



March 2019

Dear CWR/PTM Friends and Partners,

According to an old story, years ago there was a severe drought in the farm country of Texas. The people were in despair, so they asked the pastor of their little church to pray for rain. The pastor decided to have a town-wide meeting and invite everyone—even people who were not members of his church—to come and pray for rain.

On the day of the prayer service the little church building was packed to the rafters with desperate people. The pastor climbed into the pulpit and looked out on the assembly.

He asked, “Why are we all here today?”

A woman cried out, “We’ve come to pray for rain.” Another person yelled, “Amen!”

The pastor looked back at them and said, “Well, it ain’t going to work.”

“What? Why? What do you mean?!?” they said in unison.

The pastor responded, “You don’t have faith.”

No response for a few seconds, and then the crowd grew defensive. Several people shouted back at the pastor, “How do you know we don’t have faith?”

He said, “Not one of you brought an umbrella with you today.”

Let’s talk a little bit about faith in the face of doubt and misery—courage and conviction in spite of adversity and hardship—hope even though there is no evidence of anything to hope for. Let’s talk a bit about carrying an umbrella even though there are no signs of rain. Let’s talk about *faith against all odds*.

Just before Jesus poured out himself for you and me, just before he opened his arms in embrace, returning good for evil, responding on his cross with love and goodness to the hatred and violence of humanity, he had doubts:

*Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but your will be done” (Luke 22:39-42).*

Following Jesus is not a walk in the park—the Jesus Way is not a day at the beach. Jesus never said it would be. **When disease and depression circle around you like spiritual vultures, when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, doubt and despair you need not fear, for the Lord is with you.** The Lord does not abandon you because you have no energy or strength and all hope seems to be lost.

*Let’s talk a little bit about always keeping your umbrella handy even though the weather is hot and dry and your spiritual life seems parched and about ready to dry up and blow away. **Faith against all odds.***

Doubt is often thought of as the place where the fickle and faithless live, but doubt can be and often is an important ingredient within our faith—doubt is very much a part of courage and conviction. We see folks all over the world who have no doubts whatsoever—they are so filled with *religious certainty and conviction* they are ready to kill anyone who disagrees with them. They “know” their beliefs are right and good and that their way is the only divinely directed way of life. Such individuals would see doubt as an enemy of faith, or perhaps even as the opposite of faith. Ironically, such individuals actually need doubt in their lives—helping them to question dogmatic, entrenched convictions that are erroneous, dangerous and toxic. Doubt is an essential part of maturing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Courage and conviction go far beyond strong will and resolution. The word “courage” is derived from the French “coeur” meaning heart and core. *Coeur* is all about being full hearted...*courage* is all about *conviction* in the face of danger, of the unknown and of the overwhelming.

*Conviction and doubt coexist in dynamic tension*—one might be convicted but still have doubts. It’s not contradictory to say that one might be filled with belief even while harboring doubts —conviction and courage in the face of fear and doubt is *eyes-wide-open faith*.

We often speak of blind faith, which characterizes belief that flies in the face of all evidence. We often see blind, unthinking, unreasonable faith in action in the lives of fanatics and extremists. On the other hand, Christ-centered conviction and courage is exemplified by those who believe yet at the same time admit their doubts and are always open to new perspectives and insight.

People who have blind faith and are absolutely convicted in an unreasonable way can become a menace and danger to others because their faith is blind and without healthy, sensible, Christ-centered beliefs. Dogmatism in the face of all evidence can easily, and often does, morph into fanaticism and extremism.

*Conviction* is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional word. Conviction can mean to declare someone guilty of a crime, or to convict oneself about one’s culpability. It shares the same root as the word “convince”—convictions are those things about which we are absolutely assured.

*Faith* sees what hope promises. The collaboration between hope and faith gives us the gift of spiritual vision allowing us to “see” beyond the pain and drudgery of the present into the glorious future. Whenever disappointment drags us down, and whenever failure drains us, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27) will fill you and me with hope.

*Christ-centered hope is an injection against the wounds of the here-and-now—it’s like a flu shot.* A flu shot doesn’t mean we won’t get the flu, but Christ in us injects us with hope enabling us to see beyond the misery and aches and pains when flu does get us down.

Picking up our cross and following Jesus is not for the faint hearted. We must make a commitment and together with Christ-centered courage and conviction, Christ in us imbues us with hope and faith for the journey, even when it takes us through dark valleys of death and despair.

Doubt and trials can lead us to deeper faith, greater spiritual maturity and more Christ-like convictions. Doubt borne of adversity and hardship need not be our enemy. Doubt can be, though painful, the path to what those great lyrics describe, a “closer walk with Thee.”

Whatever difficulty might be present in your life right now—whatever challenge you may be facing, Jesus Christ is with you and in you, and he is the hope of glory. He will fill you and nourish

you and strengthen you with faith, hope, courage and Christ-centered convictions.

Remember that having *faith and hope involves trust*. Faith and hope have more to do with the heart than with the head. Faith and hope, given to us by the grace of God and in and through Christ Jesus our Lord, is all about radical trust in God.

**Having faith and hope means carrying your umbrella of hope** and faith even though the weather forecast calls for nothing but scorching heat and continuing drought. *Faith and hope is more about trusting in God than it is about being right about doctrinal statements or dogmas*. When its source is Jesus Christ our Lord, hope is alive, dynamic and it cannot be quenched.

Faith and hope apart from the grace and love of God is meaningless, as Paul tells us “if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2).

With thanksgiving for each and every one of you, and for the wonderful work that God is doing in your lives, as he produces his workmanship—he is crafting his handiwork in your life. His grace and love flows in and through you increasingly, as you mature in him, so that your faith and hope and courage and convictions all flow from the fountainhead of his love and grace.

Thanks be to God...thank you for being a part of the ongoing work of Plain Truth Ministries as we point people around this world to Jesus Christ, the hope of glory.

**Pray for rain and carry your umbrella of faith and hope! FAITH AGAINST ALL ODDS!**

Your friend and brother in Christ,



Greg Albrecht

President, Plain Truth Ministries

**PS.** We share this note of thanks from one of our friends in Wisconsin who appreciates the service provided by this collective ministry which *you help to provide through your continued prayers and donations*. **THANK YOU!**

“Thank you for keeping me grounded! It would be easy to get caught up in all the religious activity within the modern church—evangelism, membership drives, service (or obligation). You remind me that everyone belongs to God and that we should walk with Jesus in *grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone*.”

## CWR/PTM Prayer List—March 2019

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 my sister as her heart rate keeps dropping and doctors are trying to find out what is going on. Also please pray for me as I have inflammation just about all the time in my legs and it's hard for me to walk.—Mississippi*

*My grandson passed away from cancer. Thank you for all your prayers.—Tennessee*

*I am 85 years old and Jesus helps me go from one day to the next. Pray for me as I pray for you.—Saskatchewan, Canada*

*Please pray for my wife who has diabetes and also suffers from depression.—California*

*Please pray for our great-grandson who has no small intestine and his liver is going bad. He's only 9 years old.—Oregon*

*We are on mostly a fixed income and this winter has been hard on my husband who works outdoors.—North Carolina*

*Please pray for my daughter (age 49). She is suffering with lupus and other health problems.—Texas*

*My sister, 83 years old, passed away last month. Thank you for all the good news that comforts me at this time.—Virginia*

*My son, age 65, has bad eyesight and will soon no longer be allowed to drive. Prayers are much appreciated.—Illinois*

*Please pray that God will heal my symptoms that I received 30 years ago from a very bad accident.—Florida*

*Please pray for a friend who has Parkinson's disease and another friend who is in treatment for cancer.—Pennsylvania*

*Please pray for my sister who has a rare form of cancer in her blood. It is progressive with no medical treatment.—Oregon*

*Please continue praying for my nephew who is having problems coping with life after a head injury.—Mississippi*

*I request prayers for my husband who has internal bleeding at times.—New York*

*My wife has recently lost a lot of weight and is very weak. Pray that doctors can diagnose and treat her.—Arizona*

*I had cataract surgery a few years ago. My sight has been good, but now I have some trouble with my left eye.—Kentucky*

*Please pray for the healing of a dear friend of mine who is going through a serious illness.—Idaho*

*Please pray for me. My body's riddled with pain from head to toe. May God help me use the gifts he has given me.—Florida*

*Please pray for my sister and me—we both suffer with liver disease. And pray for my son to receive a full-time position at the college where he works.—North Carolina*

*Please pray for God's guidance concerning my career change. Thanks for all your prayers.—South Carolina*

*Please pray for my friend who has congestive heart failure and another who has neck spasms.—New York*

*Please pray for healing of my friend's prostate cancer and other health issues.—Mississippi*

*Please continue to pray for my rapidly failing eyesight and hearing. I am trying to get help through the V.A.—Nevada*

*I will be having knee surgery soon and then go into therapy. Please keep me in your prayers.—Pennsylvania*

*Please pray for my dear friend since childhood who has been told by her doctors that she has cancer.—North Carolina*

Our Father in Heaven: We thank you for your grace, mercy and love. You love each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our suffering servant who heals us, in whose name we pray—Amen.