

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 7/3/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, July 4 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who have fallen away from life with CHRIST. Pray that the SPIRIT will help them to recall the richness that active life with JESUS brings. Ask GOD to inspire them to return to the community of faith in which they were previously nurtured and fed.*

We spend much of our time focused on the physical requirements of life that we need. Food, water, shelter, light, purpose, and so on are the things we seek to bring fullness to our lives. Not only do we look for these things in a physical realm, we also seek many of them mentally and emotionally as well. Too often, however, we fail to think about them spiritually. We miss recognizing that our spiritual needs are also abundant and broad.

JESUS, though, recognized this and spoke about them to help us realize both how important they are and how HE comes to help us meet them. Spiritual well-being is more than just a couple of things that we can achieve through a few activities. Spiritual health is pervasive, and JESUS is available to help us attain them.

In John's Gospel, JESUS gives seven different "I AM" statements that name these needs and tells us that HE is the ONE who can address them for us.

"I AM the BREAD OF LIFE. He who comes to ME will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." – John 6:35. JESUS names our spiritual hunger and thirst and promises that those who dwell in HIM will never lack what is needed to fulfill our spiritual appetite.

"I AM the LIGHT OF THE WORLD. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." – John 8:12. JESUS frees us from the fears that can come when we live in darkness by providing us the light that brings life and clarity, even in the midst of those other things that can darken our lives.

"I AM the GATE for the sheep. Whoever enters through ME will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture." – John 10:7, 9. JESUS offers security and protection from the spiritual threats that can damage our relationship with GOD. Instead, JESUS promises safety and refuge from those things that can threaten our faith and trust in GOD.

"I AM the GOOD SHEPHERD. The GOOD SHEPHERD lays down HIS life for the sheep. I know my sheep and my sheep know me." – John 10:11, 14. In addition to safety and protection, JESUS promises to defend us against spiritual attacks. Further, HE talks about the intimate relationship with can have with HIM as those who HE will always defend and for whom HE will always care.

"I AM the RESURRECTION and the LIFE. The one who believes in ME will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in ME will never die." – John 11:25-26. JESUS offers an abundant life, not just now but also in the future. This is both a rich life in the present and an eternal life with GOD after this earthly life has ended. True, meaningful life is available to all who truly commit to a relationship with the LORD.

“I AM the WAY and the TRUTH and the LIFE. No one comes to the FATHER except through ME.” – John 14:6. In a world filled with so much misleading and confusion, JESUS promises clarity of truth, purpose, and values, and most of all, life with GOD.

“I AM the VINE; you are the branches. If you remain in ME and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from ME you can do nothing. If you remain in ME and MY words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.” – John 15:5, 7. Life with JESUS can give us purpose and direction as we seek to accomplish HIS will for our lives and our world. More than this, as we are connected to HIM and to HIS branches, we find community and connection with others who have also grafted themselves on to HIS life and vision.

We don't think that much about our spiritual lives, focusing instead on things that seem more important and immediate. But the life that JESUS offers touches so many aspects of the rest of our lives and gives us what we need, even when we do not realize it. JESUS cares for us, often more than we care for ourselves, and through life with HIM, we can find a richness and wholeness that will be lacking when we neglect this important aspect of our existence.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey