



Church Newsletter

First Baptist Church of
Niles

Volume 2/Issue 12

WHAT WE ARE DOING? AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO?

IN THIS ISSUE

WELCOME

Welcome to Volume 2 of the FBCN Newsletter or the “current new normal” editions.

This week’s reading will be Psalm 88, titled I Cry Out Day and Night Before You

A SONG. A PSALM OF THE SONS OF KORAH. TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO MAHALATH LEANNOTH. A MASKIL OF HEMAN THE EZRAHITE.

O LORD, God of my salvation,
I cry out day and night before you.
² Let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry! ³ For my
soul is full of troubles, and my life
draws near to Sheol. ⁴ I am counted
among those who go down to the
pit; I am a man who has no strength,
⁵ like one set loose among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no
more, for they are cut off from your
hand. ⁶ You have put me in the
depths of the pit, in the regions dark

and deep. ⁷ Your wrath lies heavy
upon me, and you overwhelm me
with all your waves. *Selah*
⁸ You have caused my companions
to shun me; you have made me a
horror to them. I am shut in so that I
cannot escape; ⁹ my eye grows dim
through sorrow. Every day I call
upon you, O LORD; I spread out my
hands to you. ¹⁰ Do you work
wonders for the dead? Do the
departed rise up to praise
you? *Selah*

¹¹ Is your steadfast love declared in
the grave, or your faithfulness in
Abaddon? ¹² Are your wonders
known in the darkness, or your
righteousness in the land
of forgetfulness? ¹³ But I, O LORD,
cry to you; in the morning my prayer
comes before you. ¹⁴ O LORD, why do
you cast my soul away? Why do you
hide your face from me? ¹⁵ Afflicted
and close to death from my youth
up, I suffer your terrors; I am
helpless. ¹⁶ Your wrath has swept
over me; your dreadful assaults
destroy me. ¹⁷ They surround me like
a flood all day long; they close in on
me together. ¹⁸ You have caused my
beloved and my friend to shun me;

my companions have become
darkness.

In the title prior to the Psalms
opening we see the words,
Mahalath Leannoth. Leannoth
defined as for answering; i.e., in
singing, occurs in the title to Psalms
88 . The title "Mahalath (q.v.)
Leannoth" may be rendered
"concerning sickness, to be sung"
i.e., perhaps, to be sung in sickness.

We will have another guest speaker
this month from the Orchard
Church.

We invite you to Join us for a virtual
prayer meeting on Wednesdays at
7:00pm.

Wednesday Bible Study ([Click Here](#))

Meeting ID: 899 2251 1230

Password: 409807

One tap mobile

+13126266799

Meeting ID: 899 2251 1230

Password: 409807

Make sure you view the updated
prayer list. There are so many
needs.

"We 'have all we want' is a terrible saying when 'all' does not include God. We find God an interruption. As St. Augustine says somewhere, 'God wants to give us something, but cannot, because our hands are full —there's nowhere for Him to put it.'" — C.S. Lewis

"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets." Luke 6:22-23

I read the C.S. Lewis quote above and began to ponder three steps. The first being, when our "all" does not include God. Salvation is the beginning step in living a Christian life. In John 14:6, Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Jesus encourages all believers to grow in relationship, commitment, and obedience to Him. Faith is believing and trusting in God.

We start with faith as the first step, and then constantly add to it. We are saved by faith we should continue to live by faith. Matthew 17:20, *"He said to them, Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."* 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, *"for we walk by faith, not by sight."* There are many Christians today that are saying, "We're worried about what's happening in the world" or "If things don't change in our world, we're finished." Christians shouldn't live that way. We don't live by the media; we don't live in fear! We live by faith in the eternal God.

Our second step is living in absolute dependence on Him. By faith we believe God is enough that He is still able to bring more people into His Kingdom, and able to send out more to preach,

teach, and serve. We believe God will provide the funds, the buildings, and whatever it takes to do the work He wants us to do. God has always proven Himself faithful. People can get upset over many things, but we can't get upset over them when we know that everything is under God's control – that's faith!

"And the Lord said, 'If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.'" (Luke 17:6).

Are we living each and every day in faith and dependence? Can we sing the first stanza and chorus of "I surrender all" and really mean it?

*All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.*

*Refrain:
I surrender all, I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.*

You might believe that surrendering was something you only did once. But if you are fully surrendered and realize who you are, for what you were created, and by whom you were created then you'll understand that surrender will be happening again, and again, and again.

- Surrendering my dreams to Him as he leads me from the material to the spiritual.
- Surrendering my comforts to Him as my fears of professing my faith to others becomes common place.
- Surrendering my plans to Him as He leads me away from self to sacrifice.
- Surrendering my future to Him as the secular is replaced by the devout.
- Surrendering my finances to Him and trusting in His provisions for my life.

- Surrendering again, and again, and again until all is surrendered.

Recognizing this "total surrendering" is exactly what God has planned for each of our lives. While the details of what surrendering all, may look different in each of our lives, the objective is the same. God desires vessels who surrender all; people who know the price that has been paid for them, and live accordingly, individuals who surrender every comfort, dream, desire, and plan to an invisible God with an eternal vision. It's the process of letting go of something that we're holding way too close.

Our third step is when we are held together with Christ in a spiritual union as one by our salvation, sanctification and glorification in Christ. There is a natural resistance in our own hearts that true saving faith always brings with it the reshaping of our heart and mind so that it is no longer we who live, but Christ lives in us.

"There are any number of issues where it seems that it's no longer enough for a person of faith to get along with, or to serve, or to treat well someone they disagree with. And I think that the political business, media, celebrity class, and also academia, it seems that there's much more of a demand that people approve of, that they validate, that they celebrate things that they actually disagree with.

-Andrew Brunson, American-Hungarian pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

There is in every human heart an intense and powerful love for the praise of men. Our love for the praise of men hinders us from trusting Christ because the purpose of Christ is to remove every ground of boasting in us and put it all in God (1 Corinthians 1:29-31; Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 6:14). This is the fundamental stumbling block to Christian faith. It is what Jesus meant when he said in John 5:44, *"How can*

you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" This is when Christ is no longer an interruption but when He becomes our lifestyle.

Our lives belong to You, O God. We want our lives to be living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to You.

It is only after we have, by faith, trusted in Him and are totally dependent on Him that our union with Him is complete; that we will understand the inevitability, purpose, and fruit of suffering for Christ.

In reading several articles lately about the "persecution" that Christians are experiencing because of the restrictions placed on church "buildings." This limits the blueprint of worship that we have embraced as common-place until this point of time. But due to the pandemic, worship as we knew it has taken on a new reality.

Carl R. Trueman has written, *"On numerous occasions over the last six months I have heard or seen COVID's effect on churches described as 'apocalyptic.' Frequently, the word has been used in its improper but colloquial sense of 'catastrophic' or 'disastrous,' referring to the chaos it has created for worship services or the damage it has done to budgets. He goes on to say, 'In conversation with many ministers, I have noticed one key concern again and again: How many Christians will return to church once COVID has stabilized? It is anecdotal at best at this point, but the figure often cited in my presence is 30 percent: Three out of every ten pre-COVID worshippers might stay away for good.'*

According to David Kinnaman, president of the prominent Christian research organization Barna Group in an interview with NPR, he stated that, *"as many as one in five churches could*

permanently close as a result of shutdowns stemming from the coronavirus pandemic." He went on to say, *"although churches were handling things 'pretty swimmingly' at first, circumstances have changed for some."* He noted that although many churches have opened just as states' shutdown orders are loosened, their services have had *"a lot less people coming."*

"They're recognizing that the relationships that they thought were much deeper with people were actually not as deep as they expected,"

"Obviously, there will be a lot more online attendance than ever before, even after all churches reopen. I think this digital church is here to stay," Kinman continued.

How might those of us who think physical presence at worship is essential respond?

Douglas Farrow, Professor of Theology and Christian Thought at McGill University, has reflected in great depth upon the importance of Christ's ascension for ecclesiology and therefore for worship. *"Christ's ascension is essential to Pentecost, to the mission of the Spirit, and thus to the birth and subsequent life of the apostolic church. It also makes worship here and now the celebration of Christ's presence in the face of his absence. Indeed, the issue of how the physically absent Christ can be present is determinative of how we understand worship and its constituent elements. And it therefore has an obvious bearing on how we think of online worship in relation to a physical congregational assembly. And that makes the difference between a physical gathering of the church and one that is online somewhat harder to articulate at a theological level."*

The physical church is a community. Community is integral to the picture of the church we find in the Book of Acts and also (ironically) underlies the problems that Paul often addresses in his

letters. Where there is no community, there can be no community dysfunction. And community works best when there is real human contact and interaction." Fellowship is an important part of our faith. Coming together to support one another is an experience that allows us to learn, gain strength, and show the world exactly what God is.

Carl Trueman, professor in the Calderwood School of Arts and Humanities at Grove City College, Pa., Senior Fellow at the Institute for Faith and Freedom and Pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Ambler, PA. expresses it this way. *"Of more significance are the elements of worship: the reading and the proclamation of the Word, prayer, singing and, yes, the sacraments. And all of these require present, communal action. Even preaching is in a sense a dialogue between the God who confronts his people with his presence through his Word and the people's response in faith and repentance."* He continues:

"So what will be revealed if vast swathes of Protestants do not return to physical church when COVID finally settles down? Surely that the theology of preaching as God's confrontational presence in and through proclamation has at some point been supplanted in the minds of many by a notion that it is merely a transmission of information or a pep talk. And that listening as active, faithful response has correspondingly been reduced to a passive reception, of the kind that televisions and countless other screens have made the default position. To put it another way, it will reveal that preachers have become confused with life coaches or entertainers, and congregations have been replaced by audiences and autonomous consumers. Such a scenario will be apocalyptic. And in both senses of the Word."

No matter where we are in our faith, fellowship provides us with strength. Being around other believers gives us the chance to learn and grow in our

faith. It demonstrates to us why we believe and sometimes is the excellent food for our souls. It's great to be out in the world evangelizing to others, but it can easily make us hard and eat away at our strength. When we deal with a hard-hearted world, it can become easy to fall into that hard-heartedness and question our beliefs. It's always good to spend some time in fellowship so that we remember that God makes us strong.

"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." Matthew 18:19-20

"Coming together is a great way for each of us to grow in our faith. Reading our Bibles and praying are great ways to get closer to God, but each of us has important lessons to impart to one another. When we come together in fellowship, we teach each other things. God gives us a gift of learning and growing when we come together in fellowship we show each other how to live as God wants us to live, and how to walk in His footsteps." -Kelli Mahoney

I began to think of the lives of Christians "truly" being persecuted for their faith and not just being asked to observe some restrictions for the safety of the general public and not the prohibition of one's personal spiritual beliefs.

I am reminded of the underground church in Russia. Vladimir Putin, the leader of Russia, signed amendments on July 6, 2016 imposing harsh restrictions on sharing beliefs, including where and who may share them, and increased "extremism" punishments, introduced with alleged "anti-terrorism" changes. The legislation on so-called "missionary activity", further restricts the public expression of freedom of religion and belief, including in the media and online. The amendment - which had been rapidly introduced - caused widespread protests. The signing was made public in Moscow July 7th. It was

published on the presidential website that day and came into force on July 20th.

The amendments also bar even informal sharing of beliefs, for example responding to questions or comments, by individuals acting on their own behalf. It also restricts the beliefs that can be shared, specifies a restricted list of places where beliefs may be shared, and explicitly bans any beliefs from being shared in residential buildings, or on another association's property without permission. An allegedly "anti-terrorist" part of the amendments bars the conversion of residential property to religious use.

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." Philippians 3:8

**Don't be alarmed! Anxiety begone!
Today I must face
A court of ungodly men
To defend the truth!
To defend those persecuted for the truth,
Those who have found life's meaning in Christ,
My own brothers and sisters
Through the blood poured out on the Cross!
—Poem written from Lefortovo Prison, Moscow, 1966**

The preceding poem was written by a Baptist Pastor named Georgi Vins. I had the privilege of meeting Georgi Vins several times in the 1980s and listening to stories of Russian persecution. The following is a brief account of the persecution he endured. He became involved in Baptist churches in Kiev. As Nikita Khrushchev's anti-religious persecutions began in 1959, the state imposed new regulations on the Baptist church that drastically curtailed the small measure of independence they had enjoyed. As the Baptist movement split acrimoniously, Vins became one of the leading figures in the campaign to resist state pressure. He publicly

opposed the pastor of his own congregation in Kiev, who had accepted the new measures. Vins formed his own breakaway congregation, becoming its pastor despite a lack of formal theological qualifications. The group met in a forest outside Kiev.

When the Council of Churches was formally set up as an underground body in 1965, Vins became its General Secretary. Hundreds of the movement's followers were already in prison. In a dramatic protest, Baptists converged from all over the Soviet Union for a mass demonstration outside the Central Committee building in Moscow. Several days later, Vins went to the Central Committee with other leaders to ask about the fate of those who had been detained at the unprecedented demonstration. As a result, they were themselves arrested. Vins and the Chairman of the Council of Churches, Gennady Kryuchkov, went on trial in November 1966 and he was sentenced to three years imprisonment. His wife Nadezhda was left to look after their four children.

After release, Vins resumed his work as pastor and organizer of the movement, but soon went into hiding to avoid arrest. He was discovered and seized in March 1974. Prodded by the human rights campaigner Andrei Sakharov, the World Council of Churches joined the international protests at Vins' arrest. Vins was tried in Kiev in January 1975 and sentenced to five years in labor camp to be followed by five years internal exile, becoming the Soviet Union's most famous religious prisoner.

International pressure led to his dramatic expulsion from his homeland. On April 26, 1979 Vins was awakened up in prison and told to change into his own clothes. Unaware of his imminent change of circumstances, he was flown to Moscow, where he spent the night in a center for vagrants. The following day he was issued with new clothes and informed that because of his anti-Soviet activity the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet had stripped him of his Soviet

citizenship. He was being expelled. Vins protested in vain that his activity was not anti-Soviet, but had to bow to the inevitable. He was told to write down the names of his close relatives so that they could leave the country with him. Realizing that he would be unlikely to see them again otherwise, he listed his wife, children, mother and niece.

Vins was driven to Moscow's Lefortovo prison and then all five expellees were taken to Moscow airport. Two American embassy officials on the plane explained that their release followed an agreement between the White House and the Soviet embassy in Washington, DC. It was not until the plane landed in New York City that they learned they were being exchanged for two convicted spies. The handover took place in an isolated hangar at Kennedy airport. The five walked off the plane at one end while the spies walked on at the other.

Joined in the United States six weeks later by the rest of his family, Vins made the town of Elkhart, Indiana his home and learned English.

"Six and eighty years have I served him, and he has done me nothing except good. How then can I curse my Lord and Savior?" Polycarp

My reason for telling his story is to highlight what religious persecution really is. With the question, *"In today's society is your faith strong enough to compel you to face the threat of persecution for not denouncing your identification with Christ?"*

John Robert Walmsley Stott, was an English Anglican priest and theologian, who pointed out that *"persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems."* We see this in Matthew 5:10-12, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* ¹¹ *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."* ¹² *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,*

for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Tom Tarrants, former President of the C.S. Lewis Institute, writes, *"That clash is what we are seeing now, and it is ultimately between those who believe, trust, and love the God of the Bible and those who do not. The changes occurring today represent a sea-change from the past; the wind is no longer on our back but in our face. This is creating a cultural climate in the West in which persecution of Jesus's followers, simply for their allegiance to Him, is no longer unthinkable, whether in family, community, or workplace. This is confusing to some and frightening to others."*

Jonathan Edwards, American revivalist preacher, philosopher, and Congregationalist Protestant theologian, wrote in his book, *Charity and Its Fruits*. "One of the greatest paradoxes in Christian history is that the church is most pure in times of cultural hostility. When things are easy and good, that is when the church most often goes astray. When Christianity seems identical with the culture and even when the church seems to be enjoying its greatest earthly success, then it is weakest. Conversely, when the church encounters hardship, persecution, and suffering... then it is closest to its crucified Lord, then there are fewer hypocrites and nominal believers among its members, and then the faith of Christians burns most intensely."

"Every Christian who is attempting to live righteously is called to this battlefield for his entire life. We are in a spiritual battle. But in grace and mercy, God gives the faithful believer an entire suit of armor for the fight." (Ephesians 6:13)

- Dr. Joseph Stowell III, former President of Moody Bible Institute and current President of Cornerstone University

We are living in an age of privilege where little or no effort is expected of us to achieve our desired outcomes. Referring back to a portion of Jonathan Edwards quote, "When things are easy and good,

that is when the church most often goes astray. When Christianity seems identical with the culture and even when the church seems to be enjoying its greatest earthly success, then it is weakest." Will you be able to take a stand for Christ? Would you be willing, like the underground church in Russia, to gather to worship in fellowship with other believers in the woods in below zero temperatures standing to hear the Word of God preached for several hours or will you stay at home in front of the fireplace with your curtains drawn?





PRAYER LIST

- ✓ Continuing Prayers for loss: All the families that have lost loved ones this past year. Remember those who continue to lose loved ones due to COVID 19.
- ✓ Continuing Prayers for physical needs: Rita McManus, Maria Hatfield, Erwin and Elizabeth Lickman, Gloria-Lynn Fernandez, Betty Matson, Ronaldo Claveria
- ✓ Continuing Prayers for our Ministry Needs: The Pastoral Search Committee, Brandon Myers, Pulpit Supply, Our Deacons, Financial support
- ✓ Continuing Prayers for our Sister Ministries: BIEM Ministries, Orchard Church, Pastors Davis, Billow, Eddy, Vitel
- ✓ Continuing Prayers for Spiritual Needs: Leonard Hatfield, Carol Pelfrey's family, Daniel Ruehlman, George Bizadellis
- ✓ Continuing Prayers for: The spread of the Gospel, Our Government, Our Nation, Our Community, Our Neighbors, Our Families, Pray for our members that have lost employment and for those who still have jobs and need to interact with others on a daily basis. Pray for those still working that God will protect. Lift up all our health professionals and their families who are on the front line of this pandemic especially Mylin and Errol Lardizabal and Liza Mitchell. Erwin Lickmann pray for wisdom regarding future living arrangements for Elizabeth and himself.
- Alex Figueroa, (Nephew of Al Nuzikowski) pray for full recovery as he receives treatments for his eye.
- ✓ Remember Carol Riemer and her family
- ✓ Norma Weinthaler and family. As they said goodbye to husband, father and grandfather. Herb is now in the presence of the Lord.
- ✓ The Perinbaraj's as they finish up their studies and prepare for the mission field of India.

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