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ARTICLES

Are You Livin' on a Prayer?

By Pastor Kevin Van Wyk

Do you remember the infamous [Bon Jovi song](#)? I never paid much attention to [the words](#), but I took a closer look. Poor Tommy and Gina, life was hard and all they had was each other. Well, and a prayer. For some reason, I don't think the authors had thought much about the meaning of livin' on a prayer either. Whose prayer was this? What was it asking for? How did this prayer help them survive and continue to live?

After reading [Revelation 8](#) and seeing an angel bring a bowl with incense and "the prayers of all God's people" to the altar before the throne of God, I wondered, is that happening now? The position in Revelation leads me to think these events have not yet happened, but we also certainly believe our prayers do come before God the Father. Can you imagine the glorious scene in heaven as your prayers are mingled with the incense and millions of other prayers before the Father?

Then add the prayers of the Holy Spirit. Consider when you just don't know what to pray. He is there stirring wordless prayers and interceding for us!

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Rom. 8:26-27)

Oh! There is more. Now add to the scene the prayers of Jesus our high priest.

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need... (Heb. 7:23-26)

Did Desmond Child, John Bon Jovi, and Sambora Richard consider the prayers of God's people, the prayers of the Holy Spirit, or the prayers of Jesus? Certainly, the song implies living in a hopeless state.

"Livin' on a Prayer" is not a statement of faith, as we might hope. It was a sad reflection of being down and out, but determined to survive. "Take my hand and we'll make it, I swear."

You are living on more than a prayer. No doubt, some believers around you are praying for you. The Spirit and the Son are praying for you. Don't give up on life and don't think it all depends on you or your prayers. Set aside some time to offer your heart and prayers to the Lord.

Join me in praying...

- Pray for your family to know and trust Jesus. Ask God to stir a deep desire for his Word in their hearts.
- Lift up those in our church who are ill or struggling with difficult issues. Check the back of our bulletin for a list.
- Pray for our consistory and staff as we seek to discern specific initiatives God wants us to take on this year.
- Pray for our elders, pastors, the leaders of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, other local RCA churches, and the RCA leadership as we all sort through our future.

We Are Made for Eternity

By Pastor Doug Shotsky

Colossians 3:1-3 - **1**Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **3** For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

I just turned 40 this past year and God has been doing something new and special in my heart that I've never really considered to this degree before.

God has been giving me a greater anticipation to be in Heaven with Him. Don't get me wrong, I have a very blessed life (more than so many others), I enjoy my days here on earth, and love my family and friends very much; but, God is showing me that what's beyond this life is my true home that I'm longing for.

Heaven has been on my radar, and I've known in my mind that my hope beyond this life is to spend eternity with Jesus, but if truth be told, I have been primarily focused on the here and now of this world. It's easy to get caught up in the day to day distractions and weights that fill so many of our days, but my prayer more than ever is for God to help me discern the things that He would place in my life that are of eternal value, and this is my prayer for all who know Christ as well.

The time we have on Earth is limited, and none of us know when our last day here will be, but all of us who are in Christ have a hope that He has gone to prepare an eternal home for us. My reason for writing this is to encourage all who are reading this to hold lightly to the lives we have here, because it will all pass away, but what we are looking forward to will never end! Don't worry about death, it's only the beginning!

Golden Lifers Update

By Roxy Schouten

When contemplating a topic to write on the Lord impressed upon me two topics and somehow I felt that I would have to choose between either of them. I chose the topic of being SALT in this earth based on Matt 5:13. The other topic was on PERSECUTION based on various scriptures that Jesus warned us about. I now see that those two are related and can't be separated. Being SALT on this earth will lead to PERSECUTION. We may be convicted to be SALT but PERSECUTION is often regarded as too unpleasant to contemplate even if we recognize that it is rampant across the world. Are we exempt? Not if we truly are being SALT as Jesus Christ has called us to be.

But how do we face PERSECUTION? Although each of us will experience and react to it in our own way there are some steps that are common to all that will help us prepare to walk through the PERSECUTION already being experienced because we are being SALT.

Pastor Andrew Brunson was sentenced to life imprisonment in Turkey for preaching the Gospel and starting churches in that oppressive country. Thankfully, President Trump was instrumental in securing his release after serving several years of his sentence. Brunson offers some advise after he admitted he never thought that his punishment would come to the degree it did and he became a broken man who time after time had to experience a new low and to climb out of that dark time in his soul. He shares what he learned and what finally was able to have him endure and be a witness as God called him to do. He shares how to prepare:

1. Talk about persecution. Be aware of it and its potential even if we consider that we are living in a “safe” country. When we read stories of death threats to children and people of all ages in other countries we see that even the children have been taught about the potential of persecution and how they need to

react. Persecution may be in the form less grave but words and rejection hurt deeply also.

2. Pursue intimacy with God. Do you know God as your Father? Do you know that you know that He will never leave you nor forsake you? Do you know that when you fail to be SALT that He forgives for Jesus Christ sake like Peters failure by denouncing Jesus during His darkest hour? Is the Father the first one you ask about a problem or decision? For the Born Again Believer the Holy Spirit abides in our spirit and how much more intimate can that be? But that relationship need be acknowledged and developed too.
3. Develop the right perspective: Fear God and not man. Are we willing to pay the price – because there may well be a price? That price may be friends and family, jobs, money, prestige, etc.
4. Determine ahead of time to follow Jesus. When the “heat” is on is not the time to decide because emotions run high at that time. Being SALT entails a price.
5. Stand on the Word. We can read it – but may not be “in” it. The Word of God is our Daily Bread. The promises of God are not written as

man writes promises. God never lies.

We live in uncertain times and events signaling the soon return of Jesus to gather His children. At times we may feel “naked” but God has equipped us with His armor as outlines in Ephesians 6. That armor may take a beating but it will never fail. Thank You, Jesus! Time is short either by natural means where we leave this life or be gathered in the “twinkling of an eye”. Weigh what we spend our time and energy on. The world is hurting and we have THE answer all between the pages of the Word of God. That is where SALT comes in. How SALTY are we today? SALT stings in wounds and open sores but it has a healing property which the world needs.

Father – Salt and Persecution come knocking and we are tempted, oh so tempted, to give into Fear that is not from You. Forgive us and remind us in those times that this Fear is a ploy of the enemy. Remind us that we only have a need of fear and awe of You in all Your splendor and power. We lift up fellow Christians who are experiencing persecution. We pray for physical, emotional and spiritual safety for them and that their response may honor You and be

a witness to Your saving grace. Thank You Jesus, Amen

Library Update

By Pauline Peters

Oh the weather outside is frightful, but the fire is so delightful, since we’ve no place to go, Let it snow, Let it snow, Let it snow. That’s the way I feel when the Christmas lights are gone & things slow down so we can enjoy staying home with a good book, a good DVD, or even challenging our brains with some Bible study books.

Our library is well stocked for all of the above. I know our library has been well used this past year because of trying to distance ourselves, but if you ask any of the people who have utilized it, they will all agree that it helps pass the time while you keep your brains engaged. We have such a great assortment of books, from fiction, to historical fiction, to autobiographies, to who done it books. Once you think you know who your favorite author is, you read a different one, & then you’re not so sure anymore. There are so many options. Don’t forget about the old Pastor’s study for a deeper understanding through different Bible study materials.

Take time & enjoy.

MESSAGES

Many Thanks to all who sent cards and prayers for Al when he had his ankle surgery. There still is some healing to take place. We also thank the church for the candy at Christmas and for the visit from our Shepherd. We also want to thank the many who remembered us with cards and expressions of sympathy on the passing of Doris's sister, Carol. They were much appreciated. We have a great caring church!

-Al and Doris Harmsen

Thanks for all the prayers, cards and calls that you gave me. God is good, answers prayers and stays by our side in time of need. Great to be a member of Alto church.

-Ron Vande Zande

We thank the congregation for the box of candy we received at Christmas and also the visit from Judy Bossenbroek. We appreciated it very much.

-Paul & Audrey Elenius

Thanks to everyone for the many prayers, cards, calls & the cool prayer quilt after my recent hip surgery. My recovery has gone well. God is good!

-Don DeMotts

Even though Christmas was very different

this year (just the two of us), I am thankful for the many people from church who sent cards and remembered us nevertheless. Thank you to the church for the surprise box of candy and to Bob & Barb Pluim for delivering it to me. I often felt isolated since my illness in August but people continue to connect with me from church with much appreciated phone calls which has helped a lot. It is great to be part of such a caring church family.

-Rollie

Dearly Beloved Brothers and Sisters of the ARC,

First, I want to extend a special thank you to the Board of Deacons for proposing that the December 2020 Benevolent Fund offering be given to the eCenter for Hope, and Vision and thank you to the Consistory, Pastor Kevin and Pastor Doug for making that a reality. Second, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your overwhelming support of our mission. Having served alongside you for many years you all know that it is not often that I am at a loss for words, but this contribution truly left me speechless! Your generous donation is an outward demonstration of your Christian love and support to help restore hope and independence in the lives of those who are struggling with vision loss. It is also an essential tool in helping us lead others to the one true hope that is found in Jesus

Christ alone. Please know that I continue to hold you all in my thoughts and prayers and thank you so much again for the opportunity to come back and share in Christmas worship with my church family in Alto.

May God's Grace and Peace be with you all,

-Pastor Gregg

We would like to thank our church family for the special Christmas treat. Thanks to Bob & Barb Pluim for delivering it. -Dave and Donna Henker

Thank you Alto Reformed Church for the candy and ornament we received at Christmas. Thank you to Renee Bruins for bringing it and for the nice visit we had with her.

-Barrie and Ardyce Tenpas

Thank you for the ornament and candy.

-John and Faye Janey

We would like to say thank you to everyone who has helped us through this time of Ken's cancer and his passing. For all the cards sent, prayers, and words of care, concern and comfort. Memories of Ken's life will remain in our hearts and we know God will give us strength for today and hope for tomorrow.

-Rich & Charlene Kamphuis and Duane & Colleen Bille families

Thank you for the Christmas cards. I enjoyed them very much.

-Dayton Ter Beest

Thank you for the candy at Christmas and to Jerry Medema for his visit. Also thanks to those who remembered me with prayers, cards, and calls following my surgery. Thanks to Kathy Flier for the visit.

-Ann Boerson

We would like to THANK everyone for your cards, food, phone calls, and prayers during our covid illness these last several weeks. Also thank you to our church for the box of candy we received at Christmas and to Larry & Betty Daane for delivering it. Jim says, "Thank you to the men's chorus for your card and gift certificate also". May God bless you all.

-Jim & Karen Stelsel

Thank you for all the ways you have blessed me this past year and for your prayers for me. God has healed me in many ways. He's the love of my life. It makes me so happy for what you do to let God shine through the Alto Reformed Church. Jesus is the church. Read the parable about the ten virgins, five had extra oil for their lamps. When the bridegroom Jesus came the five wise virgins put more oil in their lamps, the

unwise virgins had no more oil for their lamps. They asked the five wise virgins to give them some of their oil, but the wise virgins said no, we have to keep our lamps lit. While the five unwise virgins ran to get more oil the bridegroom Jesus came and said to the five wise virgins to come with Him and go to the banquet. They went in and Jesus locked the door. The five unwise virgins came back and pounded on the door but Jesus did not let them in, and said depart for I never knew you. Let all of us keep shining for Jesus, so when He comes again He will welcome you to His kingdom. May God richly bless you.
Lovingly, Helen Straks

Dear Friends at Alto Reformed,
Thank you so much for allowing Marty & Lora to come and represent all of you at CCCD again this year! They have blessed both our family and the ministry beyond what I can describe with words. Together, they were able to work on a number of projects that have unfortunately gotten stuck in the middle of our to do list. They were all necessary and important jobs, but regrettably due to shortages of funds, staff, or both they were never able to reach the top of the list until Marty & Lora came to help. For our family, this was a much needed visit! The last year has brought a number of challenges (as it has for everyone) but this time with our family from WI has brought a lot of healing and

renewal. Finally, thank you so much for the financial partnership that you continue to provide. This year, even more than any in the past, your incredibly generous gift will impact lives here at JRV in profound ways.

Thank you- The Briggs Family

I've received many messages, cards, and even gifts this whole year. I am so grateful for each one who remembered me. It's been an unusual 2020 for all, but I trust that our great God is in control and we can have peaceful hearts as we step into a new year.

-Donna Kastein

Thank you seems too small of a word to use to express my gratitude to my church family for the generous love offering given to me at Christmas. It really touched my heart when all of the deacons came to my house with the gift and prayed over me. During a difficult time in my life all of your prayers helped carry me through.

-Mark Vossekuil

Thank you for the treat and to Kathy Flier for bringing it. Thanks for the CD player. I enjoy listening to the service.

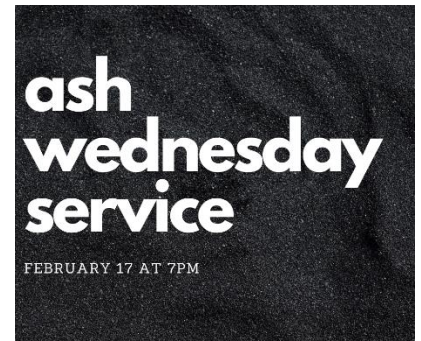
-Marcella Vande Berg

Thank you for your donation. We appreciate your ongoing support.

-REACH Waupun

We would like to thank everyone for the many cards, calls, gifts, and prayers we have received during this pandemic and holiday season. It was greatly appreciated. Our prayer is that this will end soon and we can go back to the way things used to be.

-Bud & Kay Vande Zande



Ash Wednesday Service
Wednesday, February 17 at 7pm

EVENTS



The Crazy Cycle in Marriage will address the struggle every marriage faces and the issue is usually not the real issue. Stephanie and I, Kevin, found these four short videos refreshing and helpful during our mini spiritual retreat this past fall. We hope you will join us for a special Valentine's evening with your spouse. Free child care will be provided and there is no cost to attend. Join us Sunday, Feb. 14 at 6pm in the sanctuary . Please signup at the info table.



Congregational Meeting: It is with sad, yet hopeful hearts that we seek your wisdom in discerning God's will for Alto Reformed Church regarding leaving the Reformed Church in America and joining the Alliance of Reformed Churches. We will share information and take an advisory vote on February 28th at a 9am special congregational meeting. Please plan to attend. We are hoping to use Zoom for those unable to attend, but we are not sure voting will be permitted that way.

We will be offering activities/childcare for the kiddos during the congregational meeting. Here is a look at where you can bring your child(ren):
Nursery for all children up to 3.
Sunbeamers Room for all children ages 3 through 4K.

Olive Room for all K-2nd graders.

Orange Room for all 3rd-5th graders.

Anyone 6th grade and older who would be willing to help out in one of these areas should contact Adrea Daane so we can get volunteers assigned to rooms. If you haven't contacted her before the meeting, feel free to meet her downstairs for a last-minute placement. Any questions, feel free to ask!

More information will be provided as the meeting gets closer.

– Your Elders

NEWS

Baptisms

1/31/21 - Ezekiel Lee, son of Eric & Beth Ann Redeker

Births

1/28/21 - Colbie Lynn, daughter of Ryan and Breanna Vande Zande