



March 2018

Dear CWR/PTM Friend and Partner,

...fixing our eyes on Jesus...For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame....
(Hebrews 12:2, my emphasis).

When we *fix our eyes on Jesus and focus on his cross*, as we read in Hebrews 12, we find that he endured the cross and scorned its shame because of the surpassing, incomparable joy of his mission. When we *fix our eyes on Jesus and focus on his cross*, it is revealed as an eternal symbol of beauty, illustrating how far God goes to love you and me.

The cross proclaims the unfathomable love of God for the entire world—a staggering love wherein God, in the person of Jesus, descended into the swill and corruption of our world, full well knowing that the religious response to him would be so filled with hatred that he would be crucified—but he came anyway.

He endured the cross for the joy set before him and he scorned its shame.

The greater the joy, the greater is the pain that precedes it. —Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.)

Some believe that joy is the opposite of sorrow and heartache, but sorrow and heartache actually can be a breeding ground of joy, for without suffering and sacrifice the fullness of joy is not realized.

The joy set before Jesus is described in Hebrews 2:9 as it says Jesus was “crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death.” *The joy set before Jesus* is further defined in Hebrews 2:10 when it speaks of Jesus bringing many sons to glory, so in his humanity he became “perfect through what he suffered....”

In Christ, God chose to be tortured and crucified. He didn’t flex his spiritual muscles and miraculously accomplish what needed to be done the way you and I would have done it. He himself became foolishness and humiliated himself. In turn, in you and me, he uses foolish and weak and shameful things to accomplish his plan. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus endured the cross and scorned its shame.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. (1 Corinthians 1:27).

We are foolish and weak and shameful—that’s an apt description of what it means to be human. And we humans are not that lovable, are we? Have you ever considered the rather questionable resumes of those biblical characters upon whom God granted his favor?

One of my favorite authors, Frederick Buechner, once described some of the motley crew described in the Bible:

Who could have predicted that God would choose not Esau, the honest and reliable, but Jacob, the trickster and

heel; that he would put the finger on Noah, who hit the bottle; or on Moses, who was trying to beat the rap in Midian for braining a man in Egypt and said if it weren't for the honor of the thing he'd just as soon let Aaron go back and face the music; or on the prophets, who were a ragged lot, mad as hatters most of them....

Of all the peoples he could have chosen to be his holy people, he chose the Jews, who as somebody has said are just like everybody else only more so—more religious than anybody when they were religious, and when they were secular, being secular as if they'd invented it.

And the comedy of the covenant—God saying “I will be your God and you shall be my people” (Exodus 6:7)—to a people who before the words had stopped ringing in their ears were dancing around the golden calf...and carrying on with every agricultural deity and fertility god that came down the pike.

Adam and Eve went out and did the very thing God told them not to do. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, outrageously broke virtually every proverb he had written. The two disciples whom Jesus used after his resurrection most effectively to proclaim the gospel (Peter and John) were the two he most often rebuked before his crucifixion.

Paul, who wrote more books than any other biblical author, was *avored by God* after he had engaged in blood-letting expeditions where he hunted, tortured and exterminated Christ-followers.

The cross means that God is more than willing to hang out with the likes of you and me. The cross tells us who God is, and how far he is willing to go in his love for you and me.

*When the crucified God is called the image of the invisible God [Colossians 1:15] the meaning is that this is God, and God is like this. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in his humanity. The nucleus of everything Christian theology says about God is to be found in this Christ event.—Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God**

The cross is the eternal sign of God's love—not just for the pious and the churchgoing and those whose work is honored with a gold star in Sunday school—but for everyone.

Do you remember the story of Mary? An angel appeared to Mary just as she was preparing for marriage—she was pledged to be married to Joseph, and true to form (life is what happens when you are planning something altogether different) the angel informed her that she was *highly favored* (Luke 1:28) and that the Lord was with her.

Mary would no doubt have preferred to be left alone and get on with her life. She was confused and bewildered by what the angel had said—*greatly troubled at his words* (Luke 1:28)—so the angel repeated the assurance *you have found favor with God* (Luke 1:30).

Finding favor with God is of course a good thing—and initially Mary would have thought it was, because there were Old Testament passages that spoke of *finding favor* in God's sight. When we accept God's invitation, surrendering our desires and priorities to him—when we embrace God's grace—we are, to use a biblical term, *avored*. *Mary found favor with God and she wound up pregnant and unmarried.* We are *avored by God* with the high honor of carrying our cross and following Jesus.

Being *highly favored by God* can mean being chosen to look foolish and weak and even silly to the world at large, as God uses you and me as his hands and feet in the world to do what he deems to be best and appropriate. **God's favor is his grace, granting us the high honor and wonderful privilege of suffering with and for Jesus.**

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but to suffer for him...
(Philippians 1:29).

God's grace, proclaimed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, turns the world upside down. **The symbol of success in the kingdom of heaven is a wooden, rugged cross, not a golden throne.**

We may be successful as measured by our culture—we may be affluent, well-educated and a home owner. We may be in good health and admired by others. But that's not God's favor.

Finding favor with God is a total rejection of the repackaging of the gospel within much of American Christendom. The health-and-wealth gospel defines spiritual success as excess—but the true gospel is all about a poor, humble carpenter who rode into town on a donkey knowing full well that he would be crucified.

He didn't come on a white horse with his sword flashing—he didn't strap on his six guns to clean out Jerusalem and send the bad guys packing. *The favor of God* was his voluntary and full love, willingly accepting and absorbing all human hatred on his cross, scorning its shame, enduring the cross for the joy set before him.

God's favor is given and found and experienced by picking up our cross and following Jesus.

The cross is the exhibition of the nature of God, the gateway whereby any individual of the human race can enter into union with God. When we get to the cross, we do not go through it; we abide in the life to which the cross is the gateway.—Oswald Chambers

By his grace, privileged to serve him with you,



Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

P.S. Here are a few of the many letters we receive each month from people who are being blessed by the ministry of CWR/PTM—which you help to provide!

I want to thank everyone involved with CWR/PTM for all the good gifts you provide. You have become a stabilizing source in our lives.—Texas

I thank God for CWR/PTM and I count it a privilege to be able to support you.—Virginia

God doesn't give me everything I want, but He does supply my every need. My spiritual needs supercede my physical needs, and CWR/PTM contributes immensely to that fulfillment.—Illinois

CWR/PTM Prayer List—March 2018

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

Please pray for a dear friend as she recently had a stroke at a young age.—Tennessee

Please pray for my husband—he was recently in an accident and may lose his driver's license.—North Carolina

Please pray for my daughter and son-in-law to find good jobs close to me.—Mississippi

I pray God will deliver more people from the swamps of religion. Thanks for all your efforts in this regard.—Alabama

Our son has drug and alcohol problems—please keep him in your prayers.—Indiana

Please remember my family who have many health problems.—Kentucky

Please pray for my brother's upcoming colon procedure and the healing of two close friends with cancer.—Louisiana

I request prayers for the painful numbness and tingling in my hands and fingers.—Minnesota

My daughter needs colon surgery (pre-cancerous). She has already had one surgery and it was very painful.—Ohio

I pray for all the sick—God knows who we are because we have a God who is full of grace.—Texas

My knees and legs give out on me walking a short distance. Pray that I'll have strength like I used to.—Mississippi

Please pray for me as I face a lonely life since my eyes are failing and my husband died.—Saskatchewan, Canada

Please keep my grandson in your prayers. He is in the hospital undergoing chemotherapy.—Tennessee

Please pray for my 86-year-old sister. She is in a nursing home, unable to walk.—Georgia

Please pray for my granddaughter who has many health problems due to drug abuse.—Ohio

Please pray for my sister's son, 56 years old, who has cancer throughout his body.—Kentucky

Pray that humanity can achieve inner peace which only comes from Christ Jesus.—Maryland

Pray for my son who has a mental disorder and is seeking vocational rehabilitation.—Kentucky

Pray for those who are suffering from actions of terrorists. So many innocent victims including children.—Colorado

Pray for my husband—he is anemic, weak and also has severe back pain.—Alabama

Please pray for my young daughter who has shortness of breath and discomfort from lack of oxygen.—New York

I will be soon having heart surgery. Your prayers are much appreciated.—Nevada

My husband is the last stages of pancreatic cancer. Please pray for his comfort and peace.—Ohio

Please pray for my son, that God will help him get through his many health issues.—Indiana

Pray for my granddaughter as she is undergoing tests to see why she has suddenly become sick.—Arizona

I've had Parkinson's disease for years, which causes me to fall. Please pray that I don't get seriously hurt.—Virginia

Dear God: We bring you many requests and needs. You know each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for your love and grace, we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—Amen.