

June

Week 1

Faith "is not the hope which looks forward with wistful longing; it is the hope which looks forward with utter conviction. The Christian faith is a hope that has turned into certainty... belief in God against the world... belief in the future against the present." (from *The Letters to the Hebrews*, commentary by William Barclay)

Faith is "...being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (from Heb. 11:1)

How are we to have faith?

"...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (from Rom. 10:17).

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." (from Heb. 12:2)

"I...urge you to contend for the faith that was *once for all entrusted to the saints.*" (from Jude 3, ital. added)

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God..." (from Eph. 2:8)

Monday. As I begin this week, O God, endow me with a confidence in your grace that is stronger than ever before. I want a faith that possesses me, surrounds me, communicates your reality to me, reassures me that I am loved and that my life is guided by you, the true and almighty God. I open my life to you in full expectation that you will answer this prayer for this day and for all my days. And I also pray for...

Tuesday. Can we "lose faith" the way we lose a ball game or a friend or the car keys? We can't lose it, but we can misplace it or even throw it away. And we can lose out in our relationship with God when we stop connecting with him in prayer and Bible

reading. **“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”** (Heb. 10:35)

Dear Lord, there are times when I feel that my connection with you has somehow grown weaker. I think it happens when I get scared or get too tied up in myself and my affairs. Then I stop praying and reading my Bible. And I lose touch with you. Forgive me. Restore me quickly, for truly my life has meaning only as you lead me in it. Everything else is for naught in comparison to that. Thank you for letting me see this grand truth; hold me close so that I never forget it. I pray today also for...

Wednesday. “By faith, Abel... Enoch... Noah... Abraham... Isaac... Joseph... Moses... Rahab...” and many more heroes of the faith all did great and marvelous things. **“These were all commended for their faith.”** (from Heb. 11)

God, I thank you for your words of proof about the saints of the past; their witness of your love is an inheritance for me. And as your word has said, they did not accomplish what you led them to do because of their own worthiness. They were mere human beings like I. But the race they ran is the race I want to run, the one you have marked out for me. So help me to throw off every hindrance and every temptation to sin. Your promise to commend me as one of your saints is as solid as it was for all those people in the Bible, as it is for all your children since and now. I accept that promise; I thank you and praise you for it. I pray now for...

Thursday. “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness, no one will see the Lord.” (Heb. 12:14)

Chapter 1 of Genesis says that God created people in his own image. No one has yet proven what that means in specific detail, but a careful reading of that chapter identifies a lot of similarities: people have power and freedom – to act, to control, to make choices about all sorts of things. And people can even choose to be holy – **“Be holy, because I am holy.”** (from 1 Pet. 1:16) Similarity to God – surely that makes a strong bid for respecting and loving one another!

Father, as I look around at others, too often I see character wrinkles and warts. How negative is that? Forgive me and help

me to stop being so judgmental. I have no business inserting my own value system. Make my sense of what is right be *your* sense of what is right. Teach me to love people just for whoever they are. I must have faith in you if I am to be holy, so I must have faith in what you do for others if I am to be at peace with them. Thus, I can fulfill your two greatest commandments: love you and love other people. But, as in everything else in my life, I need your help to do it, O God. I pray also for...

Friday. "Don't be obsessed by material things. Be relaxed with what you have. Since God assured us, 'I'll never let you down, never walk off and leave you,' we can boldly quote, 'God is there, ready to help; I'm fearless no matter what. Who or what can get to me?'" (Heb. 13:5,6, *The Message*)

God, it seems like the world we live in pushes us too hard to make more money so we can get more things. I confess: it affects me too. I think I *need* more money when I probably just *want* more money. And thinking I *need* more things is probably just more *wanting* on my part. Am I being manipulated by this kind of attitude? And if so, is it keeping me from putting you first in my life? If that's the case, then it's time for some drastic action to change. Help me do that! You're never going to forsake me – that's for sure. So make that my greatest possession – knowing you'll always love and guide me. I pray this, as best I can, from my heart. And I pray also for...

Saturday. The universal church of God is like a holy city where all saints worship. **"You've come to Mount Zion, the city where the living God resides. The invisible Jerusalem is populated by throngs of festive angels and Christian citizens. It is the city where God is Judge, with judgments that make us just. You've come to Jesus, who presents us with a new covenant, a fresh charter from God."** (Heb. 12:22-24, *The Message*)

"There is no such thing as an isolated Christian in heaven above or on the earth beneath . . . just as there cannot be an individual hand or arm, for it is then cut off and dead, so there cannot be an individual Christian."(From *The Chain of Kindness* by Paul Tudor Jones).

Father, I pray that, as we meet to worship tomorrow, you will join us together in new and special ways. Where there are differences of any sort, let them fade in importance so that we unite under your umbrella of love. And help us to understand more fully that your church family includes all believers, whoever and wherever they are, both within and without our walls. Break down the barriers so that your love reigns equally in the hearts of all of us. I pray today also for...

Week 2

Monday. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” (Heb. 13:8) **“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”** (Heb. 13:15-16)

Great God, thank you for the promised consistency of your love. You made it beautifully clear why Jesus came to this world. He showed your love for all humankind in the most spectacular way possible, and that love never fails. So I do follow your command to confess that Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of my faith. I do want to be a reliable witness of that in the mainstream of life, to share with others how they too are loved. Make ways for me to do that, I pray, and show me how to be as consistent in my witness as you are in how you love us all. I pray this in Jesus' holy name, and also for...

Tuesday.

**“May God,
who puts all things together,
makes all things whole,
who made a lasting mark through the
sacrifice of Jesus. . .
who led Jesus, our Great Shepherd, up and alive
from the dead,**

**Now put you together,
Provide you with everything you need to please him,
Make us into what gives him most pleasure,
By means of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah.
All glory to Jesus forever and always!**

Oh, yes, yes, yes!” (from Heb. 13:20, 21, *The Message*)

God, this is my prayer for myself, my family, my church here at home, and for our extended family who are in other places. Provide us the wherewithal to please you, to do your will – the knowledge of what to do and the means for carrying it out. This is my prayer for today; cause it to be my prayer for every day. I also pray now about these other things...

Wednesday. “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete...” “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” (from James 1:2-4, 12)

God, this seems a hard lesson, a bigger challenge that I can handle - that is, until I remember your promises to hold me up, to walk with me, never to forsake me or leave me alone. It's clear that this has to be more about your sustaining grace than it is about my ability to face trouble and deal with it by myself. Like Paul said, I can do all things, but only because you give me strength (Philip. 4:13). So whatever comes my way, stay with me so that I may be the better for it, no matter how tough it may seem at the outset. Thank you for loving me. I pray now for...

Thursday. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.” (James 1:17, 18)

How true, Father! Thank you! You are the source of all the good things we have, we who are the most honored of your creation. That never changes, for your love never changes: we shall always be on the receiving end. You gave us the final proof when you gave us Jesus. So I offer myself in gratitude, in thanksgiving, in praise to you. Take me as I am, draw me nearer to you, and use me to tell others of your love. I pray also for...

Friday. “...take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...”

(from James 1:19)

Lord, among my temptations, this is a standout. I might be able to explain it: I get busy and in such a hurry that I lose patience with people; sometimes I simply know more about what's going on than the one who is talking; inefficiency and laziness just irritate me; I need to assert myself – it's my right. *What am I saying?* None of that has any love in it! Forgive me, for all this

contradicts everything else your word says, especially your command to love others – *at least* as much as I care about myself. What I need is to learn more about loving. And I need humility! Turn me around; teach me to love openly so that I honor others before honoring myself. Slow me down so that I can hear your voice – as well as the voices of others whom you love as much as you love me. Keep reminding me: it's only love that matters, not any of those other things. Undeservedly, I am loved. I want to love too. I pray also for...

Saturday. "Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like. But whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God – the free life! – even out of the corner of his eye, and sticks with it, is no distracted scatterbrain, but a man or woman of action. That person will find delight and affirmation in the action." (James 1:22-24, *The Message*)

God, as I come to you each day, open my ears that I may hear. And as our congregation comes together tomorrow, open the ears and minds and hearts of all of us. You have promised that you will honor us with your presence when we meet, so it is with expectation that I look forward to tomorrow. Hearing your word – really hearing it – means action will follow. We all need to act so as to be your witnesses in all the places we walk in our lives. And to crown all this off, you promise us delight and affirmation. Thank you, Lord! I pray this, as always, in the name of Jesus, in whose name I also pray for...

Week 3

MONDAY. Where am I in God's plans? **"Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load."** (Gal. 6:4)

"...Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (from 1 Cor. 15:58)

Lord, through the richness of your word, I have seen that my first need is to grow in your grace as I make my Christian journey. But I also see here that I need to carry my own load, that I need to do some work. Surely that means I must do that in the church body, the one in which I live, among the people I see. Am I doing the things you want me to do to support the life of the church, to carry your message of love clearly, right here where I am? Am I doing things the way you want – not just being busy so I can feel good, or worse, *look* good – but that you want all my work to be done as unto you, to serve you **"with great humility"** (Acts 20:19). If I'm not doing this, I ask you to set me straight. As in everything else, I must have your guidance. Otherwise, what a terrible mistake I'd make, like **"a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal"** (1 Cor. 13:1). Lead me to those things you want me to do. Teach me how to do them right. I pray also for...

TUESDAY: How do I connect to others at my church? **"...and all that believed were together."** (from Acts 2:44)

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Gal. 6:9, 10)

God, you make it so clear that you want us to work together. And it's clear I'm especially to love and work with those in our church family – it's for our mutual spiritual growth and for the fulfillment of your plans for all of us. Forgive me where I have not done that. Show me how to do a better job of it. And give me your

love so I may forgive when I need to, and give me your grace to accept forgiveness where it is offered. Teach us all that it is in our togetherness that your will can be done. I now pray for...

WEDNESDAY: Thank God for the volunteer workers in our church. **“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching”** (Heb. 10:24,25)

Dear God, I thank you for loving me, for the promise of an even closer relationship tomorrow, and for opportunities you will give me to work for you. And that makes me think of the many in our church who work so devotedly. Thank you for them. I pray they will be encouraged in their walk with you – the officers and teachers and all those who take on those valuable, extraordinary tasks: cooks; record keepers; office helpers and receptionists; librarians; communion servers at church and in homes; chauffeurs; congregational care workers; artists; painters and wielders of hammer and saw; dramatic actors and producers; musicians; sound system operators; nursery workers; landscape gardeners; and so many more who happily do whatever needs doing. All of them are living witnesses of your love at work. Bless them, nourish them and bring them all into a deeper awareness of who you are to them and to us. I now pray for...

THURSDAY: Thank God for the gift of children and young people. Jesus said, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”** (Matt. 19:14)

“...I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions...” (from Acts 2:17)

Lord, how greatly you have blessed us with the gift of our children, our teenagers, our young people. We call them “our future” for, indeed, they are. Forbid it, Lord, that we should hinder them. Rather, give us wisdom in our leadership, in the examples we set. Above all, let us demonstrate your love so that, as they grow, they will clearly see who you are and will discover the marvels of living within your will for their lives. Let each one

know how you love unsparingly, uniquely. Then help us to look to them and profit from their eager joy of life. As we are serious about our responsibilities for them, help us to share in the fun. You have told us that we are to be joyous, to have good times. So when our seriousness becomes somberness, remind us about the fun, especially with these young people, these gifts beyond measure. Take them all unto yourself. Embrace each of them in your own special way. I pray also for...

FRIDAY: Thank God for the gift of older people. **“To the elders among you... Be shepherds of God’s flock...not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be...being examples to the flock. Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because ‘God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.’”** (from 1 Pet. 5:1-5)

Thank you, Lord, for all the adults of all ages in our congregation. You give us people who come from experiences of countless kinds, and all that history is of value too high to rate – their talents, knowledge, vocations, hobbies, relationships. But I thank you most especially for their experiences with you: they have walked the walk, they have tasted of the heavenly gifts, they have reveled in your love as they have had to face their dilemmas. And they have overcome. I pray that their Christian journeys will ever be enhanced by even deeper revelations of your love. I pray that their discouragements be turned into delight, that their fears be erased by the joy of their salvation. And I pray that those of younger years will find pleasure in friendships with their older brothers and sisters, that they discover the love that is there, the fun that is to be shared, the learning that awaits them. I pray now for...

SATURDAY: Thank God for our musicians. **“Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. In front are the singers, after them the musicians...”** (from Ps. 68:24, 25)

God, your word shows us that your people have forever used this special way of worshipping, of sharing the joy in knowing about your love. It is you who gifted humankind with music – music

which has no limits among all the languages of your world. You have always done that for every generation in every place. And here in this place, you bless us in the very same way. So we most heartily thank you: for the singers, the instrumentalists, the directors and all those who make music happen in so many ways. What gifts they all are! And how worshipping hearts can soar at the words and the sounds! How can we ever express the depth of our thanks? As I thank you, I also pray for all those musicians who guide us in worship in every venue – on Sunday and all other days. Refresh and encourage their hearts. Lift them all to ever clearer awareness of your love for each of them. And now I pray for...

Week 4

From Galatians 5: **“So I say, live by the Spirit... The acts of the sinful nature are obvious... But the fruit of the Spirit is...”**

MONDAY: “The fruit of the Spirit is love...”

Dear God, you highlight love above all else and have done so from the beginning. You make it clear throughout your word (e.g. 1 John 4:7-21). You ARE love. I don't have to invent love for myself because you give it to me all the time. And when I live in you and you in me, love will be made complete: it will become obvious in everything I do and am. O God, help me to learn this lesson better so I may demonstrate to myself and then to others what your love is all about. Without the fruit of love in my life, the other fruits won't be there in the abundance you have promised. I ask this for myself but not for me alone. I really want to be a helpful, purposeful Christian – in the life of our church and wherever else I am. To do it, I must love everybody and *show* that I do. So I ask you to keep teaching this love lesson to me and all of us in our church. We learn, but sometimes we forget. I now pray for...

TUESDAY: “The fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace...”

Lord, your word guarantees that when I ask for your righteousness, I will receive it as a free gift. And your word says that the Holy Spirit will give me joy and peace even in the tough times. Well, I do have some tough days and so do others in our church. So I come now to ask that you visit all of us today with a special awareness of your love so that we can all relearn what your joy and peace are meant to be to us. Elevate us to feelings of delight – delight that we are loved by the God of all humankind. Then sustain us at that higher level with your peace, even a serenity that will amaze us when we're in the middle of problems no matter how tough they are. These will be the times we'll all know more clearly that the Holy Spirit is with us. You promised us righteousness and joy and peace. Help us know how to claim the promise, accept the gift. I pray also for...

WEDNESDAY: “The fruit of the Spirit is patience...”

O God, so much of the time I am way too short on patience. In fact, sometimes I'm just openly *im*patient. I suspect these failures happen when I get in too big a hurry and caught up in responsibilities. But I also suspect that what is really going on is that I forget to keep your love in my heart. I confess I've sinned on this score, and I ask you to forgive me. Does this happen with my fellow Christians? If so, I ask you to guide them in the same way. Sometimes I see some of them being patient in the way they connect with each other and with me, and that's when I know the Holy Spirit is at work within them. How excellent that is and how much I thank you for that evidence. We're meant to be a family here, O God, so help us all to be that and behave like the *loving* family you've told us to be. Now here are other prayers I have...

THURSDAY: “The fruit of the Spirit is kindness, goodness...”

Dear Lord, I must admit that I don't do much of a job at being good on my own. No matter how hard I might try, I can't honestly call myself “good.” And I confess that being kind is something I simply don't do all the time. Your word goes to extra lengths to tell me to be kind so I see how important that is. And then, also in your word, I see that what I'm actually doing wrong is trying to do all this by myself – where did I get the idea that I'm supposed to be “nice” and that will cover up my *ur*kindness, my *un*goodness? You tell me that the only way to be good and kind is to rely on you. Forgive me for trying to do it alone. Draw me to you in so strong a way that I will just naturally be the good, the kind, the “nice” Christian you want me to be. If other people in our church have these same sorts of shortcomings, I ask you to visit them with your Holy Spirit also. Let them – let all of us together – discover a daily life where unfeigned kindness and goodness are just part of who we all are. I also pray for...

FRIDAY: “The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness...”

Our Father, there have been times when I made up my mind to be faithful – faithful in staying in touch with you all the time, faithful in my connections with other people, and faithful to the things I should be doing in my church. But then somewhere

along the way, I just slow it all down without even knowing it, sometimes to a full stop without ever waking up. O God, how great is your faithfulness to me! I don't merit that at all! But then your word explains that I'm not supposed to earn it; I'm to take it as a gift. Help me do that and, as I accept *your* faithfulness, help me see it as a clear example of how I, too, am to be faithful to you, to my love for others. Looking around, I see so many of my brothers and sisters in this church who are faithful to the way they love you and one another, and all that is proof that the Holy Spirit is alive within them. But where there may be others who, like me, fall short of faithfulness, I ask you to guide them in the same way I ask you to guide me. You've said it's your will that we all demonstrate faithfulness as one body. We rely on your promises to help us do it and we thank you. I now pray for...

SATURDAY: "The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness, self-control..."

O God, your word says that the Holy Spirit will guide me so that these fruits will describe who I am. As to gentleness, guide me to the humbleness the Holy Spirit brings, without trying to be a doormat. As to self-control, guide me to submit to your leading, not being pushy and determined to have my own way. You know me well, so I confess that I sometimes go woefully awry about these things. Help me, Lord, to have the right kind of self-control, the kind where I prayerfully wait for you to direct me. Your word tells me to come to you and wait. That takes more gentleness and self-control than I have on my own. So visit me daily through the Holy Spirit with your gift of love. It's there I will find this kind of gentleness and self-control, the kind I see among many of your other children. For those who might need the same kind of help I do, I ask that the Holy Spirit is active in their daily lives also. Guide us all together then to demonstrate your joy and your peace, being patient in all our dealings, so that goodness, faithfulness and gentleness will shine forth among us. And, most of all, help us accept your gift of love so these Spirit-born fruits will be the hallmarks of who we are. Now I pray also for...