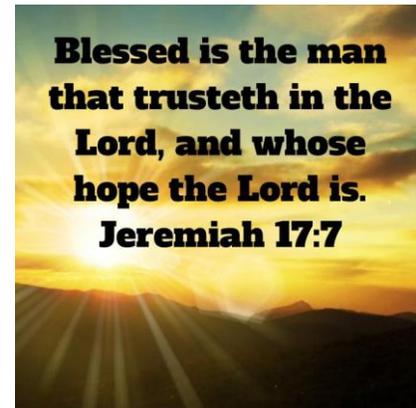


A devotion given by Brother Robert Ching at the Serving Board Meeting on Dec. 16, 2018

A Difficult Year Ahead!

⁷ *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. ⁸ He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” Jeremiah 17:7-8 (ESV)*



In October, a destructive fire swept through Northern California and brought the town of Paradise to ashes. Residents posted: *“Paradise is lost!”* Hardly any houses in this retirement community stood. Terrible pictures emerged as caravan of cars fleeing from the scorching fire behind. What’s ahead was another fierce fire that had jumped the fire line. Visibility on the freeway was closed to zero due to smoke from the burning bushes. People drove forward by faith and parents comforted their children with lullabies.

This is a picture of life that we often face. We flee from firing pans to firing pans. The path forward is often unclear, uncertain and treacherous. Gilead collectively has experienced many difficulties in the past. We have been sued; we incurred several years of huge deficits; leaking roofs and massive eucalyptus trees compound our maintenance problem; our largest space left unrented for years. We face declining health and serious family issues; we lack pastoral care and leadership.

Our future is bleak and challenges ahead are certain. The path forward is as cloudy as sky from the choking smoke of the recent camp fire. 2019 will be a difficult year and it is even more important to trust in the Lord. Verse 6 and 8 contrasts the outcome of one who trusts in man against one who trusts in God. The political drama that frequently plays out in Washington testifies the deceitfulness of men. A liar will be surrounded by liars. A crook can’t expect loyalty from his followers. But this verse assures us that *“Blessed is he whose trust is the Lord and not his strength”*

The three success factors selling a house are *“location, location, and location”*. In other words, the only sure way to sell a house is location. Verse 8 says closeness to the Lord is the only success factor in life. *“He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream”*. If a tree is not planted by the water, its roots can stretch as far as they can and still can’t find water. Several months ago, my gardener cut down two adjoining trees, a birch tree and a spruce tree. They died due to lack of water. Their roots stretch a long way, break the concrete walkway yet find no water. My neighbor’s birch tree flourishes because they have well water. What a difference!

This tree planted by the water is not afraid of heat and drought, because the water drawn nourishes the plant. Their leaves remain green and continue to bear fruit. Such is the contrast of a man whose trust is in the Lord. If history is our guide, we will face fires and droughts personally

and collectively in the coming year. Stay close to Him, draw from Him. The Lord is that living water that grants us strength to weather the many storms in life.

Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 4 says *“⁷Now we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this surpassingly great power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are pressed on all sides, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”*

May these verses encourage us in 2019 that not only will we not be crushed, but will bear many fruits for Him.