

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of May 6th & 7th, 2017

Dear Members of St. John

In today's crazy world, fear can grip our hearts and shake us to our core. But when we keep our eyes on God, we can stand strong — whatever the circumstances swirling around us. This week was one of those “swirling” events week. Monday morning, I started with labs tests at the Cleveland Clinic at 9:15 a.m. That was followed by an insurance meeting (they always want to know where's the money), meeting with my transplant nurse, an EKG, and ECHO and several lung tests. Tuesday was another full day of tests: full body X-Rays, and a bone marrow prep and biopsy. They did add one more chemo session for May 8th at the Moll Center.

Hidden in 2 Chronicles is an amazing story of the ancient Israelite King Jehoshaphat of Judah. When he first heard about three fierce armies coming to attack his kingdom, do you know what he did? Scripture tells us, “*Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah*” (2 Chronicles 20:3).

Jehoshaphat praised God before he cried out, “*We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*” God answered King Jehoshaphat — and all of us — by saying, “*Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's*” (2 Chronicles 20:15b). Now see what God did to Jehoshaphat's enemies: “*As [the appointed men] began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated*” (2 Chronicles 20:22).

When Jehoshaphat and his kingdom were confronted with an overwhelming challenge, they prayed instead of worrying. They moved their eyes off the problem onto the ultimate Problem-Solver. Although they didn't know what to do, they were unshaken and filled with God's inexplicable peace as they walked in faith.

Jesus promised me a new life through following Him. As I did, He saved me by His love, comforted me by His grace and freed me by His truth. The Bible reminds us that God has comforted us “so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:4b-5).

Your story and circumstances may be different, but we all need personal healing and comfort of some kind. Seek that comfort from God today. But don't stop there. God doesn't comfort us to make us comfortable. He comforts us to make us comfort-ABLE ... able to help others. Love others. Share comfort. And believe small gifts aren't small at all when God is the giver of those gifts.

Love you all and thanks so much for keeping me in your prayers. God is answering those prayers in a mighty way.

Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of May 13 & 14, 2017

Dear Members of St. John

After a whirl-wind week of appointments, I have received several reports on these tests. The full body scan showed holes all over my bones, including my head. I know what you are thinking, “I knew Pastor Jim had holes in his head.” Also my bone marrow biopsy, which I was not looking forward to, really was not bad. They prepared me well for the pain, and it was very tolerable. Praise the Lord! The results of the bone marrow biopsy showed only 20% cancer throughout, and that compares to the biopsy I had done last May, when it showed 70% cancer. Great improvement! But my EHCO cardiogram showed a slight stenosis, or thickening of the walls of my heart valves, and my Transplant doctor wants me to see a Cardiologist sometime this week for more review. They also added another Chemo day to my schedule, which I had on May 8th. I thought two weeks ago was supposed to be my last chemo treatments. Oh well, that all went well.

I felt a little like the Israelites coming out of Egypt after centuries of slavery. They were at the mercy of their captors (for me it's all the doctor tests) and worked endless hours making bricks from straw (for me the seemingly endless hours sitting in waiting rooms). Generations had prayed for freedom, and the answer had

come! Thousands left Egypt and headed for the Promised Land. Not too far into their journey, Pharaoh sent his men after them and the Israelites panicked.

They started to complain. “They said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?’” (Exodus 14:11) They were so focused on the obstacles, that they forgot how many times they’d asked God to release them from slavery. And now — on the brink of stepping out of Egypt completely free for the first time in generations — they complained. After listening to their murmuring, Moses petitioned God on their behalf. God responded instantly: “Tell the Israelites to move on” (Exodus 14:15b). Have you learned that rarely does answered prayer mean it’s smooth sailing all the way from there?

You pray for that prodigal child to come home, and he/she does. Yet there’s work to be done in the relationship. You may pray for God to help achieve a dream. He does, and it’s more difficult than we imagined. You may have prayed for a promotion, and there’s a learning curve. God’s answer, “Move on! Keep going!”

God indeed does answer our prayers, and He’ll be with us every step of the way. But the choice is “to get caught up in the challenges,” or “celebrate where God is taking us?”

On this Mother’s Day weekend, I hope we can all celebrate where God is taking us, and the people who helped us get there – like Our Mothers.

Love you ALL very much! Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of May 20 & 21, 2017

Dear Members of St. John

This past week was pretty full with appointments and procedures downtown at the Clinic. On Wednesday, I had labs and met with my Transplant Doctor. She is very good and very thorough. She answered our questions and explained in better detail all that was to happen to me. On Thursday, we return to the clinic to have the tri-lead port surgically implanted in my chest. This way I don’t feel so much like a pin cushion. They can take blood from this port, give me medicine through this port and next week harvest my stem cells using this port. After the surgery, and I am awake again, they instruct us how to care for this port and show me how to give myself an injection. There are a few reasons why I did not become a nurse, and this is one of them. But actually, it really does not hurt, so quit crying like a baby, right?

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16b). I have to admit: Sometimes I’m scared to pray boldly. It’s not at all that I don’t believe God can do anything. I absolutely do. I’m wild-about-Jesus. Wild in my willingness. Wild in my obedience. Wild in my adventures with God.

So, my hesitation isn’t rooted in any kind of doubt about God. It’s more rooted in doubts about myself and my ability to absolutely discern the will of God. The reality is sometimes God chooses not to do things. And if His will is “No,” while I am boldly praying for a “Yes,” it makes me feel out of step with God. Can you relate?

Prayer opens my spiritual eyes to see things I can’t see on my own. And I’m convinced prayer matters. Prayers are powerful and effective if prayed from the position of a righteous heart (James 5:16).

So, prayer does make a difference — a life-changing, mind-blowing, earth-rattling difference. We don’t need to know how. We don’t need to know when. We just need to kneel confidently and know that our simple requests to Jesus extend far-wide and far-high and far-deep.

Jesus speaks specifically about igniting our prayer lives in Matthew 6, verses 6-8, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” So, let’s ask. And ask again. Not because we can cause God to move, but so that we’ll position our souls to see our sweet Jesus move in any which way He pleases.

Thank you for all your specific and bold prayers for me. God is answering them and we are about to see how grand those answers will be.

Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – May 27 & 28, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

This week, every day I was as the Clinic to harvest stem cells. They hook me up to this machine that draws out my blood, separates the stem cells and then returns the rest of the blood back to me. It is about a six-hour process. They want to collect 5,000,000 Stem Cells. After that, I go for treatment, giving me something that will cause my body to release more stem cells. We end up fighting the traffic both ways. I am downtown by 7:30 AM and I don't finish up until 5:30 PM.

As I finished this week, I could not help but think of someone else in the Bible who was right there as well – Hannah. She felt provoked and irritated. Her anguish was so intense that she wept and would not eat. Before the Lord, she cried out in bitterness of soul saying, “LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant ... then I will...” (1 Samuel 1:11b). Hannah's tears over her empty womb were made even more painful by her husband's other wife, Peninnah. She had many sons and daughters and made sure to rub this fact in Hannah's face every chance she got.

There's a common thread that weaves through Hannah's story, and yours and mine. We can all be found desperately wanting something we see the Lord giving to other people. We see Him blessing them in the very areas He's withholding from us. We look at them and feel set aside. *Why them? Why not me?* Then the seemingly unjust silence from God ushers us from a disturbed heart to a bitter soul. And we start to feel something deep inside that contradicts everything we hold true: *If God is good, why isn't He being good to me in this?*

So, what do we do when our heart is struggling to make peace between God's ability to change hard things and His apparent decision not to change them for us? We do what Hannah did. We keep pressing in. Instead of taking matters into her own hands, Hannah took her requests to God. Instead of pulling away from Him in suspicion, she pressed in ever closer, filling the space of her wait with fervent prayer. Where barrenness and mistreatment by Peninnah could have caused Hannah to completely lose heart, she refused to be deterred from trusting in God. She possessed a faith that was not contingent upon her circumstances, but based on what she knew to be true about her good and faithful God. A faith that led her to pray with so much passion and boldness in the tabernacle that Eli, the high priest, accused her of being drunk! (1 Samuel 1:13-14). But, Hannah's answer didn't come right away: “So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son” (1 Samuel 1:20). Samuel was born in God's perfect timing. God hadn't made Hannah wait to punish her. He hadn't been callous or indifferent to her cries. And He's not ignoring those of us waiting either. **God loves us too much to answer our prayers at any other time than the right time.**

Thank you for keeping me in your prayers. Pastor Jim

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – REVISED Weekend of May 27 & 28, 2017

Dear Members of St. John

This week, I was to be at the Clinic to harvest Stem Cells. They hook me up to this machine that draws out my blood, separates the Stem Cells and then returns the rest of the blood back to me. It is about a six-hour process. They want to collect 5,000,000 Stem Cells and said that for most patients it takes about two days. But on the very first day, they were able to collect 7,480,000 stem cells – **PRAISE THE LORD!**

As I finished this week, I could not help but think of someone else in the Bible who was right there as well – Hannah. She felt provoked and irritated. Her anguish was so intense that she wept and would not eat. Before the Lord, she cried out in bitterness of soul saying, “LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant ... then I will...” (1 Samuel 1:11b).

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Thank you for keeping me in your prayers and our great God answering them!

Pastor Jim

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of June 3 & 4, 2017

Dear Members of St. John

This week, I am reminded of Gideon in Judges 6. This week I am in a battle of my life against cancer. On May 30th, I was admitted to the Cleveland Clinic and administered a huge dose of chemo which is supposed to kill all the cancer cells, but unfortunately a lot of good things too, like my bone marrow, all my hair and possibly the lining of my mouth and throat. They will have me chew ice chips to keep that last thing from happening. May 31st is my "Day of Rest." They tell me, I definitely will need the rest. On June 1st, they start giving me my stem cells back to grow new bone marrow. The process is amazing. Praise the Lord! But the process will also take time, as I will be in the Clinic for 2-4 weeks, depending how fast new bone marrow starts to grow back.

We can all take heart, because in the midst of Gideon's hopelessness, God shows up in a big way. While Gideon was hiding in a winepress, threshing wheat, the angel of the Lord appears. This was not just any angel. This is understood to be an Old Testament appearance of God Himself declaring: "***The LORD is with you, mighty warrior***" (Judges 6:12b). "***Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?***" (Judges 6:14b).

Gideon may have looked behind himself to see if the angel of the Lord was addressing someone else. After all, he was hardly qualified to save Israel, coming from the weakest clan in Manasseh and being the least in his family (verse 15). Yet apparently to God, Gideon was a mighty warrior.

I believe God sees mighty warriors in each of us too. Imagine going about your daily work, making dinner, paying bills or sorting laundry and God appears to you saying, "***The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.***" This would undoubtedly change your life. The trust is God makes victors out of the ordinary and overlooked people. God seems to delight in working powerfully through unexpected "warriors" such as Gideon, Rahab and Ruth and even you and me. Don't let your past determine your present or your circumstances dictate your worth. God is the giver of new life.

Notice God appeared to Gideon in private. Wheat was normally threshed in open spaces, typically on a hilltop so the breeze could blow away the chaff. But fearful of the Midianites, Gideon worked hidden away in a sunken winepress. You might be caring for a toddler, teenager or aging parent. Or you may be at your job, doing your daily work when God shows up to speak to you. Gideon was a simple man living a normal life, but as he fulfilled his everyday duties, God showed up to do the miraculous.

Gideon was teachable because he listened to what the angel of the Lord said. He rose to the daunting occasion of delivering the Israelites. He didn't do it perfectly, but God's strength is perfected in our weakness, isn't it? Love You All! Pastor Jim