evening meal... thru Sunday lunch... get RIGHT back on your GOOD healthy eating & healthy exercising plan You won't have to have NEW YEARS Resolutions.... Resets"

Here's some encouragement from God's word: "Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge and in the image of its Creator. Col. 3:10

"Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Col 3:12-14

Let's pray, "Father, thank you, we can trust you with healthy habits - healthy eating and also healthy emotional choices as we start the New Year. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

#7 Bend My Will 2/7

Facebook can be a huge waste of time, but it's also a place we can encourage each other through community. Community happens most effectively through small groups which help us navigate through difficulty. Any life changes, such as children advancing to the next grade in school, the loss of a parent or spouse, getting re-married, moving into a new home, selling a home, and blending children from two families and even blending our household pets.

Good change brings stress into our lives because it's starting all over again. It can happen when you change churches, move from one town to another or change jobs. It takes a while to get the hang of the new city or house, driving time to work and really important things like location of favorite coffee shops. It's helped me to have many praying for me as we've been settling in to our new area. Community happens within the family unit. Ps. 68:6 reminds us, "God sets the lonely in families." For me, it's been essential to pray about everything with my new husband, Jim. We've prayed through our changes as a couple, and also submitted the needs of our children to the Lord. Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us, "Trust the Lord completely...in everything you do, put God first, and He will direct you and crown your efforts with success."

We don't know what changes lie ahead of us this year, so as we begin the year together, let's hold each other accountable and pray for each other. To commit her New Year, Lisa Terkeurst prayed, "As I make goals for this year...Jesus, let your thoughts become my thoughts and bend my will to your will."

#8 Learning to Rest 2/8

So much to do, so little time. Each evening some of us lay our heads on our pillow and attempt to sleep guilt-free as we leave an unfinished to-do list. No wonder why we have insomnia. It is most difficult to live from a place of resting in God. Rest must be a big deal to God, after spending six days creating the world, he rested. He wants us to do the same in observing the sabbath; a literal day we can rest from the demands of daily living. But to live from a place of resting in Him takes mental and spiritual discipline.

We can live in a peaceful place of union in the middle of stress by re-centering ourselves in Him. The way it works is as soon as we realize we have walked away from our place of peace (some people call it their happy place), we think, "How could I have strayed?" We all need a reality check. As soon as we see we are lost in the wilderness, we don't walk, we run

back to the Lord. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and are safe." Prov. 18:10

When we return to the presence of the Lord, we call on His name. This helps us reconnect with Him and we feel safe. It's hard to form a new habit, but the effort is worth it. The more we return to Him, our resting place, the more peaceful and joyful our life will be. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Phil. 4:13

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the opportunity to return to rest in you.

In Jesus' Name, Amen

#9 Spiritual Vitamins 2/9

"Take your vitamins, watch your diet, exercise regularly." I remember my mom's stern voice giving these directions. How harsh these words of advice seemed at the time. Yet, now I realize her instructions and guidelines were filled with godly wisdom tainted with motherly love. She was attempting to prepare me for life. My desire for a healthy lifestyle has resulted in applying these few simple habits. "Teach me your way, O Lord' lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors." Psalm 27:11

In the same way, when I let my trials and troubles draw me to Jesus, they remind me of my constant need for Him. It's difficult to view our troubles as

reminders to draw near to Him, but if we train our minds to transition from problem mode to prayer mode, it makes a huge difference. Brief prayers like “Help me, Jesus. Fill me with your peace. Show me your way.” These requests are like spiritual nutrients – soul vitamins. The more we use these types of prayers, the healthier and happier we will be. “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.” James 1:2

The Holy Spirit will help guide us, as we form our needs into prayers that make a difference. These prayers will flow from our hearts and as we practice them, the enemy will flee and God will draw near. “Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.” Psalm 143:8

Help me, Jesus. Fill me with your peace. Show me your way. Thank you. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

#10 These Ashes 2/10

God’s specialty is rearranging the ashes of our disappointments, despair and dismay into something beautiful. He takes our mess and changes it into His message. The best historical illustration of this spiritual truth happened in 1988 in the Yellowstone National Monument. It was the most devastating wild fire in the history of the national park system. It burned uncon-

trollably for nine months – from early June through the first snow in September. In early June, flames wiped out 1.2 million acres about 36% of the park's over 2 million acres. The fire was finally put out in November. As the damage was tallied, the losses financially could not be recovered. Yet God was up to something.

In the same way, all of us have experienced ashes of loss:

Denial

Depression

Destruction

Despair

Divorce

Death

Domestic Violence

Discouragement

Disease

God has a plan for the ashes of our losses. He will restore, rebuild, regenerate our lives. Isaiah 61:3 reminds us, *"To bestow on them a crown of*

beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.”

Years after the Yellowstone wildfire wiped everything out, these plants actually increased in productivity. The ‘natural catastrophe’ has been re-generated into a lush forest, which has come back thicker and healthier. God does the same thing for us, He takes the ashes of our losses, uses them as fertilizer to make us even healthier than ever!

Let’s pray, “Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for taking our ashes and changing them into something beautiful. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

#11 Our Story His Glory 2/11

God can use our story for His glory, but we must trust Him to restore and rebuild in His time. In 1988 in the Yellowstone National Monument, the most devastating wild fire in the history of the national park system burned uncontrollably for nine months. From early June through the first snow in September, flames wiped out 1.2 million acres about 36% of the park’s over 2 million acres. The fire was finally put out in November. As the damage was tallied, the losses financially could not be recovered.

On an environmental note, it is necessary to clear out the dead wood and excess brush to encourage new growth. After the fires, the forest is more open and more light reaches the forest floor. Where the fire had been hottest is an ideal seedbed for the young giant sequoia seedlings. The heat of the fire causes giant sequoia cones to open and thousands of seeds are released and fall to the soil. What had been considered to be a 'natural catastrophe' has been restored and regenerated into a lush forest, which has come back thicker and healthier than before it was burned. In the Yellowstone National Park – Lodgepole pines now fill about 80% of the park's extensive forests.

God has a plan for the ashes of your losses. He will restore, rebuild, regenerate your life. Isaiah 61:3 reminds us, *"To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."*

#12 Prayer...God's Way 2/12

Is prayer a priority for you? If so, have you made the necessary adjustment to your schedule? None of us can manage our time; however, we can manage ourselves to accomplish what God asks us to do in the time He gives us. We all have the same twenty-four hours in a day. "Therefore

be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time for the days are evil.” Eph. 5:15, 16

How does this happen? It takes focus, intention and discipline.

Through time in His word coupled with dialogue with God, we can learn and discern the plans God has for us Jennifer Kennedy Dean said, “What God wants to do on the earth, He will do through intercessors. When God wants to change the course events will take on their own, He searches out an intercessor on whose heart He can place His desires.” Will you be the one? “Teach us, Lord, to number our days; that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Psalm 90:12

God is looking for people who will pray. God is searching for hearts willing to be consumed and do things His way—to pray first. These concerned hearts submerge themselves in caring about what God cares about - the person, circumstances, even when things are messy, for God’s glory. . John 15:4 says, “Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

Let’s pray, “Dear Lord, thank you for teaching me to pray. In Jesus’ Name, Amen”

#13 The Rest of the Story 2/13

Rest is high priority with God. He rested after the six days of creation, on the seventh day, “God had finished all the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work,” Gen. 2:2. God has made us to function best with adequate amounts of rest for our body, mind and soul. “No eye has seen no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.” I Cor. 2:9

If you’ve ever had anxious questions, an over-thinking mind and an absence of inner peace, you need time with God. It is wonderful ; to sleep, or sit and read, worship, listen, wait, focus on God – what amazing remedy. Within a few hours, it won’t matter whether or not you have answers to your questions. It gets you back to basics: “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ “Matt. 22:37

Everything goes back to loving and worshipping Jesus. “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you.” Love God, Worship God. It’s ok to stop. “Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

We don't have to leave our home to find solace. God is right here, waiting for us to turn to Him. He is my Sanctuary. "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." Isaiah 43:1-3

#14 Blind Spot 2/14

I remember a time when I made a decision too fast. Oh yes, I had prayed about it, but even with the essential prayer component, I made the wrong choice. I felt pressured to decide and in my haste, I was at fault. I didn't foresee the way I handled a request would negatively affect an important relationship.

After I got through it, the blinders came off; I couldn't believe I hurt someone I love. I lost sleep. I wasted emotional energy, plus I had a mess to clean up. For three days, I was a nervous wreck, experienced insomnia, an eating binge and even gained a few pounds, which is never a good thing.

Have you looked back on a quick decision and wished you had done things differently? Of course, all of us have. No wonder we say "hindsight is 20/20." Google definitions defines "blindspots" as:an area where a person's view is obstructed.

One of my favorite examples of “biblical blindspots” is in 2 Kings 10:28. Jehu destroyed all the false prophets, ministers and priests of Baal. Jehu deceitfully planned for the enemies of the Almighty God’s destruction, their mass annihilation was intentional. But Jehu’s view was obstructed – he did not destroy the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. We can learn from Jehu’s disobedience and choose to obey God with all of our heart. . Next time, I pray I act not in zeal or haste, but in humility. One thing is for sure, we know we will get another chance.

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

#15 Humility and Service 2/15

Google definitions defines “blindspots” as: an area where a person's view is obstructed.

One of my favorite examples of “biblical blindspots” is in 2 Kings 10:28. Jehu destroyed all the false prophets, ministers and priests of Baal. But Jehu’s view was obstructed – he did not destroy the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. The NIV study Bible says “He had become God’s instrument for carrying out justice, but he had not become God’s servant.” Not only was Jehu’s view obstructed by his own motives, in addition, he was

void of impartiality. In today's terms, Jehu wanted to be "politically correct" instead of "God obedient"

However, because I acted (or re-acted) in haste, I had perceived incorrectly, this caused me to seem insensitive, unemotional and misunderstood. My view was obstructed about certain parts of the request and my process was self-centered, not God serving. Like Jehu, I acted in zeal, made a quick decision, I needed to look in the mirror of God's word and "check my blindspots". Wayne Cordiero says, "You read the Word and the Word reads you." I needed to reflect on what God would want me to do. Next time, I pray I act not in zeal or haste, but in humility. "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

Let's pray together, ok?

Dear Father, Thank you for your mercy and grace. Lord, help us. Lord, have mercy on us. We ask you fill us with your love for others as you have loved us. In Jesus' Name, Amen

#16 New Beginnings 2/16

Is there a new thing on the horizon for you? Let's expect for God to show us new things about our fresh start. While captives in Babylon, the

children of Israel experienced the challenge of feeling like God had forgotten them and they didn't like it much. God's deliverance had not yet come, His timing was not at all what they expected; they were still in exile. God gave them hope through the prophet Isaiah that new things were going to happen. *"Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things: before they spring forth I will declare them to you."* Isaiah 42:9 (NIV) They were told to watch for the new thing, to anticipate it, not to miss it. In the same way, God sends us messages of hope to encourage us to keep praying, waiting and believing His promises.

Choose to view the situation with wonder instead of worry. *"Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder the things of the past. Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth, will you not be aware of it?"* Isaiah 43:18, 19 (NIV) Instead of living with "the giddies" ask God to load you up "with more grace." Ask God to develop character instead of seeking comfort. You don't want to miss out on the amazing gifts found in new beginnings! And when your new thing comes, praise God for His blessings. *"Sing to the Lord a new song."* Isaiah 43:10 (NIV)

Edward B Pusey says, *"Because perseverance is so difficult, even when supported by the grace of God, from that is the value of new beginnings. For new beginnings are the life of perseverance."*

#17 Warriors Prayer 2/17

Don't get beat up! Fight back with God's word. Our war is not against flesh and blood, in any spiritual battle, we are more effective when we pray scriptural prayers. Here's the Warrior's Prayer straight from Ephesians 6:14-17

Heavenly Father,

Your Warrior prepares for battle.

Today I claim victory over Satan by putting on

The whole armor of God!

I put on the Girdle of Truth!

May I stand firm in the truth of Your word

So I will not be a victim of Satan's life.

I put on the Breastplate of Righteousness!

May it guard my heart from evil

So I will remain pure and holy,

Protected under the Blood of Jesus Christ.

I put on the Shoes of Peace!

May I stand firm in the Good News of the Gospel

So Your peace will shine through me

And be a light to all I encounter.

I take the Shield of Faith!

May I be ready for Satan's fiery darts of

Doubt, denial and deceit

So I will not be vulnerable to spiritual defeat.

I put on the Helmet of Salvation!

May I keep my mind focused on You

So Satan will not have a stronghold on my thoughts.

I take the Sword of the Spirit!

May the two-edged sword of Your Word

Be ready in my hands

So I can expose the tempting words of Satan.

By faith Your Warrior has put on the whole armor of God!

I am prepared to live this day in spiritual victory!

Amen

#18 Armor Up! 2/18

Armor up! When we pray scripture, we are doing battle God's way. When we obediently put on our 'spiritual armor' and fight the battle, we stand firm in the authority of Christ. The truth is, we are 'more than conquerors,' through the price He paid for us; we claim the victory that's already won. I pray we will understand the new identity Christ gave us when He took over our lives. "God made us alive together with Christ, that in the ages to come

He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Eph. 2:6-7

What’s so amazing about grace? Everything. As believers, God’s grace engulfs us every single moment, but in the flurry of life, we overlook how involved God’s grace actually is in the minute details of our lives. I’ve been having numerous ‘grace encounters’ lately. God has already paved the way for me: “I have set the Lord always before us. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.” Psalm 16:8

Some of you might not know how you can even take the next step in life, let alone, walk down the driveway to pick up the daily newspaper. It’s when we understand that we cannot walk another inch forward without God’s grace - - grace becomes most precious and most glorious. God will give you exactly what you need from Him. “The Lord has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” 2 Cor. 12:9 NASB

#19 The Apostle’s Creed 2/19

The Apostle’s Creed, is a corporate prayer to pray it aloud with other Christians in unison as a declaration of what we believe. It’s a confirmation, a

pledge, a wonderful way of bringing us together to share the hope and faith we have in Jesus Christ. It sets our beliefs apart from all other religions. It is a summary of the doctrines unique to Christianity: the Trinity, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, His ascent into heaven and intent to rule over all when He returns to judge the world and raise the dead.

“The Apostles' Creed is one of the doctrinal recitations commonly used in many services. The word "creed" comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning "I believe." It was called "Apostles" not because the apostles wrote it but because the Creed is an accurate summary of what the apostles taught. The Creed is a public statement of faith, a way in which we can confess and affirm our faith in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle's Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is

seated at the right hand of Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

#20 Spiritual Marker 2/20

Have you celebrated a win lately? Completing a big project demands a pat on the back, big shout out or a high five. Maybe you kicked a habit, finished a project or celebrated an anniversary. Affirmations of our accomplishments should direct us to praise God – since He is the one who helped us complete the task. Stepping back to praise Him reminds us we could not have finished the task without God’s help. He deserves the praise!

In the Old Testament, it was the custom to set up physical markers as reminders of an encounter with God. The tall stone pillars were large enough to see for a mile and could not be ignored by the passer-by. One of them in I Sam 7:7, when Samuel prayed for deliverance from the Philistines. God answered Samuel’s prayers for protection of the Israelites by confusing the enemy and re-routing them away from the people. After the victory, Samuel took a stone and named it “Ebenezer” saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

Why not erect a spiritual marker for a recent victory in your life? Have you paid off a debt? Overcome a nagging habit? Think about erecting a spiritual marker – try framing your reminder or photo, planting a tree in your backyard, setting up a few small stones or setting aside a special place for a reminder in your home. Praise God for what He has done. Just praise God for His victory and say with Samuel, “The Lord has helped me!”

Let’s pray “Lord thank you for helping me complete a big project. It’s only through you it was done. I give you the glory for what you have done. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

#21 Delays 2/21

Mechanical problems,” the pilot announced over the public service address system, we’d already boarded and seated on the plane an hour. My flight was already one hour late, I knew I would miss my connection. The reality of my circumstances ground against my plans like fingernails on a chalkboard. I could do nothing to prevent the inevitable. How would I respond? I was reminded of my mom’s advice in times of adversity, “Just praise Him!”

How can we praise God when irritating things happen, our plans are changed, schedules are altered? No matter what, God deserves our praise.

When we worship our great God, not just for what He has done for us, but for who He is, there is a great exchange. We can be relieved from stress, plus enjoy fellowship with him and the saints and much more. If we learn to focus on worship instead of worry, it can make things better. Praise brings us into God's presence, can even minimize our problems. He inhabits the praise of His people.

Really? (You might wonder, in a sarcastic tone.) No matter what happens, there might be something to praise Him about? Absolutely, if nothing else, we can worship God and affirm Him of our love, adoration, honor, edify, submission and commitment. Worship can heal the hurts of this world, and gives us a glimpse of eternity. Affirming our devotion to God and reminding him of our respect helps us with our priorities. He alone is worthy of our worship and praise.

Psalm 145:2, 3 says, "Great is the Lord and worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom. I will meditate on your wonderful works.

#22 Praise Changes Everything 2/22

Plans change, we lose our way, run out of money, time is gone, family or friends move away. Let's praise God, our Creator, our Redeemer and closest Friend. When we learn to infuse our day with worship, we keep our mind set on His ways. When we do, we will experience a glimpse of eterni-

ty. This eternal perspective gives us hope that faith will someday fulfill. Heaven is the place where our worship continues and we will glorify Him forever and ever. How can we praise God when irritating things happen, our plans are changed, schedules are altered? No matter what, God deserves our praise. When we worship our great God, not just for what He has done for us, but for who He is, there is a great exchange.

I missed my connecting flight and my plans had changed. My God had not changed. I praised God for the chance to see what He would do next, this helped to focus my mind off my plans and on to His. God's will for me and for you is to "just praise Him" regardless of how I feel. Praising God helped give me perspective – in light of eternity; my little inconvenience of a missed flight doesn't really matter. My response to it does. I choose to "just praise Him."

Let's pray, "Heavenly Father we praise you, we worship you, not just for what you have done for us, but for who you are. Thank you for being a great God, whose wisdom, grace, power are so worthy of honor. Thank you for allowing us to love you, praise you, worship you. We give you all the glory. In Jesus' Name, AMEN!"

#23 Closeness to God 2/23

Closeness to God in the 21st Century is it possible? The fast lane of our fast paced society seems to be accelerating: mobile phones, texting, skype, face time and more. Believe it or not, our Lord Jesus also faced the challenges of a demanding schedule. All the time and everywhere He went, He dealt with an abundance of needs and a multitude of interruptions. He was teaching, preaching, meeting needs, feeding, healing, praying for people. To stay close to God and manage His ministry, each day, He spent uninterrupted time alone with His Heavenly Father.

Charles Hummel in *Tyranny of the Urgent* reminds us, “When we stop to evaluate, we realize that our dilemma goes deeper than a shortage of time, it is basically the problem of priorities.”

Make it your priority to be alone with God each day. Jesus did. Schedule a daily appointment with God as if you were meeting with an important dignitary, after all He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus’ example from Luke 5:16, “He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.” Make time to be alone with God today. He is waiting for you. God wants to shower you with His love in His presence when you meet together with Him.

Let's pray, "Lord Jesus, thank you for the example you gave us of how to arrange our priorities. We know that spending time with the Father was how you managed your life in the time you had. Help us to do the same. In your name we pray, Amen."

#24 Father Knows Best 2/24

If you have experienced a dysfunctional family, emotional or physical abuse, you might view God through this grid. Understanding the father-heart of God is important because often our own relationship with our earthly father is messed up. Emotional feelings toward our own earthly fathers can cloud our image of our Heavenly Father. In Luke 15, there was a father who had two sons. The Prodigal Son asked for his rightful part of his inheritance, which was one-third of it. In doing so, the son insulted his upbringing, his father and his family name. In no time at all, he spent the money, but in the end, was more dissatisfied than ever.

In Luke 15:7, the son has a truth encounter, "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, At home, even the hired men have food enough to spare and here I am, dying of hunger." Imagine the young prodigal's state, he had left the security of the family home, after bugging his father to hand over his inheritance. He squandered his wealth on wild living, ended up working in a pig sty. Homeless, hungry, dirty, humiliated; at the

end of his resources he decides to return home. Ashamed, humbled, filthy, broke and guilty, he was compelled to confess to his father the mess he had made. He decided to repent, and return home to his father. The father was waiting for him. The father saw him coming. He had been anticipating the return of his wayward son. He hoped his son would return home and had waited and watched daily, always on the look out for him. The waiting Father is a beautiful picture for those who have yet to believe in Jesus.

#25 Father Heart 2/25

Have you wondered if the Father has turned his back on you? Our Father is a father who waits, watching, anticipating our return. In Luke 15, there was a father who had two sons. The Prodigal Son asked for his rightful part of his inheritance, which was one-third of it. In doing so, the son insulted his upbringing, his father and his family name. In no time at all, he spent the money, but in the end, was more dissatisfied than ever.

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Romans 2:4, “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kingdom in forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.” Believe that your Heavenly Father is waiting for you to come back to Him.