

“Held in the Arms of Prayer”  
Pastor John Bronson

(Ephesians 6:16-18)

August 14, 2011

Order of Worship for August 14, 2011,  
Pre-service Song  
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Women’s Ministry by Barbara Conley

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:129-144 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“We Have Come into His House”

Song # 224

“Blessed Be Your Name”

Overhead

“Our God Reigns”

Song # 372

“God of Grace, God of Glory”

Song # 435

“Shine, Jesus, Shine”

Song # 431

Offering and Offertory

Special Music

Message:

“Encouraging” (Ephesians 6:21-24)

by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“Joy of My Desire”

Song # 744

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word  
Heroes of the Faith, Hebrews 11:16-31  
5:30 to 7:00  
The Henneker Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

August 7, 2011

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*  
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **District and Home Office, EFCA:** the personnel will preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; the Spirit will give wisdom for the efficient use of resources and the effective conduct of ministry; the leaders at both levels will enjoy open communication with the local churches and offer practical help and spiritual encouragement
2. **President Obama:** the Spirit will fill him with a spirit of humility and a deep love for the country he serves; that the Lord will protect him and his family from harm; that he will be able to rise above partisan passions
3. **Children’s Ministries:** the Lord will raise up the needed volunteers for both AWANA and the Sunday School ministries for the coming year; the Spirit will stir up a fresh love for the Lord and for the children in the different programs; these and other ministries will more effectively penetrate our community with gospel deeds and words
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: E4 Tim Hammonds** (son of Tom and Cindy Hammonds):
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Sabrina Johnston at Butte College** (daughter of Julie Johnston):

Order of Worship for July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 (Communion and Call2Fall)

Prelude  
Pre-Service Song

Welcome and Announcements  
Ministry Moment: Military Moms and Ruthie Bowen

Call to Worship: 2 Chronicles 7:11-14

**Call2Fall, Prayer for the Nation** (I recommend beginning with a song such as “Christ Alone” or “The Deep Love of Jesus” then have a leader read prayer topics one by one from the pulpit with time between for either silent or spontaneous prayer from the congregation. This could as long as it seems right to do. I think you can trust the Spirit’s leading. I would recommend closing with something like #557, “Seekers of Your Heart”, or #563, “Open My Eyes That I May See”

[You may want to incorporate the Call2Fall with the Communion Service. In that case I recommend you have the person administering the elements read the prayer topics and have a season of prayer before proceeding with the prayer for the elements and their distribution]

Offering and Offertory

Message or Communion if not integrated with the Call2Fall. I would consult with Mark L. as to whether he prefers the Communion precede or follow his message. If separate from Call2Fall, to prepare for the Supper you might want to sing either “Jesus Saves” or “Power of the Cross”.

Closing Song

“God Be with You”

Song #232

“The Prayer Closet”

July 3rd, 2011

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **Richard and Kerry Nakamura:** the Lord will refresh them physically, spiritually and emotionally during their home assignment; they will be empowered to strength church ties and support; the Spirit will impart a fresh vision of their call to serve Him in Japan
2. **President Obama:** the Spirit will give him a humble heart, a truth perceiving mind and the courage to know and do what is right
3. **Board of Trustees:** the Spirit will bring them to unity of mind regarding priorities and time lines for summer projects; the congregation will be led to support them personally and financially; they will experience the Lord’s peace and blessings in their work
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: Sgt Jonathan Sweetman** (son of Catherine Sweetman):
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Natalie Rivera (?)** (daughter of Bob and Lisa Sanford):

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I have two confessions to make today. These are from mistakes I made a long time ago! One is [this]: you all know that I have committed myself to getting up early in the morning and spending time in the Word of God and in prayer as a part of my being a disciplined child of grace. Well, I have found that I have been having increasing difficulties in that when I would go to prayer I would go to sleep. I have fought this and fought this. I exorcised the demon of sleep and it did no good whatsoever. Some of you know that in addition one of the disciplines I have followed and developed for years is the discipline of journaling. What I have decided to do – although John Piper says that if you have trouble falling asleep when you’re praying, stand up and walk around: well I thought that was a little much. So what I do now is I journal what I am going to pray for. After I have written down what I am going to pray for, I pray for it. I have found that helps me to remain very focused and I do not fall asleep. Why do I say this? Because I want you to pray. I do not want just me to pray; I want you to pray.

The church in America is desperately weak. We want the church to thrive. Some people believe that the way in which the church will thrive is by making it grow. That is a good thing. But if I read the Word of God correctly, the way the church will thrive is as it comes in humility before God and seeks by His grace to be a holy people, dedicated to Him, devoted to Him, willing to slough off worldliness and become a holy people. That involves prayer. So I am encouraging you to think about prayer. [Our elder] Ken Butler made the observation that it is wonderful to live in a land where we have the freedom to gather in Jesus’ name and worship. That is a good thing, right? Amen! Every nation on the earth guarantees freedom of worship; they do not guarantee freedom of religion. Worship is what we do when we gather together – now I know what the [Biblical] word for worship means, and it encompasses more than that. But this is what we have come to understand [culturally]: when we worship, we gather together. But we want freedom of religion. What is freedom of religion? [It is that] I can be a Christian twenty-four hours a day any place I want to upon the face of the land. I can lift up the name of Jesus any place I want to upon the face of the land; that I have no restrictions on my freedom of speech and my freedom of witness; that I can invite anybody I want to and speak of my love for my God any place I want to. Do we have freedom of religion in this land? It is increasingly restricted. Never settle for freedom of worship. We are guaranteed the freedom of religion, and that is a whole life commitment, not an inside the building commitment.

Well, what am I preaching about today? The title of today’s message is “Encouraging”. If I could force you to open your Bible I would have you do this. This is a moment in time. The Greek has two terms for time, one is *chronos* – meaning “the clock” – and the other is “*kyros*” – which means “crisis”, a moment of great significance. That is what we have today. Do you see what that is? [It is] Ephesians 6:21-24. Do you see what those verses are? It is the end. Today if you will cooperate I will finish this message and the letter.

This is about the church. Ephesians is about the church. That is what this letter deals with. Of all the writings in the Bible this one more than any other focus on, gives a description and definition of the church. I want to think about that as we come to the conclusion of this study.

There are various ways that people have of envisioning the church. Many think of cross-topped spires rising over arched stoned cathedrals, or white clapboard chapels, or perhaps a store-front with a neon sign that says “Jesus Saves”. There is an immense diversity of architectural statements about “church”. But of course buildings are churches only by function, not by essence. By the way, the same is true of preachers. Here is my second confession. Not only do I tend to fall asleep when I pray and have to develop disciplines to overcome that, but when I think of

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the church, in my mind's eye come preachers. The church has been blessed with many great preachers, men who have lifted up the Word of God and have blessed God's people by opening God's truth. This reaches all the way back. You can go back to the Apostle Paul: but the Apostle Paul was not a good preacher, he says so himself. You may not know this man: Ambrose of Milan. He was a great preacher. He was also a bishop. Through his preaching he brought to faith, he was the critical agent in bringing Augustine of Hippo [to faith in Jesus]. St. Augustine was one of the great fathers of the church. He did a huge amount to enable the church of Jesus Christ to speak eloquently and powerfully against the corrupt Roman culture of his day. Later on there was Francis of Assisi who spoke about purity in the midst of a horribly corrupt age in the life of the church. After Francis of Assisi one of the great preachers was Luther of Wittenberg who recaptured the essence of what it means to be saved by grace alone through faith alone, setting the church in Europe free from the false teaching of sacramentalism, that the way to be saved was by doing the right thing, to fulfill the rituals and to make certain that you very carefully obeyed the discipline of the church. Zwingli of Basel, Calvin of Geneva, Knox of Scotland, Wesley and Whitfield of England and America, Spurgeon of London: perhaps the one that we would know the best is Billy Graham. That I would have a particular affinity with and identification with preachers is probably not a surprise to anyone. It is my own passion. But preachers are only the church by way of function. Preachers are not the church.

What is the church? You might come close to remembering what the church is by understanding that in its essence the church is those who believe in Jesus Christ who have gathered. Of course, it is not sufficient only to gather in the name of Jesus to be the church. You have to push yourself a bit further and say that the church is believers believing and seeking to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and they do this by building one another up through faith working through love. All that I have done is picked out a couple of different verses both from Ephesians and Galatians which help our minds and hopefully our souls and spirits to focus on our proper identity as the body of Christ. If you look at the definition, you recognize that passivity is not enough. You have to be actively engaged to be the church.

The core, if we follow the scriptures, the core, the necessary living center, is love. First Corinthians 13:1-3 makes it absolutely crystal clear that only those things that are done in love have any spiritual effectiveness at all. All the rest is just a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. So there is a discipline of the heart, a discipline of the mind that says to God, “Father, enable me to fall in love, to choose to love, to discipline myself to love the brotherhood.” This is an active posture.

So we see then that the core of the church is love of the brotherhood and love for Christ, and these two feed each other. Surely when you look again at the end of Ephesians, the passage which concludes this letter, Ephesians 6:21-24, listen to what Paul says. He comes to the end of this great letter on the nature of the church, the definition of the church, how it is that we are the body of Christ – this is what he wants us to grasp – and this is how he concludes: *“Peace be to the brothers with love and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all [Do you notice this?] – “. . .with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”* So that should be our quest, our request: “Lord, how do I have this incorruptible love? That’s what I need.” We need to think about that for a moment. What on earth is incorruptible love? Nini is not here because she is taking our oldest son, wife and two grand-daughters to the airport. You all know, and I make no hesitation in letting you know, how much I love my wife. But it is not an incorruptible love. There are times not only when I am not loving, but there are substantial elements in our relationship that I love her because she takes care of me, and I measure out

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my affections according to how well I think she has done her job! Your laughter tells me that you are amazed that I would be so practical minded. Seeking my own advantage becomes problematic: am I using my wife? Hard to say! So now when I approach my God, or I approach my brothers and sisters, is it to bless or to use? That is ambiguous territory.

I would think that incorruptible love would have to be a love pure in its origins and a love that delights in that which is pure. Then these purities would be sufficient to keep me from corrupting [the love I have for others, including God]. Therefore I believe that this would be a love poured into our hearts by the Spirit of God, and at the same time it would be a love for that which the Spirit of God had brought to pass or created in the lives of those around me: a love received from the Holy Spirit and a love that delights in what the Holy Spirit does. Now that may strike you as being almost mythical. But I suggest that you turn and read Romans 5:3-5. It is my observation that overwhelmingly our approach to and our expectation of God in His grace is that God is going to come and help me accomplish the things that I think are necessary and good to do; that God is going to come and help me to be a good person according to my understanding of goodness. But I think that is a misunderstanding of the Word of God. God’s intention in dealing with me is to radically change the way I am. How many know what the word “radical” means? Radical means “to the root”, right down to the root so that if the root is changed, the whole plant that grows is changed. That is the intention of God. He has a process by which He seeks to accomplish this transforming work in us. Romans 5:3-5 gives us a snap shot. It says, “*More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.*” Right before this in Romans 5:1-2, [Paul] has emphasized that we have been saved by grace; that we now stand in this salvation; we have been justified; we are now Christ’s own. That being the case, by now having been shifted from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, that is the kingdom of His Son, now begin a process of change. American Christianity has become very much convinced that when I move from the kingdom of darkness by His grace to the kingdom of His Son, the change has been done. But this is not true. The Scriptures are very clear; it simply says the change has begun. Now begins the process by which we are transformed from fallen to holy creatures. That is what God wants. Now begins the process by which not only do I receive the pure love of God through the Holy Spirit, but I learn to love that which is holy, that which is pure. I am changed.

We are new creatures in Christ. We are becoming Christ-like. That, by the way, is what Christian means. We are being, as Scripture often says, refined as gold and silver are refined. How many know how you refine metals? Yes, Dean Jensen [a man who fashions jewelry] knows how to refine them! You take it, the raw metal, the ore, and what do you do with it? You subject it to intense heat until under the impact of the heat the pure is separated from the dross. The dross is sin; the pure is that which God creates within us. I will be very frank. That is what I am praying for the Lundberg family. The process for them watching a man [slowly die] whom many of us know and love a great deal – Harlan – is no easy process: it is fire. But it is not out of God’s control. It is by His gracious intent. Why do I make a public exhibition of this? Because I want you to pray! The body of Christ is bound together by love that holds up the brother, holds up the sister, and says “O God of heaven, pour out Your grace; sustain them, grant them wisdom, to go the whole distance.” A pure love.

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You know, it is interesting – or I hope you find it interesting – have you noticed that Paul’s letters almost without exception with a list of names? These are people he is either commending for some kind of service or dedication, or they are people that he wants his readers to commend. So, looking again at the conclusion of Ephesians 6:21-22, this is what we read: *“So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.”* That, by the way, is where I got the title of the message “Encouraging”. We read these names and I suspect we barely notice them. How many know who Tychicus was? The reality is that these names are but the echoes of lives long since gone. They can speak no word to us, they can do nothing either for good or for ill that will make any difference to our lives. So why should we bother? I thought about this, and there is good reason for bother, for who made sure their names were written down and preserved: the Holy Spirit did. I can’t think that He is just filling up space.

Do you remember an occasion in the gospels when the disciples spoke very disparagingly about the activities of a certain woman who broke open and just wasted a whole vial of very expensive perfume? Do you remember that? She poured it out on Jesus’ feet and the response of the disciples was, “What a big waste! This could have been sold and used to help a lot of poor people.” What was Jesus’ response? “Oh no, this woman has done good for me, and she will be remembered forever.” So, how many of us are anticipating meeting the woman who broke the vial and blessed our Lord? How many of us anticipate meeting Tychicus? How easily we are trapped inside the secular materialism of our culture, wherein we are inclined to act as if because a person died it’s over and done and we have nothing further to do with that person. But that is a lie; if you believe the Word of God, that is a lie. We shall indeed have to do with those who have gone before us. At that time we may have a lively conversation with Tychicus, and we will probably have an opportunity to know more fully why his name was recorded by the apostle as one to be remembered.

This raises a couple of questions. Those questions would be something like this: for what will I be remembered? Differently stated, I wonder who is writing down my name. The other is, whom do I remember and why? Of course I know full well I will be remembered. So should you. One of the most deeply affecting, touching the emotions, statements in the Bible I believe you will find in Psalm 56:8. This is what David wrote: *“You have kept count of my tossings, put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?”* I was thinking about that. I thought about the varied sorrows and struggles and griefs that we endure and often times endure them away from the eyes of others. But you know there is a scene at the beginning of Ezekiel when the time has come for God’s judgment to fall on the deeply apostate, the deeply corrupted city of Jerusalem. God lets His servant Ezekiel know that he is now going to send His angels of destruction and they are going to destroy the city and they are going to slay its inhabitants. But first, he sends an angel that has a writing tablet, and that angel is to go all through the city and find those individuals who grieve over the city’s corruption. How many of us grieve over the corruption, not just of our land, but of the church of God, where so many parts the Body of Christ, so called, have simply abandoned the Word and have adopted the standards of the world? It is easy to become angry – I do – but it is more essential to grieve and let one’s tears flow so they are captured in the bottle and in the book of God’s remembrance.

What Scripture desires that we would understand is that God is intimately acquainted with our lives in the way that a close friend would be, or a loving father. By the same token, of course, we are to love one another in that way.

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Last week I said that the picture we gain from the New Testament of the church in its first two or three generations was one of emotionally rich relationships in lively interaction. That is the reality which we see reflected here in Ephesians in its conclusion. Paul sends Tychicus, you notice, so that he can let the Ephesians know how Paul is and what he is doing. Paul assumes they want to know. That is what we had when the Weisners were here. That is what we have when Sheryl Jackson is here. When these missionaries that we support come, the assumption is that the Body of Christ loves them and delights to know what God has been doing, remembering. He assumes, you will notice, that when they learn about what's going on, they will be encouraged, it will encourage them. So now two questions come quickly to mind: What encourages me? What do I find encouraging? What lifts up my spirits? What helps the burden of the world's sin and corruption to be lifted off of my heart and instead I feel like I can sing, I can give words of praise, I can step out into the day and say “This is the day that the Lord has made; I can rejoice and be glad in it. Why? Because I know my God and I see my God is at work, and this brings me gladness of heart!” I don't expect you talk like that – that is the way I talk. But you should talk to God and let your heart be glad, to be encouraged.

These I think are very important questions. We need to ask not only what encourages us, but also how does such encouragement us come to us; where do we find it? The things which encourage us I believe reveal the action points of grace in our lives. We resonate, so that what is revealed by what encourages us is what we love. That which encourages me, that which gives me gladness, that which lifts me up, that which makes me feel hopeful, that which breaks through the fog of difficulties and struggles and [comes] like a ray of light [so that my soul] says, “Ah, whoosh, OK, here is the way, what a relief, I can get through this, this is great!” These are the things to which my soul clings and delights: “Ah, it is here!” Well, what are those things? You ought to know, because what encourages us in the manner just described, not only tells me what I love, but warns me what I don't love. So we have a measure here of where we are and how we stand in Christ.

Now consider this: consider that you were there in Ephesus, and you're listening to the letter and you are watching the rest of the body and you come to this section at the end: “...so that you may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything...” At that moment you say, “Everything? Aargh! It will take all afternoon! I hope he gets done fast. I have a life to live: and this isn't it!” Those who loved the Lord, and those who felt a burden for the people who lived in Rome, which is where Paul was when he wrote this letter, these would have been encouraged to know how Paul was doing and how the ministry was going forward. And those who didn't, wouldn't.

What encourages me, what do I love, where is my life, where do I “live”?

Essential in the transformation of the believer's heart and mind is the reorienting of the affections of our hearts. New interests and new desires emerge in our lives; we see people and the issues of life differently than we saw them before we were saved. This comes by degrees for most people. Initially and understandably we are primarily concerned with our personal story and the liberating, life-giving effect of God's forgiving love and grace in our lives: once I was blind, now I see! Hallelujah! I get all excited about the fact that I can see! But after a while I need to become more excited about what I am seeing than the mere fact that I can see. I need to move beyond a self-focused celebration of God's empowering presence within me and begin to be excited about what God is accomplishing in the lives of those around me. That is called growing up.

This is what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:17-24; *“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* If we listen carefully to those words that Paul wrote, it is apparent that change in us is not forced; it is a choice. Change in us is not by magic or automatic. What does he say? He says, “You, put on. You, take off.” Who? You! You, that’s who.

Notice how exactly this process replicates, reproduces, repeats the words of Jesus in John 8:31. This is what Jesus said: *“Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him – what is the tense there? “Had believed.” – “If you abide in my word...” – Who is responsible for abiding? You. – “...you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”* Did you catch the relationship? Do you notice: belief alone does not set the mind free! There are millions of people who believe and are enslaved. Why? They do not know the truth! They just do not know the truth. When we believe the gospel we are set free from the guilt and condemnation of our sins, and we are reconciled to the Father through the love gift of His Son who died for us. But our minds are not yet free from their ignorance nor from the deceptions and confusions and limitations which have been written into our understanding by the world. After we are saved there is a great work of renewal to be done. The question that then comes to us is, am I on the way? Is that what is happening? Am I being changed in the thoughts of my mind and in the affections of my heart? Am I seeking an incorruptible love? Am I being altered into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ who gave His life for me that I might love the world the way He loved me? What encourages me? Where do I live? Am I in fact a part of the church, the company of those who work in order that the body would build itself up in love and the kingdom of God’s righteousness would be extended in the world?

Let us pray: Our gracious heavenly Father, thank You. Thank You for the living Word that You have given to us, and for the Holy Spirit You have poured into our hearts and the love, Your love which has come with Him. May these things, Your love and truth, now become the constant occupation of our own thought, and the delight of our desires. So may we more and more live like Jesus and love like Him in the midst of the lost world. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

#### Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What first comes to mind when you hear the word “church”?
2. There is much talk these days of the “languages of love”. What would you say is your “love language” for the Lord?
3. How has your way of expressing God’s love through serving others changed as you have matured in Christ?
4. Who service for the Lord is most memorable in your life and why?
5. For what do you hope to be remembered as a Christian?
6. What do you hear or see in others that most encourages you to be faithful in Christ?
7. From what worldly forms of thought, value, and understanding have you worked your free through an increasing knowledge of God’s truth? (See John 8:31)
8. What would you like to accomplish for the Lord, and what would like to see this congregation accomplish for the Lord in our community either before He calls you home or He returns and brings this age to an end?