



March 2023

Dear CWR/PTM Friend and Partner,

Finally, after a long winter, spring is on the horizon. As warmer days arrive and nature comes alive, resurrected as it were, from the cold darkness of winter, we Christ-followers focus on the Cross of Christ and his Resurrection. At the same time many also look forward to the promise of another season of baseball! *Baseball, you say?*

What does the crack of the bat and a fastball popping in the catcher's mitt have to do with our faith in Christ? What in the world does baseball, hot dogs, popcorn and singing "take me out to the ballgame" have to do with the Cross of Christ and his Resurrection?

Did you know that baseball is spiritual? Some of its fans seem to think so! The goal in baseball is to come to bat so that you can touch all the bases and then go home. One might say that's why we are born... **we are born to go home**. Getting home... that's what it's all about. In baseball it's all about crossing home plate. After his Cross and Resurrection Jesus went home to the Father's house, "*preparing a place*" (John 14:2-3) for you and me.

For many people, baseball is as close to faith as they may ever get. Regarded as one of the greatest 20th century American writers, in his 1925 novel "The Great Gatsby" F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) made reference to the infamous cheating scandal of the "Black Sox" in 1919, calling baseball "the faith of fifty million people" (a little less than 50% of the US population at the time). In one of the opening lines of the 1988 movie "Bull Durham" actress Susan Sarandon remarks, "I believe in the Church of baseball."

I admit that I have a lifelong love and attachment to the game of baseball—I "follow" baseball, but of course not in the ultimate sense that I follow Jesus. ***Baseball is, when all is said and done, just a game... Jesus on the other hand is our life, our all in all, the totality of life both now and forever.***

What is our life as Christ-followers all about? Jesus told us to love one another, and that the greatest love was laying down one's life for friends, which of course is precisely what Jesus did on his Cross. Loving one another is all about self-sacrifice and dying to oneself. Giving to others is what faith in Christ is all about. We, by God's grace, are enabled and empowered to serve others in Jesus' name. When we serve others in Jesus' name, we are laying down our lives for them—we are sacrificing for them.

In baseball, the batter can execute a premeditated action called a "sacrifice." A runner is on one of the bases, attempting to advance around the bases and eventually come home. The batter ***lays down a sacrifice bunt***, meaning that the batter will be thrown out at first base in order for the runner to advance to the next base.

Baseball players, and Christ-followers who sacrifice, lay themselves down and give themselves up so that their teammates (and the team) might benefit. If one of their teammates is on third base, only 90 feet away from coming home and scoring, a batter can attempt a ***sacrifice fly***. A ***sacrifice fly*** describes a long fly ball hit by the batter which will easily be caught by a fielder on the other team,

erasing the batter from this endeavor to get on base themselves, but enabling the runner on third to “tag up” and run home. Batters who hit a *sacrifice fly* lay down their own life and are called “out” so that their teammate (and the team) might benefit.

Loving one another is all about making sacrifices. Only a few days before his death on the Cross, Jesus spoke about his glorification:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds (John 12:23-24). He further explained:

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself (John 12:32).

God came to us, in the person of Jesus, incarnating himself in a human body, becoming part of our time and space. What Jesus did in time and space, in his incarnation as the God-man, perfectly reflects the eternal reality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The self-sacrificing love of God is his eternal reality! **The self-giving, outpouring of the love of God is the glory of God!!**

Somewhat like a modern communications tower, *the Cross of Christ lifts up the love of God* and broadcasts it to the world. God’s love is lifted up on high on the Cross of Christ, shining in its unrefined, unadulterated purity. Of all things, Jesus came here to serve us, rather than for us to serve him! He came to give himself self-sacrificially for you and me—*there is no greater love!*

- God on the Cross is bigger, more majestic, more glorious and more stupendous than any illustration or definition of God we humans could ever imagine. God on the Cross is love so intense, amazing and glorious that it is beyond the capability of the human mind to capture and comprehend.

- God is love. The Cross of Christ is the single greatest illustration of God’s love. The Cross of Christ is glorious!

- God’s love is fully defined by and demonstrated by the Cross of Christ. The Cross of Christ defines love as voluntary self-surrender for the sake of a loved one, the object and beneficiary of that outpouring of self-sacrificial love.

- The Cross of Christ reveals the fundamental power and dynamic of God’s essence—the very heart and core of God is love.

And here we find a HUGE DISCONNECT with so much of Christendom today. In many, if not most cases and places within Christendom, the Cross of Christ is explained as the penalty God the Father insisted we owed him, and because God the Son loved us he volunteered to step into the path of the Father’s wrath and be our substitute. *It’s a horribly warped and twisted teaching, perverting the very essence and nature of God’s self-sacrificial love.*

The Cross of Christ is not God the Father insisting on payback from Jesus, instead of us... **payback and retribution and revenge is human nature, not divine nature!** How in the world has such a corrupted teaching gained such a huge foothold, subverting the beauty and wonder of God’s love?!?

The Cross of Christ stands forever enshrined as eternal proof that God is not filled with wrath and anger. Jesus absorbed wrath and anger alright—but it was human wrath and anger, not divine! Jesus absorbed all human hatred and evil, without in-kind retaliation. He made no vows of

vengeance—he didn't threaten to send his executioners to hell—rather he forgave them as they killed him.

The Cross of Christ is two things:

1) The most profoundly inspiring and beautiful illustration of the reality of God's love. **The Cross of Christ was the absolute best God did for us.**

2) The most atrocious abomination ever—the ignominious, outrageous human attempt to kill God! **The Cross was the worst that humanity could do to God.**

Following Jesus means living the Way of the Cross—the Jesus Way. It is the way of service and self-sacrifice in Jesus' name. By Jesus' invitation we pick up our own cross and follow him on and in HIS WAY of life—by the invitation of Jesus we self-sacrificially and voluntarily lay down our self-absorbed lives for a higher cause, the cause of living in and with Jesus.

Following Jesus means to follow him in suffering (1 Peter 2:19-25). We participate in pain, for that is part of what it means to be human. We participate in suffering, for that is what it means to follow Christ. We discover in suffering for and with Jesus the love and grace of God who wipes away all tears from our eyes (Revelation 21:1-4).

Anne Lamott is one of my favorite contemporary authors—she speaks of grace in baseball and in life. “Grace bats last” she says.

In baseball the cleanup batter is fourth in the batting order, hopefully coming to bat with the three preceding batters on first, second and third base. The strongest, most effective hitter is scheduled for that eventuality—to maximize the moment and bring home all three base-runners.

When we find ourselves in doubt and despair, when we find ourselves in desperate circumstances, we have Jesus as our cleanup hitter. Jesus who sacrificed and gave himself for us. Jesus who rose victorious from his tomb—conquering the insurmountable odds of death and the grave. By the grace of God Jesus, who is for us and with us—Jesus who is the captain of our team—Jesus gives us the victory! By the grace of God, we are on Jesus' team!

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Your fellow teammate—your fellow partner—your brother in Christ,



Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

CWR/PTM Prayer List—March 2023

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 daughter. She had surgery and has to start treatment for cancer. Please also pray for my sister who is suffering from heart failure and other health problems.—Virginia

My brother, age 64, is in the hospital with some undiagnosed leg-swelling, newly diagnosed Covid and high blood pressure. He lives alone and does not have any children.—Pennsylvania

Please pray for all us “senior citizens” who struggle financially living on fixed incomes. Food, fuel, electricity—everything we need to survive is so expensive now!—Tennessee

Please pray for my sister, who is having severe difficulties since she was struck by a car. She can barely walk and is in pain and medicines don't help.—Florida

Please pray for healing of my Multiple Myeloma and Chronic Kidney Disease.—Alabama

Please pray that the Lord will give me favor in my active court case. Thank you so much for your prayers.—Texas

Please pray for my brother. He recently had his prostate removed and he has cancer concerns. May God give him encouragement and hope in Jesus Christ.—Oklahoma

Please pray for my brother and sister who unexpectedly discovered they have to find a new place to live. Please pray for us all to have the mental, physical and spiritual resilience to cope with the difficulties of life.—Arizona

Please pray for my friend who is 96 years old. He's having trouble sleeping and he's retaining fluid which is causing swelling in his feet and legs.—Kansas

I pray that God will continue to bless this ministry. I look forward to all your monthly resources because I receive such spiritual help and encouragement from them. Thank you so much!—Indiana

Please pray with me about the horrible situation in Ukraine, and pray for the many charities who are helping the residents with aid and comfort.—New York

Please pray for me as I'm in so much pain in my neck, back and knees. I'm going to physical therapy to get some help. I pray for CWR/PTM every day.—Alabama

Thank you for your prayers for my son's cancer. Please continue to pray for him, as he's in a lot of pain.—Georgia

My wife recently developed Sjogren Syndrome, and she is experiencing various difficulties. She gets depressed and wonders why God is allowing this. Please pray for her.—Florida

God has helped me so much through your ministry. Thank you for everything you do. Please pray that we stay committed to him and trust in him always.—North Carolina

Please pray for my friend's wife who has cancer throughout her body. I recently had a quarter-size skin cancer removed from my face. Please pray for my healing, too.—Wisconsin

Please pray for me. I live alone most of the time, and I suffer from loneliness that's overwhelming me. Please pray for all the elderly who are suffering from loneliness.—Louisiana

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.