

ARBC VISION 2023 – 40 DAYS OF PRAYER**Week 5**

Dear Ashley River Family,

Welcome to Week 5 of our 40 Days of Prayer! May we continue to draw closer to our Father and His Son and may we let the Spirit guide us as we seek His will for Ashley River!

This week's portion of the Lord's Prayer focuses on spiritual warfare: *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.* It is often difficult for humans, even Christians, to grasp the spiritual realm. When Jesus came to earth, demonic activity clearly increased, as if the Holy One of God's coming from heaven stirred up the evil hornet's nest known as Satan's domain here on earth. Jesus' incorporation of this element in the Lord's Prayer validates the fact that we need the full armor of God to stand against the spiritual forces of evil in this world.

DAY 29 – MAY 24 – KEEP OUR EYES ON JESUS (2 KINGS 6:15-23; HEBREWS 12:1-4)

One of my favorite hymns is "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus." It truly establishes our true north as we awaken to each day. 2 Ki. 6 gives us great insight to the spiritual realm; Elisha, the prophet of God, responded to his servant's real fear and worry about enemy armies encircling their camp by saying: "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then, when God opened the servant's eyes, he too saw the "hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." When we are faced with personal troubles or attacks from the evil one, when the devil tries to discourage us, we can stand strong. Christ will lead us on into victory. All we have to do is "...fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." (Heb. 12:2)

Spend time with God in prayer and imagine seeing Jesus face-to-face. Ask Him anything and listen intently to what He might be saying to you this day. Pray also that our church will never take our gaze away from Jesus!

DAY 30 – MAY 25 – DELIVER US FROM EVIL (PSALM 23; PROVERBS 20:22)

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4, KJV)

In times of danger, difficulty, and even death, we should fear no evil. Why? "For thou art with me" in every situation of life. The "rod" (a short club) is a weapon of defense or discipline, symbolizing God's strength, power, and authority. The "staff" (a long, slender stick with a hook on one end) is used to draw a sheep close to the shepherd, to guide it in the right way, or to deliver it from trouble.

God's rod and staff reassure us of God's love and guidance in our lives. We often require deliverance from the onslaught of Satan's influences in our culture, which is counter to the holiness of God. Satan is a masterful strategist who seeks our downfall by his various schemes. Some schemes of Satan are failures, disappointments, hurts, depression, worry, fear, grief, anger, conflicts, and broken relationships – all designed to defeat God's people. Because of the presence and nearness of God, we can walk in victory above all our circumstances. Our deliverance from evil is assured by our intimate relationship with Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Spend time with God in prayer and ask Him to lead you, to guide and deliver you (and our church) from the evil influences of our world.

DAY 31 – MAY 26 – PROTECT US FROM HARM (PSALM 125; PROVERBS 3:5-6)

“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people both now and forevermore.” (Psalm 125:1-2) When we are in times of difficulty and stress, it can often seem like God is distant. At times, we look for answers or rescue and there seems to be none. This is a reminder that regardless of the trouble we face, God is surrounding us with protection and provision both now and forever.

When we “Trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding,” we are effectively placing our lives in His hands. And such faith is a tangible acknowledgement that He loves you more than you could even love yourself, that He cares for you more than you even care for yourself, and that He knows what is best for you. This security and safety brings great peace and freedom to the children of God.

Spend time with God in prayer and ask Him to protect you in all aspects of your life – spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional.

DAY 32 – MAY 27 – ARM US FOR THE DAILY BATTLES (EPHESIANS 6:10-20)

You must remember that each day God permits you to live on this planet, you are engaged in spiritual warfare. This is not simply a descriptive statement (acknowledging a truth). For the Christian, this is a prescriptive statement (a truth you must act on).

When Paul talks about putting on the armor of God, he makes it clear that it is a necessary first step for every Christian. It is the armor of God that gives you the strength to stand firm (v.11), fight against the mighty powers of darkness who rule this world (v. 12), and to be fully prepared for what He is calling you to (v. 15).

Are you feeling spiritually exhausted? Defeated? Overwhelmed? Unprepared? Are you ready to retreat? Circle the wagons? Wave the white flag of surrender? Is the enemy too great and your own strength too small?

Your Father promises you His strength and victory when you lay down your own armor and weapons and take up His. Don't be fooled into thinking that acknowledging this truth is the same as acting on it. Paul's final encouragement in this passage is to "pray at all times and on every occasion" (v. 18).

Make it a point today to confess your dependence on Him. Don't stop praying until you feel His peace. Meditate on Scripture. Consider His truth and righteousness. May His armor bring you victory today.

DAY 33 – MAY 28 – HELP US TO RESIST TEMPTATIONS (MATTHEW 4:1-11; 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13; JAMES 1:12-15)

You may be familiar with the passage on Jesus and His temptations but have possibly missed a very key aspect: Jesus wasn't there by accident, but rather the Holy Spirit led Him into the desert for the expressed purpose of being tempted by Satan. This may seem at odds with the Lord's Prayer, "...lead us not into temptation ..." (Matt. 6:13). However, it gives insight into God's relationship with us. God could shield us from all temptation, but He desires for us to trust Him to deliver us, to equip us to face our enemy head-on. The Lord has given us His authority, His power, and His purpose. All it takes to access those tools and weapons is our faith in Christ.

When Jesus was in the desert, He used Scripture to combat the lies of the devil. He also stood firm in His authority, in His Sonship, and in His purpose. Using that example, it is clear that our greatest weapon against the enemy is intimacy with the Father. The closer we draw to the heart of the Father, knowing His Word, then when temptation comes, we know that it is not from our Father but from our own sinful state in this fallen world, but we have hope knowing that our Heavenly Father also provides us a "way of escape." (1 Cor. 10:13)

Spend time with God in prayer and ask Him to reveal to you your weaknesses and thereby targets for temptation. Then commit to abiding in Him so that you will be alert to His means of escape.

DAY 34 – MAY 29 – LIBERATE US FROM THE EVIL ONE (2 CHRONICLES 20:1-23; JOHN 8:31-36)

Liberation is the act of setting someone free. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free! He made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. Likewise, many on the battlefield have given their lives for our freedom. Lt. Murphy is credited with risking his own life to save the lives of his men when he knowingly exposed himself to enemy fire to gain a better position to transmit a call to get help. In his memory, "Murph" is a workout completed by Cross-Fitters and Navy Seals on Memorial Day every year. In the midst of running one mile, completing 100 pull-ups, 200 push-ups, 300 squats, and finishing with another mile, it is tempting to give into the pain and give up, but many persevere to honor the fallen who have died for our freedom.

Similarly, in life, we find ourselves tempted to give up or give into the enemy's schemes, but we must keep fighting to honor Christ's sacrifice and remember that He gives us victory over sin in our lives.

He died so that we may be free from Satan's grip. Not only that, the weapons we fight with have divine power to demolish the strong grip of the enemy. We fight with worship, the Word, and with prayer. In 2 Chronicles 20, worshipers led the march into battle. In response, the Lord sent an ambush against their enemies! The Israelites kept their eyes on the Lord and followed orders to stand firm and watch the deliverance God would bring. May Ashley River do the same!

Spend time with God in prayer, asking Him to remind you of the battles He has fought for you and for our church over the years; then, submit to Him by remaining steadfast in your worship, study, and witness.

DAY 35 – MAY 30 – LEAD US INTO VICTORY (DANIEL 7:26-27; JOSHUA 1:1-9)

Each week, Christian churches gather together and proclaim songs of God's victory such as, "The Battle Belongs to the Lord!" These songs are both a declaration and a reminder that no enemy can defeat God and His people. This refreshes our faith and challenges us not to get short-sighted when troubles find us, knowing that our sovereign King has already won.

In Daniel 7, Daniel's vision reveals coming kings and kingdoms who subdue the earth. A final king rises up, oppressing God's people. But afterward, Daniel sees that "all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him" (Dan.7:27). God's eternal victory is guaranteed.

As we go through trials in life, we must remember the four "P's":

1. Presence – God is with us in the midst of trials. He will never leave us nor forsake us.
2. Prayer – Petition for God's mighty hand to deliver you while accepting and acknowledging your desire to see His will accomplished regardless of personal pain. Pray for peace regardless of the outcome.
3. Perspective – Reframe your thoughts from temporary sufferings to the eternal victory promised by God.
4. Perseverance – We run with perseverance the race marked out for us, which is an arduous journey guaranteed to contain troubles. We must not give up! God will lead us to victory!

Spend time with God in prayer, reflecting on the victory that is already yours in Christ. Then, ask God to bring to your mind all His promises as you face daily trials and temptations.