

GO TO CHURCH WILLIAM

On a sunny morning, William's mother came into her son's room and said, "William, it's Sunday. Time to get up! Time to get up and go to church! Get up!" From under the covers came mumbles, "I don't want to go!" "What do you mean?" she said. "That's silly! Now get up and get dressed and go to church!" "No!" he shot back. "I'll give you two reasons. I don't like them and they don't like me!" "Nonsense," she told him. "I'll give YOU two reasons to go. First, you are 42 years old, and second, you are the PASTOR!"

PRAY

Who's team are we on? Life's lessons come in a lot of different ways. Our parents' teachings have a large influence on how we face life. A lot of you grew up in this church and when I listen to some of your stories, it's nice to be with people who have the kind of history you have. Most of us grew up in a generation of obedience. You can probably relate to sayings like; children are to be seen and not heard. We wouldn't dare talk back or even think of challenging our parents. Using Mr. or Mrs. when addressing an adult was also required. I'm sure you can add a few more basic rules to the list. But the fact is, today's times are a lot different from when we grew up.

Our media is in a feeding frenzy. We can try to blame the media but our society pays a lot of money for gossip and people want to know about all the negative. We thrive on it. We may try and deny it, but gossip is rampant today. We can whine about most everything. As we get older, everything around us is changing and we are more prone to tell each other things that we don't like. It's hard to see any good in how our world is today.

Thankfully, when we read the bible, it tells us the opposite of what the world wants us to know.

We all know the scriptures that tell us to be content in all things or thankful in all things but how do we live it out? If we believe that the bible is the word of God, then we must fight for it. It takes time and repetition of study to know how God wants us to be.

Last Wednesday night, in our men's small group, Jim B. used Philippians 4:4-7

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This is real hard to live out but when we do this, the reward is huge.

Verse 7 tells us that **7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Is this what our parents taught us or is this what we have to learn on our own? When it comes to FAITH, some people may argue and say that when they get it right, they'll start coming to church. Others may feel like God is untouchable and a lot of people are fearful to be in His presence.

For today, I would like to try and present a God who is alive and very personal.

To start off, I'm going to use an illustration that I think everyone can relate to.

Baseball is an American tradition and I hope everyone knows who the pitcher and catcher are on a baseball team are. First, let's look at the catcher. He's the guy behind the batter but in front of the umpire. Try and picture what he wears. He has a helmet with a cage attached to it, he also wears a chest protector covers his shoulders, he wears a cup and also wears shin guards that go up over his knees. His mitt is oversized and has extra padding in it. The pitcher doesn't wear anything special but it's his job to throw the ball based on the catcher's command.

When I was coaching baseball, these were the two most important positions. Each one has two very different roles during the game and they're both dependent on each other. The catcher is the General and takes the most abuse. The pitcher is who gets the win or the loss. He's in the driver's seat. His job is to place the ball where the batter will swing and miss it. The catcher gives him the target and tells him what pitch to throw. The pitcher has to learn to throw multiple kinds of pitches. First they learn to throw a fast ball, then a changeup, then a curve ball and a slider. If they get real good, they even learn how to throw a knuckle ball. The catcher signals the pitcher with which one to throw and then the game gets played. It takes years of practice but they both keep getting better and better, if they practice "a lot". They also share something else in common. **THEY HAVE A COACH!!!!** The coach has 2 main responsibilities. One is teaching how to play offense and the other is teaching defense. Safety is a top priority. The coach has to make sure the catcher is dressed properly every time he gets behind the plate and he has to count the number of pitches that get thrown during a game.

So why does the catcher wear all that extra stuff? Because the ball hurts when it hits you. It can break bones. When the pitcher throws the ball, the catcher never knows for sure what's going to happen. The pitcher might throw a wild pitch or the batter may tip the ball and it goes in the wrong direction. The catcher might even get hit on accident with the bat. The ball is moving so fast and when it gets out of control, the catcher is going to miss it. Then the catcher has to go to plan "B" and use some part of his body to keep the ball in front of him. The ball may go into his face or it may bounce up off the ground. Being protected from the unknown isn't thought of as, "if" it will hit him but, it's a fact and the catcher prepares for it. Knowing that he's a living pin cushion is critical for him to understand. If he wasn't wearing all that equipment, he would get seriously injured. Our lives are no different. If we don't accept the fact that we're going to face troubles and pain, then we'll end up facing Satan with no equipment on. God is our coach and the word of God repeatedly tells us that we will get thrown curve balls and we will have trials of many kinds. God does provide the equipment for us to dress in. God is our Father and He wants us to be clothed by Him. He dresses us but, if we refuse to wear His attire, then we can get hurt really bad. God isn't like our Earthly parents and His ways are not our ways. When we reject His teachings or don't understand His authority over the world, His armor won't mean much or be worn at all.

Let's look at Ephesians 6:10-20 The Armor of God **10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**

God doesn't mix words. He's telling us that the world is evil. He wants to help us with staying safe. It's like a baseball catcher who understands that he's going to get hit by the ball. The more intimate we are with God the more protection we'll have. As we continue to verse 13, God describes and gives us the protection to put over our uniform. It's up to us to put it on.

This is the only defense we have and Satan is going to try and convince us that we don't need it. Satan uses every lie in the book to stop us from wearing this.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Every one of us has the ability to wear this armor. The hard part is to put it on and practice wearing it during life. We don't know what today is going to bring and I'm totally guilty of blindly go out into this world. If we make God untouchable or believe that He's not present at all times, we become sheep to be slaughtered.

I really love verse 18, **18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.**

Asking others what we can pray for them is like completing the rest of the players needed for the field. We need infielders and outfielders.

19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Paul isn't afraid to ask for prayers because he understands the power of it. He's being the coach and is needed to speak for God. The armor we wear is because we're all catchers. PRAYERS are because we're all pitchers too. As Christians, we have to play both positions. We're constantly being faced with new batters and Prayer is our only way to strike out Satan. Like the catcher, the armor is the only way to deflect the attacks from Satan but, it starts with PRAYER. Learning the armor comes with reading the word. Praying can be taught in a couple of ways. When I first came to believe, I really didn't know anything. First I had to learn how to pray. Thankfully, I had someone help me with this. I was told to just talk to God like He's your best friend. I was taught that before I do anything, ask God for help. We pray over the word, we prayed for forgiveness, we pray for food and about our families. Like all pitchers, we must learn to have different pitches to throw and then we need to learn how to put the ball in the right place. The more ways that we know how to pray, the better we'll get at striking out Satan. We also need to wear the armor and let it do its job of deflecting. Satan is going to do everything he can to hurt us and if we don't have the armor on, then we're going to get broken bones. If Satan can't hit a home run, then he's going to try and hit the ball right into our chest or at our face. He's going to do anything he can to find the exposed part of our body. None of us always win but, Christ blood washes that white as snow. The more we talk to God the more He protects us. This is why God tells us to pray without ceasing.

After my heart attacks God laid it on my heart to better understand what it means to pray in "all" things. The first thing God taught me was that my prayers needed to become more real. He revealed in me that only using formal prayer is how I kept Him at a distance. It was stopping me from having a true Father/ Son relationship. I had to learn about the meaty kind of prayer. I needed to find prayers that showed me that I could trust God in all things. I needed to give God my real self. He wants the real us and then He does what only God can do.

1 Peter 5:7 says "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for us".

We may feel like we can't do this or that we're being disrespectful in some way but that's Satan trying to keep us away from God. God knows that life is hard and confusing. If we push God away and deny Him access to our hearts, we live out the saying "children are to be seen and not heard". Fearing God only makes us bury more pain. God is very touchable. Unless we risk having an open relationship with God then we'll never allow God to help us with all the hard things in life. I had to learn that it's ok to see God as touchable. God showed me that He wants me to tell Him everything. My prayers needed to become a way of life and hearing multiple others praying showed me that I'm not alone. My hope is that we can grow our prayer lives and find a closer relationship to God. Feeling comfortable praying with each other or publicly is an important part of prayer. We need to be willing to pray together and for each other.

In James 5:16 it says **16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.**

This is "HARD" to do. I've been learning that the number one reason for why some churches are growing today is because they ask strangers what they need prayer for. Then they pray for them.

All God wants us to do is, plant the seed and then let Him water it. We need to hear each other pray. We need to show others that God is real. If you have a need in your life, feel free to come forward or find someone who you trust and let God walk with you through this time.

Let's pray