



Prayer

NURTURING OUR
LIFE IN JESUS

2 0 2 4 U B C L E N T
D E V O T I O N A L S

PRAYER: NURTURING OUR LIFE IN JESUS

A Message from Our Pastor

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Lent comes from the Middle English word *Lente*, meaning “springtime.” However, as I write this introduction, the weather outside feels like anything but spring. The morning temperatures are in the 30s and the forecast calls for a significant drop to the 20s in just a few days’ time. This serves as a chilling reminder that one must endure the winter before enjoying the spring.

In some ways, the journey from winter to spring is emblematic of the journey taken from Lent to Easter. These seasons remind us that death precedes life. Before we can appreciate the blooming flowers and the greening grass, we must first endure the winter. Death, then life. It is the same with Easter. Before we can appropriately celebrate the joy of the empty tomb, we must walk the road to Calvary. We are called to ponder and participate in the suffering of our Lord. We are called to die to self. We are called to the cross in order to truly and fully behold the glory of the resurrection.

Such a journey should not be taken with indifference. It demands nurturing. This journey requires a certain care to ensure our souls can be developed appropriately. Just as one nurtures the flowers and fields from winter to spring, so should we nurture our souls from death to life. While many ways demonstrate such care, our focus this year will be to do so through the discipline of prayer. Over the next forty days, we will gather around the Scriptures and remind ourselves of some of the most thoughtful prayers offered in the biblical text. We hope the example of these prayers will inspire us in our own prayer lives and that our souls might find the nurturing they need.

So, let us journey together. Let us walk through the darkness of winter that we may enjoy the glory of spring. Let us once again bring all that we are to the Lord Jesus. Let us follow His steps from the cross to the empty tomb. Let us be reminded that through Him we have been brought from death to everlasting life.



Jeremiah Smith

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Prayer of Praise

FEBRUARY 14, 2024

Read: Psalm 8

When two American astronauts landed on the moon in July 1969, many commentators declared it the greatest triumph of humanity. Science and technology could overcome any challenge. As Apollo 11 was returning to earth, Buzz Aldrin offered a different perspective. As millions of people listened, he read Psalm 8:3-4 to express his awe and humility before God. Psalm 8, as a lyric sketch of Genesis 1, reminds us of what God in His magnificence has created and given us to manage.

What do we learn about God in Psalm 8? David began and ended his prayer by addressing the LORD (*Yahweh*), the one in a covenant with His people — a personal relationship. “Our Lord” acknowledges His Kingship over heaven and earth. His majesty and splendor in creation display this. But, He rules in unexpected ways. He defeats powerful enemies not with swords, but with the voices of little children.

The shepherd David had seen the beauty of the star-filled night sky, mostly unknown to modern city dwellers. The Lord’s “fingers” had done the detailed forming of the stars and moon. As a skilled craftsman, God placed them in their perfect locations. Likewise, the Creator places us where He wants us to be. He knows us personally and takes care of us.

What does Psalm 8 show us about ourselves? We are not equal with God (*Elohim*), the King of Creation. We are His subjects. He does, however, crown us with majesty and glory. He has made us in His own image. He created us and gave us rule over all His creation.

Lent should prompt us to examine our attitudes and actions in the light of God’s word. So, how can Psalm 8 change our lives?

Too often in crises, we look first for what we can do through scientific discovery, organizational efforts, or military might. Then, we pray that God will bless our plans. Psalm 8 reminds us to follow a different approach. We should turn to God Who designed every facet of creation and gave us the ability to understand, care for, and rule it. Praising Him focuses us on how God does care for us in the midst of our difficulties. Our transformed focus enables us to be ready then to hear His answer to our requests for help even when it differs from our own understanding and efforts. –PG

Personal Reflection:

“Lord God, I praise You as the majestic Creator. Thank You for loving and caring for me, a mere mortal. Help me to turn to You when crises come. Amen.”

Prayer for an Heir

FEBRUARY 15, 2024

Read: Genesis 15:1-21.

“But [Abram] said, ‘O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?’” (Gen. 15:8, ESV)

Genesis 15 depicts something a bit mind-blowing: God talked with a person. And not just in a series of declarations, but in an actual conversation. The interaction proved a relationship existed between them — God and Abram. Let that sink in a minute!

In this instance, God pulled back the curtain a tad more — revealing more details about THE story, about His radical plan to redeem His people. This was (and is) a super important revelation.

Abram’s response to this was, in summary: “Well, that’s great and all, but I still don’t have a legitimate heir, in case You missed that detail.”

Each time God responded with more information. And Abram kept up the blinders: “I guess the alternative solution I’ve created will just have to do. I hear ya, but how will I know that You’re telling me the truth?”

God showed him — and shows us.

We can make a thousand applications at this point. And, I hope you spend time here allowing the Holy Spirit to guide your spirit.

For the sake of this devotional journey, let’s think about:

- When God made these promises, it was for Abram ... for Israel ... for God’s Church ... for you and me. Abram’s personal life played a larger role in God’s story. That’s true for you, too.
- God pursues us and shares His plan in relationship with us. We have the completed work of Jesus Christ. We have His complete message in the Bible. We have the Holy Spirit.

So, how does this impact the content of your prayers? You can know it isn’t a one-way interaction. You can know God’s plan comes to fruition despite your ignorance, selfishness, and near-sightedness. You can know that God hears you and understands your humanity. He is patient and kind! (He showed a lot of kindness to Abram!)

You can also learn from Abram’s mistakes. Instead of spending time commiserating about what’s not quite right or scheming your own solution, spend time focusing on what God has already said and what His work through that Heir accomplished. –EY

Personal Reflection:

Do I believe what God said about Himself, about me? What do I not believe about God? How does this belief or unbelief influence my prayers? 5

Prayer of Intercession

FEBRUARY 16, 2024

Read: Genesis 18:18-33, 19:29

My life changed drastically when I lost vision in my left eye as a 17-year-old college freshman. I didn't know what to do or how to react. My parents went into action arranging for medical examinations, hoping for restoration of sight. My church, friends, and family began praying for healing for my eyes. Their concern and prayers helped me feel I was not alone.

As time passed, various doctors and clinics could not determine the cause or the intervention for my situation. I felt alone, with nothing available to help me. Despair and roiling emotions captured my waking hours.

All who knew and cared for me were praying for restored sight and for God's presence in my life to sustain and encourage me as I learned to live with a disability. These were prayers of intercession. Intercessory prayers arise from a heart committed to God, asking for mercy and for resolution of a human situation with no apparent human solution. Abraham prayed such a prayer.

God had shared with Abraham His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their rejection of Him and their sinful lifestyle. Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his family lived in Sodom. Abraham asked God if He would destroy the righteous along with the sinful. He then asked God if he would spare the cities if 50 righteous persons could be found. God agreed. Abraham feared 50 was too large a number and bargained for 10 righteous persons to prevent destruction.

Abraham offered this intercessory prayer because he believed in God's sufficiency in all things. His words defined his view of the situation and the needed resolution. God, however, did not answer the prayer using Abraham's perspective. He provided for the safety of the righteous in Sodom — and then destroyed both cities the next day.

Intercessory prayers present both a situation and a desired human solution. The solution God gives might appear as though He rejected our prayer. Through Scripture and experience, we learn God always receives our prayers and provides His perfect solution.

I learned much about God as I prayed for healing. More importantly, God taught me that His answer is always best for me. Though my sight is still a problem, the Lord encourages and blesses me each day with His presence and love. He has taught me to end my prayers saying, "not my will but Your will be done." –PE

Personal Reflection:

"Father, as I intercede for others, fill me with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

Prayer for a Wife

FEBRUARY 17, 2024

Read: Genesis 24

From time to time, when studying Scripture, I'm left with questions about details not explicitly spelled out in the text. For example, in Acts 1, what conversations took place among the disciples after Jesus' ascension and their return to their "normal" lives in Jerusalem? I'd love a glimpse at the undoubtedly lively discussions regarding the events described in verses 9-11!

Another of these times for me comes in the story about the quest of Abraham's servant for a wife for his master's son, Isaac. We're not told much about this servant in Genesis 24. He's not even named in this passage. He was "in charge of all that he [Abraham] had." (v. 2, NIV) Therefore, we can assume that he had been with Abraham for a long time. It's possible this servant is Eliezer of Damascus who was mentioned in Genesis 15:2 as the heir of Abraham's estate since, at that time, Abraham and Sarah were childless.

Since this servant was "of Damascus," Abraham likely acquired him on his journey from Haran to Canaan. It's also likely that he didn't initially share Abraham's belief in "the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth." (v. 3) Later, the servant prays to the "LORD, God of my master Abraham," not to "my God." (v. 12)

I'm struck that Abraham didn't tell the servant to pray for God's guidance, nor did the servant necessarily pray to a God in whom he believed. He prayed because that's what his master would do. I wonder how many times that example had been set throughout the servant's time with Abraham.

God's answer to the prayer would have "shown kindness to my master" (v. 14), not kindness to the servant. That statement makes me wonder if God was answering Abraham's prayer or the servant's prayer. Regardless, at the end of the account, we're told that the servant "bowed down to the ground before the Lord" (v. 52) after Rebekah and her parents agreed for her to become Isaac's wife, answering Abraham's prayers. He had learned worship from his master as well.

Like the servant, many of us have been taught how to pray and how to worship by those in our lives. Like Abraham, we have opportunities to influence those in our lives toward prayer and worship. Whose example are you following? Who's following your example? –RR

Personal Reflection:

"Thank You, God for the examples set for me. Give me wisdom in leading those following my prayer and worship examples."

"PSALM 8"



EVE FRUGÉ

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024
TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

What does it mean to you that the God Who created all that exists loves and cares for you? Praise God for His majestic name, His wondrous creation, and His steadfast love. Thank Him for inviting you to talk with Him as Abraham did.

ENTERING A NEW WEEK PRAYING FOR...

Prayer for Protection

FEBRUARY 19, 2024

Read: Genesis 32:9-12

When I pray for God's protection, it is often done quickly without much forethought: "God, protect me from drunk drivers tonight. God, protect me from getting sick this weekend. God, protect my roof from this hailstorm."

Jacob's situation was very different from my casual prayers. Jacob prayed for protection for an enormous, ongoing, deadly problem. Jacob had good cause to fear his brother, Esau. When he was younger, Jacob lied to his father, stole his brother's blessing, and fled from his family. Esau vowed to kill Jacob for this, but now after 20 years God told Jacob to return home and go back to a murderous, betrayed brother.

Throughout Jacob's life, God promised He would be with him. Jacob spoke with God often and trusted Him with many things. At this moment, Jacob prayed a powerful prayer of protection. This prayer at a time of "great fear and distress" (Gen 32:7, NIV) contains a structure we can use when we call out to God for protection.

Humility — Jacob recognized he was unworthy of the blessings God had given him. We are also unworthy of God's blessings, but despite our unworthiness, God remains faithful, extending kindness and grace beyond measure. He multiplied blessings far beyond Jacob's expectations. He can do the same for us.

Rescue — Jacob asked God for help to save him from his brother. When we cry out to God for help, we are wisely admitting we cannot solve things on our own. We need help as we seek God's protection over our loved ones and ourselves.

Fear — Jacob confessed that he was afraid. Jacob had no idea what Esau had planned, but he imagined the worst. His fear was so large that he divided his entire camp hoping maybe only half of his family would be killed. We do not have to pretend we aren't afraid. Instead, we can tell God about our fears and know He listens to us.

Trust — Jacob ended his prayer with trust. He called back to God's previous promises in his life, rested his prayer there, and moved forward with meeting Esau. In our own times of fear and vulnerability, we can pray with trust, knowing that the God who has brought us this far is the same God who will protect and guide us through the challenges ahead.

—KL

Personal Reflection:

"God, when I am afraid and want protection, help me to remember Jacob's prayer and model my prayer the same way. I am not worthy. I need rescue. I am afraid. But, I trust You."

Prayer of Praise and Gratitude

FEBRUARY 20, 2024

Read: Exodus 15:1-18

One evening, when my daughter was a fifth grader, a classmate's mother called. Her daughter was upset about how their teacher had treated Lydia that day. "Miss C was very mean to Lydia." Miss C had slammed a ruler on Lydia's desk and ridiculed her inability to solve a math problem.

The "angry mother bear" came out in me. But God gave grace. Our moms' prayer group met the next morning. Godly women prayed about the situation. The teacher could not meet with me that week — God gave me time to "cool down." When I met with Miss C, she spoke first, "I acted terribly, unprofessionally toward Lydia last week. I'm sorry." "The LORD himself will fight for you. Just stay calm." (Exod. 14:14, NLT)

After their deliverance from Egypt, God's people were now between a rock and a hard place, or literally, between Pharaoh with his chariots and the Red Sea. Did they call out to the Lord for help? No, they complained and blamed Moses. Moses affirmed, "Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the LORD rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again." (14:13)

God did deliver His fearful, untrusting people. Moses sang a prayer of praise and thanksgiving about this awesome event. Look at the beautiful poetic imagery: "At the blast of your breath, the waters piled up!" (15:8a) "But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters." (15:10) Figuratively, the Lord rescued His people with His breath! How? He is a warrior (15:3), glorious in power (15:6), "glorious in holiness, awesome in splendor, performing great wonders" (15:11). Why? "With your unfailing love you lead the people you have redeemed." (15:13) God loves His people.

What places you between a rock and a hard place – unexpected illness, work stress, parenting decisions, senior downsizing, broken relationships, painful loss, unplanned expenses? How do you respond? Do you trust the God who loves you, cares for you, and who will fight on your behalf?

Lent reminds us that God has already acted on our behalf. He has defeated our fiercest enemies—sin and death. Jesus' death and resurrection accomplished this. "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:57, ESV) –SG

Personal Reflection:

"I praise You, O Lord, for You are my strength and my song, and You have become my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. Thank You, Jesus, for giving me victory over sin and death."

Prayer of Trust

FEBRUARY 21, 2024

Read: Psalm 25

In Psalm 25, David petitioned the Lord for protection, guidance, and pardon (vv. 1-7). He then described some of the attributes of God (vv. 8-14) and prayed for deliverance (vv. 15-22).

David surrendered to God with these words: “To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul” (v. 1, NIV1988) and “in you I trust, O my God.” (v. 2) His surrender indicated his belief that he would never be put to shame while trusting God. David pleaded with God to teach him and guide him in truth (vv. 4-5) and asked Him to remember His great mercy and love while forgetting the sins and rebellious ways of David’s youth. David found it comforting that the Lord is good and upright and guides the humble in what is right. He is loving and faithful to those who keep the demands of His covenant. Knowing these attributes of God helped David to bring his requests to Him.

David confessed his sin and asked for deliverance from his enemies. He implored God to “be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.” (vv. 16-18)

At the end of the psalm, David expressed his hope in God’s deliverance: “Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.” (vv. 20-21)

When believers experience hard times, grief, physical affliction, depression, and unexpected crises, we should approach God with confidence that He will release us if we trust in Him. In our prayer life, we should glorify God, confess our sin, and surrender to His will in order to experience His peace. Our hope is in Him alone.

Psalm 25 comforts me in knowing that if I confess my sin to God and humble myself, accepting His grace and mercy, I will receive forgiveness and protection. This protection may not be as the world views protection — physically, but as our Heavenly Father views it — spiritually, for eternity. Trust and hope in God our Father provide the only way we can survive our tumultuous times, for He is our Savior. –NM

Personal Reflection:

How can this Psalm’s structure of adoration, confession, petition, and surrender enhance my prayer life?

Prayers of Complaint and Discouragement

FEBRUARY 22, 2024

Read: Numbers 11:10-25, 31-33

The Children of Israel had apparently forgotten all that God had done for them in the wilderness. Their complaints to Moses had driven him to despair. Moses expressed his dissatisfaction to God. He wanted to know why God had afflicted him with these people. Where was he supposed to get the meat that they wanted? He couldn't meet their supposed wants.

Moses had reason to complain. He blamed God for his affliction. He believed he was serving God, so why was God allowing this adversity? God allowed this pain so Moses would trust Him and depend on Him more.

Sometimes we believe that the only appropriate prayers are prayers of praise and adoration. Sometimes we're afraid to complain to God. But, in my own life, I find some of my most effective prayers occur when I'm mad at God. If I have the faith that He can take my anger, then I frequently come away from my prayer time with a closer relationship to my Father God. God knows my frustration, so what's wrong with expressing it to Him?

Moses said that he couldn't bear the burdens of the people by himself. He even suggested that God might as well just kill him.

While I've never had Moses' burdens, I have experienced times in my life when I felt I couldn't go on. I understand Moses' despair.

But God had an answer to Moses' complaints and discouragement. He told Moses to select 70 godly men from within the camp. God guaranteed Moses that He would put some of his Spirit into these men, and they would stand with Moses as a support and strength to him. They would help bear Moses' burdens.

How often my cries of torment have been met with God's blessing of bringing Christian brothers and sisters to my aid. I might not need 70 people to help me, but two or three faithful companions can make all the difference in my time of difficulty.

As for the Israelites' complaint about meat, be careful about what you ask. About two million people in the crowd complained to Moses, and they got more than the meat they wanted. God sent bushels of quail — they could hardly handle so many birds, but He also sent a plague. —SB

Personal Reflection:

“God, help me to be unafraid to come to You with my complaints, as well as my praises and requests. When is the last time I offered my afflictions to You with an expectation of Your answer?”

Prayer of Praise and Gratitude

FEBRUARY 23, 2024

Read: 2 Samuel 7:18-29

How are you feeling today? Maybe you are in a season of sorrow or are feeling betrayed or confused. Maybe you are feeling grateful with praise on your lips. No matter how you are feeling, you can tell God about it, both the happy and the sad. In fact, pause and tell Him now

God is big enough to handle all our feelings. David's story shows this. David, a humble king, expressed profound gratitude and awe before the Almighty God. (2 Sam. 7)

David declared, "Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you" (v. 22, ESV) These words show David's humility as he recognized the greatness of our Lord. Lent gives us an opportune time to step back from the busyness of life and acknowledge God's unmatched power and authority. As you reflect today, let your heart resonate with the truth that there is no God like our God.

David petitioned, "And now, O LORD God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken." (v. 25) David's prayer reminds us of the promises God has spoken over his life and our lives too. Quietly reflect on His faithfulness. Use this time to renew your confidence in God's unwavering Word. Let the assurance of His promises guide your steps today and during this season of Lent.

David's acknowledgment rings true today: "And now, O LORD God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant." (v. 28) Let your prayers today be filled with gratitude. Approach God with a heart that acknowledges His truth and goodness in your life and express thankfulness for the blessings He promises and already bestowed upon you.

David's prayer exemplifies trust in God and hope in His power to establish a generational dynasty of hope for all people – a King, the Messiah, who will oppose the proud and exalt the humble.

No matter what you face today, you have hope in a Savior, Jesus, who died for your sins and has promised to restore you. His promises are true despite your failures and the weight of sin in the world. So, remember to praise Him! –AL

Personal Reflection:

"Gracious Lord, may my heart echo the humility and gratitude of David. Remind me of Your sovereignty, prompt me to hold onto Your promises, and teach me to approach You with sincere gratitude and praise."

Prayer of Dedication

FEBRUARY 24, 2024

Read: 1 Kings 8:22-54

American social psychologist Amy Cuddy studies expressions of non-verbal power and dominance. In a 2012 TED Talk, she presented her research about how body posture relates to human interactions.

Amy identified human practices that assert power over others. People with power offer big gestures, such as arms raised overhead. People with less power opt for smaller, more closed gestures, like crossed arms and legs or hunching over a desk. People assume these postures naturally based on how they feel, but they can use their bodies to change their minds too.

Amy's research revealed that a change in posture, whether high-power or low-power poses, for just two minutes affected testosterone and cortisol levels. This suggests the potential of a "fake it 'til you make it" mindset. Her research also revealed that two people will naturally complement the other's body language rather than mirroring one another. If one person uses big postures to indicate power, the other person will use smaller postures to demonstrate a lack of power.

In the Old Testament, King David led Israel with great power. He loved God deeply and planned a temple for Him in Jerusalem. His son, King Solomon, built the temple, furnished it, and assembled the priests and leaders for the dedication. Together they sacrificed countless animals and placed the ark of the Lord's covenant in the inner sanctuary.

At the dedication, Solomon led Israel in a prayer. Solomon started by standing — a big posture. (v. 22) This showed his power as king of Israel. As he prayed, he acknowledged God's uncontainable size and Solomon's own inability to accommodate Him. (v. 27) Solomon's words reflected his subservient position before God. (v. 28) He recognized the people's potential shortcomings, their powerlessness before God, and their need for God to hear and receive them when they strayed and then returned to Him. (vv. 29-49)

As Solomon prayed, he stepped through one observation after another of God's size and power. By the time Solomon finished praying, he was on his knees, demonstrating his understanding of his own powerlessness before God. The more he saw how big God was, the more he made his own posture smaller before Him.

Solomon prayed to dedicate the temple. Based on his change in posture, however, he effectively dedicated himself too. What do your prayer postures reveal about your relationship with God? –KR

Personal Reflection:

"Lord, forgive me when I see You as smaller than You are and when I see myself as bigger than I am. I dedicate myself to you and surrender my power to yours."

"SACRIFICES FOR SOLOMON'S TEMPLE DEDICATION"



HUDSON PERRY

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2024
TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Jesus is the Lamb of God — the perfect, atoning sacrifice Who was killed to take away the sin of the world, to take away your sin. God showed His love for us by sending Jesus to die for us while we were yet sinners. Talk to the Lord about your response to these truths.

ENTERING A NEW WEEK PRAYING FOR...

Prayer for Resurrection

FEBRUARY 26, 2024

Read: 1 Kings 17:17-24

Have you ever felt reluctant to pray for someone because you feared the situation could become worse?

As I sat with a friend, I inwardly despaired as she shared her latest heartache. Every area of her personal life seemed in chaos with no clear solutions. I had previously prayed for her physical healing, job search, or comfort after a broken relationship. Every time we spoke, her life seemed increasingly worse. I feared that if my prayers appeared unanswered, this unbeliever would think God does not care or even exist.

Did Elijah feel this dilemma when he saw his hostess's despair as she held the body of her dead son? Initially, Elijah's presence in the widow's home led to hunger relief (1 Kings 17:1-16), but now things appeared much worse. Both her child and hope for future provision were gone. Would Elijah pray for her son to be raised from the dead? Would God respond the way he hoped?

It takes courageous faith to pray for deliverance and even more to pray for resurrection. How can we pray with such boldness when we encounter situations that seem impossibly hopeless? How can we pray with fearless faith even when we confront death itself?

The faith to pray this way comes when we look beyond our despair and focus instead on the Person to Whom we pray. God's miraculous power works in us when we confess our fears to Him, surrender our unmet desires to Him, and continue to come into His presence even if we don't get the results we want. God uses prayer to create bold faith in our fearful, doubting hearts.

Elijah prayed for resurrection. He stretched himself over the dead boy's body three times and kept praying. He prayed past his fear and despair and focused instead on his God Who alone has power over life and death. God answered by reviving both the boy and the widow's joy and faith.

When we pray for resurrection, we focus our prayers on Jesus Who died but rose again. Jesus promised, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25-26, NLT)

After leaving my friend, I prayed for resurrection — that God would raise her from spiritual death into new, abundant life in Jesus. As I await resurrection, I will keep praying. Will you? –LW

Personal Reflection:

In what area of my life do I long to see God's miraculous resurrection power displayed?

Prayer for Deliverance

FEBRUARY 27, 2024

Read: 2 Kings 19:15-19

When Hezekiah became king of Judah, he was a man who did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. But soon, he looked away from the LORD and fixed his eyes on the adversary he'd once rebelled against and refused to serve. He was filled with dread.

Hezekiah offered reparation to the Assyrian king Sennacherib who demanded gold and silver. (2 Kings 18) Hezekiah gathered both — even stripping gold from the doors of the temple — hoping to appease the pagan king. Sennacherib took this treasure and returned with a great army whose commander's strong words mocked the living God — the God he knew Hezekiah trusted.

When Hezekiah received the message, he immediately returned to the temple — not to take from it, but to offer a proper response of contrition. He tore his clothes, covered himself in sackcloth, and sent word to the prophet Isaiah.

Hezekiah confessed that he was helpless to deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrian army without God's intervention. The enemy was fierce. The king could do nothing in his own strength. The LORD responded, "Don't be afraid."

When Hezekiah received another letter from the Assyrians with similar threats and blasphemy, he took it straight to the LORD, physically spread it out before Him, and prayed acknowledging the supremacy and singularity of God. He closed: "So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." (2 Kings 19:19, ESV)

God heard his prayer and stopped the Assyrian threat. They would not enter Jerusalem. He would defend her to save her for His own sake and for the sake of His servant David.

Every word of God proves true. God promised that the throne of David would be established forever. (2 Sam. 7) When Hezekiah — distant grandson of David — prayed and took refuge in the LORD, he intervened, sparing Jerusalem. The divine promise stood and was later fulfilled in Hezekiah's distant grandson — Jesus Christ.

God keeps His promises. He's always had a plan. No enemy can thwart it. His purpose will always prevail. In the chaos of the nations, He is moving. In the chaos of your life, He is moving. Everything He has ever done and everything He will ever do points to Jesus — first in His coming and now in His return. –JH

Personal Reflection:

As I wait for that day, I want to live my life trusting in His promises. God is sovereign. He is faithful and true. "Come, Lord Jesus."

Prayer of Confession and Restoration

FEBRUARY 28, 2024

Read: Psalm 51

From the palace's high roof, he saw a woman bathing. He lusted for her. He had the power to take her — and he did, knowing she was the wife of one of his inner circle of trusted soldiers. When he learned of her pregnancy, he schemed to cover up his sin. This plot eventually resulted in his warrior's death.

The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to confront this adulterer/murderer. "You have done evil in the sight of the Lord, showing utter contempt for Him." David confessed immediately, without excuses: "I have sinned against the LORD." God forgave immediately, with mercy. "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die." (2 Sam. 12:13, NIV)

Sometime after these events, the king wrote his personal prayer lament. He did not try to hide but turned to the God of unfailing love. What do we learn from his confession of sin?

We can ask God for forgiveness based on His nature. He is a merciful God, giving us His undeserved, unmerited favor though we deserve death — the payment for sin. His love is steadfast. His compassion is abundant.

We can acknowledge our wrongdoing to God. This includes our transgressions — rebellion against God, opposing His laws and defying His authority; our iniquities — corrupt acts and guilt; our sin — missing God's standards.

We can urgently appeal to God. "Have mercy on me! Blot out my transgressions — erasing my crimes, canceling my debt, and completely removing my sin. Wash me of my iniquities, laundering away the stain of my sin." We can admit our failures and personal responsibility, confessing we have sinned primarily against God Himself.

We can pray for spiritual renewal, asking God to create a clean heart in us. We need something only God can do — a miraculous transformation, a change of our attitudes and thinking to help us stand firm and not yield to temptation.

We can offer the God-pleasing sacrifice that comes from a broken spirit and repentant heart. Humility before the Lord reflects our genuine sorrow and grief over our sins.

I'm thankful for Psalm 51. I return to it frequently, claiming King David's words as my own. I'm also thankful that I live on this side of the cross of Christ. Purifying from all my sin comes from the blood of Jesus, God's Son. His death provides my forgiveness. –SG

Personal Reflection:

"Thank You, Jesus, for the blood applied. Thank You, Jesus, it has washed me white ... Glory to Your name. Amen."

Prayer of Faith

FEBRUARY 29, 2024

Read: 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

Judah's King Jehoshaphat received word that a great army was marching towards his people. The sheer number of the enemies listed could spell destruction for the nation. Quickly, the king responded by requesting all of Judah to fast and seek the Lord in prayer. Jehoshaphat trusted God more than his military resources.

As Jehoshaphat stood before his people and prayed, he acknowledged God's supremacy, reminded Him of the covenants He had made, mentioned the nation's dependence on the sovereign Lord, explained the current circumstances, and beseeched His assistance. God had promised a land for His people to reside (Deut. 4:38). Enemies now threatened this land.

Jehoshaphat's prayer echoed that of King Solomon who prayed, "... when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel ... then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive, and deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts" (2 Chron. 6:28-29, NIV). Jehoshaphat sought to follow God as earlier righteous kings had. Now, he needed deliverance for his people.

Immediately, the Lord's Spirit came over Jahaziel with God's response. The people would only need to march towards the enemy and not fight at all, for "the LORD will be with you." (2 Chron. 20:17) As they marched the next day, the king appointed singers to lead the people to worship along their march. When they finally arrived at their destination, they saw the enemy was already vanquished.

In recognizing his own weaknesses, Jehoshaphat made a profound statement of faith, "... We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." (v. 12) The king also exhorted his people: "Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld" (v. 20) God answered Judah's prayer swiftly. The Lord acted in a large setting, where many witnesses could recount the events with neighboring nations, further protecting His people. In addition to providing for their safety, God exceeded their expectations by including precious valuables and supplies from the slain forces.

I didn't know this text well. Its simplicity is beautiful. It provides a pattern for us as we pray in times of crisis. Reviewing this story enables me to reflect on times when I went to my community, facing crises. King Jehoshaphat took a three-pronged approach to his problem: fast, face the problem in community, and pray. By not following his example, do I limit my worship of God? –DN

Personal Reflection:

When God has provided opportunities for me to show courage and faith, how have I responded?

Prayer in Crisis

MARCH 1, 2024

Read: Nehemiah 1

“Help me, Lord!” My earliest prayers came in times of perceived crises. Pleas for God’s help on an exam seem silly now. However, such prayers are foundational to understand Who God is and who we are not. We learn that God can handle every situation, and we discover that we are not self-sufficient.

As we mature, our concerns expand. News of natural disasters, wars, and economic hardships weigh us down. Our immediate circles of friends and family often know the pressures of illnesses and more. As Christians, we also care about the missionaries and mission of the church. What should we do in times of crisis? We pray!

God’s people faced a crisis. (Neh. 1) In 586 B.C., the Babylonian empire conquered Judah, destroying Jerusalem and God’s temple. They scattered God’s people throughout the empire. Decades later, the Persians came to power and released the exiles. However, some of God’s people, like Nehemiah, chose to stay, and he found himself serving the current emperor. Nehemiah learned that those who had returned to Jerusalem were in great distress. They were defenseless, disorganized, and destitute. Nehemiah was in a position to ask for help from the king, but such a request could be dangerous. If perceived as disloyal, Nehemiah could forfeit his position or even his life. In this crisis, he prayed!

Nehemiah remembered God’s character, confessed his sin, recounted God’s promises, and finally, asked God for help. (vv. 4-11) Too often, we rush to the request, when we need to begin with remembering Who God is, who we have been, and His precious promises.

During the last three years, the Lord allowed me to be part of a church revitalization. After decades of decline, the congregation was about to close. My first thoughts dwelt on how I could mobilize college students and graduates who lived in the area to assist in bringing this church back to life. It didn’t take long for the impossibilities of the situation and the futility of my efforts to bring me back to prayer. “Help us, Lord!” became our cry. We heard again about God’s faithfulness. We confessed sins, past and present. We meditated on God’s promises, and the Lord answered. He brought new people with the spiritual gifts that He promised His churches. The Lord is reviving His people! God is teaching me to pray and to depend on Him all over again. –MM

Personal Reflection:

“Lord, expand my heart and my prayers. Help me to remember Your character and Your promises. Father, help me!”

Prayer of Intercession

MARCH 2, 2024

Read: Isaiah 63:7 – 64:12

My first attempt at grad school was a disaster. I grossly underestimated the workload of full-time classes and full-time employment. My attempts to get out from under the pressure just made things worse. I was terrified of my professors, and yet they were the only ones with the ability, perspective, and care to get me out of the mess I was in. The shame was too much for me, and I dropped out of the program.

God's people were in a mess. (Isa. 63-64) They had squandered God's love and their position as His chosen people. They were like a small child who lets go of his parent's hand at the store to look at the newest toy and looks up moments later alone and afraid. Fearful repentance was the answer, but what they needed most was God's presence.

The author called back to a specific moment of God's presence that encapsulated the fullness of their present need: Mt. Sinai. (Isa. 64:3) God's presence meant the greatness of His power and His holiness would be brought to bear on the people, presently in sin. No one else could get them out of this mess, and even if it meant being fully exposed, they needed God to come and come swiftly. The prayer ended in desperate uncertainty, wondering if God would be in the present who He had always been in the past. "Did we finally sin too much for you to come and rescue us?"

This is the longing question of Lent: What is God going to do when the fullness of our mess reaches its greatest extent? Will He rescue us again when we fail to obey Him over and over? And if He does come, will it just be in wrath and punishment? The Cross provides us an answer that the writer of our prayer could only see in faith. God see us in our mess, rescues us from our broken lives, and punishes our sin decisively in the work of Christ. This prayer provides us a pattern to extinguish the shame of our sin — remember the faithfulness of God and fully depend on His forgiveness when we cannot see a way out of our mess by ourselves. –SPa

Personal Reflection:

"Where is God asking me to trust in His past faithfulness and present offer of forgiveness? How is shame keeping me from embracing His offer for myself?"

"PRAYING FOR GOD'S CREATION"



ANNABELLE SMITH

SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2024
TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Sin's entrance into the world marred God's creation. Our broken world needs hope, peace, and love. Jesus is our hope. (1 Tim. 1:1) Jesus is our peace. (Eph. 2:14) Jesus loves us. (John 15:12-13) The world needs Jesus.

Think about the people you know—family, friends, neighbors, fellow students, colleagues. Who needs Jesus? Pray for each of these people by name that the Lord would "... open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in [Jesus]." (Acts 26:18, NLT)

ENTERING A NEW WEEK PRAYING FOR...

Prayer for Justice

MARCH 4, 2024

Read: Jeremiah 10:23-25

“The die is cast. The roar you’ll hear,” proclaimed Jeremiah to Judah, “is the coming of the Babylonians God has raised up in judgment for your perpetually sinful ways.” Since Judah had refused to listen, God’s patience had worn thin, and His discipline was imminent.

Jeremiah’s fate was also sealed with this terrifying revelation. What did he do? Flee? Wallow in self-pity? No, he prayed.

Jeremiah understood that though he had been God’s messenger, he could not escape a shared fate with his people. He would be swept up in the coming judgment, and neither he nor Judah could stop their outcomes. Events, good or bad, sometimes happen to people for which they have no control. The prophet admitted “a person’s way is not in himself” nor can a person completely “direct his steps.” (v. 23, NASB) Though he spoke in the first person, Jeremiah also had in mind Judah. God’s course was set, the Babylonians were restless, and all would pay the price.

Next, rather than challenging God’s seeming unfairness toward him, Jeremiah beseeched God that if he shared Judah’s fate, “correct me ... with justice; not with Your anger, or You will bring me to nothing.” (v. 24) If God chastised in anger, Jeremiah, and by extension Judah, would be obliterated; yet with justice, they could be spared and valued once again.

Jeremiah concluded with an understanding that God had a right to be angry, but He should “pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know you,” the mockers, and those who “have devoured Jacob.” (v. 25) These were the ones truly deserving of His wrath. If Jeremiah only knew at this point what God was planning, for the Babylonians too would learn that “a person’s way is not in himself.”

Pre-exile, the circumstances were dire. The northerners were looking to conquer. Judah buried its head, trusting in themselves, their leaders, and their alliances to save them. Jeremiah pleaded to no avail. Yet, amid this mess, God was fashioning His plan, and He would not be thwarted.

God later revealed the promise. His people would again have “a future and a hope,” (29:11) and He “will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... and Judah.” (31:31) What a glorious day! –StP

Personal Reflection:

In what recent experience have I perceived God was being unfair? How did I react? When was my life chaotic, and my sense of hope challenged, yet God prevailed, and I witnessed His higher purpose in my discomfort?

Prayer of Confession-Intercession

MARCH 5, 2024

Read: Daniel 9:3-19

How do you intercede for others? Do you confess sins on their behalf? Octogenarian prophet Daniel interceded for the nation of Israel because he felt burdened by his people's sins. He knew their greatest need was seeking God's forgiveness.

Daniel believed God's promise given to the prophet Jeremiah: Judah would return from Babylonian exile after 70 years. Those years had almost passed. Daniel now prayed fervently on behalf of fellow Israelites, humbling himself before God with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

The prophet praised God, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments." (v. 4, ESV) He acknowledged the Lord's righteousness, mercy, and forgiveness (vv. 7, 9).

Honest confession followed, "... we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments ... we have rebelled ... and have not obeyed" (vv. 5-6, 9-10) Despite the disaster that had come upon Israel, Daniel described it as God's just punishment. (v. 14)

Finally, Daniel pled for God's deliverance, basing his plea on the Lord's mercy — not on His people's righteousness. He prayed urgently: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not" (v. 19) God honored Daniel's contrite intercession. The Israelites would return to Judah.

This prayer amazes me. Daniel, whom God described as a righteous man along with Noah and Job (Ezek. 14:14), identified himself with his people's sin, confessing it as his own. He lived without compromise, yet he took his fellow Israelites' sins on himself because he was a part of that sinful nation.

I have studied this passage in several Bible studies. Some participants thought it wrong to confess our nation's sins, for example. Their vehemence reminded me of the Pharisee who declared, "Thank God, I am not a sinner like everyone else." (Luke 18:11, TLB) Why do we feel uncomfortable identifying with corporate sins? We are all sinners.

Our Savior offered the greatest identification. Though sinless, "He was counted as a sinner, and he bore the sins of many ... and he pled with God for sinners." (Isa. 53:12, TLB) "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21, ESV) –SG

Personal Reflection:

"Lord Jesus, thank You for bearing my sins and forgiving me. Teach me how to intercede for my family, church, denomination, and nation — identifying with their sins, knowing their greatest need is seeking Your forgiveness."

Prayer of Hope

MARCH 6, 2024

Read: Psalm 71

The root of all sin is pride: the belief that we can and desire to do things on our own, that we are on an equal playing field with God, and that we are above needing the help of the One who is sovereign over all things. How fitting that the psalmist begins this prayer by unashamedly proclaiming trust and reliance upon the Lord — a contrast to our prideful independence.

The psalmist turned to the Lord for help in his time of need. He affirmed his confidence in the Lord by giving testimony to what the Lord has been, is, and will continue to be. I find this convicting because oftentimes my prayers consist of complaints, frustrations, wants, or worries. I question whether God will answer my prayers. If I shaped my prayers by unwavering trust in the One the Lord continually proves Himself to be — my strong refuge (v. 7), I will have confidence that He does answer my prayers. I will also remember the Lord will accomplish more than I could ever ask or imagine.

The psalmists frequently spoke of needing help or deliverance from a physical enemy that was attempting to conquer. Our location and modern context make it difficult to empathize with their need. Yet, the psalmist's plea "do not be far from me, my God," (v. 12, NIV) is a prayer that should be a regular part of any believer's prayer life. The nearness of the Lord assures us of His guiding presence and helps us understand our dependence upon Him. Experiencing the nearness of the Lord helps us see more clearly the ways the Lord provides, blesses, and saves. He is our hope (v. 5).

Above all, our response to our God of mighty acts (v. 16) and marvelous deeds (v. 17) should be one of praise (v. 23) and a desire to tell others of His righteous acts (v. 24).

When reading the psalms, a hymn or song often comes to mind. Throughout the writing of this devotional, "The Lord is My Salvation" was that song. The lyrics, melody, and accompaniment of this song have always captivated me, but worshipping alongside brothers and sisters and declaring the chorus together powerfully witness to Who God is and what He has accomplished for us. –BJ

*Who is like the Lord our God?
Strong to save, faithful in love
My debt is paid, and the victory won
The Lord is my salvation.*

Personal Reflection:

"Lord, help me pray with unwavering trust in Who You have been, are, and will continue to be."

Prayer of Thanks

MARCH 7, 2024

Read: Jonah 2

Out of all the prophets, Jonah was not the prophet to aspire to imitate. The Book of Jonah begins with Jonah getting a mission from the Lord to go to the great city of Nineveh for His glory. God wanted Jonah to preach “against [Nineveh] because its wickedness” had “come up before” Him. (Jonah 1:1, NIV) Jonah responded by fleeing in the opposite direction — to Tarshish. Though Jonah fled, the Lord pursued the prophet. He extended mercy and grace to Jonah by allowing a great fish to swallow him up rather than perishing in the ocean.

As Jonah was in the fish, he responded by praying. His prayer tells us about a Lord Who rescues those who call out to Him. The prophet realized that the Lord was the One sovereign over his whole situation. The Lord had cast him into the ocean and made this fish swallow him. Though his situation was not ideal, it was more ideal than death. Jonah was grateful for that. He recognized his current situation as gracious and merciful, and he lifted a voice of thanksgiving because of it. Jonah remembered the Lord amidst his self-inflicted consequences.

The Lord responded to Jonah with undeserved grace, mercy, and compassion. Jonah knew that he had messed up, but the Lord did not give up on him or the Ninevites. He doesn't give up on us either when we mess up.

We could critique a lot of things about Jonah's prayer. We can see later how his heart was still in a place of judgment for the “other.” He recognized that he had received grace and mercy from the Lord, but he was still unwilling to extend it to the Ninevites. However, what matters is that God met Jonah right where he was, and the prophet prayed right where he was.

Our prayers in different seasons of our walk with Jesus can reveal the state of our hearts to ourselves, but the Lord already knows our heart before we even pray these prayers. He always responds with grace and mercy. He always looks upon us, seeing us as His child. And, He is always faithful to continue to shape our hearts to look more like His. –RS

Personal Reflection:

“Father, let me be challenged to always see with eyes of thanksgiving in every circumstance. Help me in my brokenness praise You.”

Prayers of Trust Upon an Angry Sea

MARCH 8, 2024

Read: Matthew 14:22-33

After Jesus had received news of the execution of John the Baptist, He went with the disciples by boat to a secluded place, but the crowds followed Him. Jesus sent the disciples away in the boat to cross to the other side of the sea while He finished working with the crowds. After praying alone, He walked across the sea to meet His disciples in the boat.

While the disciples were battling a strong wind and waves in their boat, they saw Jesus coming across the water. Since John the Baptist had recently been executed and human beings don't normally walk on water, they understandably jumped to the conclusion that Jesus had been executed and His ghost was visiting them. But Jesus calmed their fears.

Peter gathered his faith and asked to meet Jesus upon the waves. Leaving the other disciples behind, Peter walked toward Jesus upon the sea, but the intensity of the wind frightened him, and he began to sink. He scarcely had time to scream for help before Jesus lifted him from the water. Then, they walked back to the boat together.

If you went to church as a child, you may have the impression that Jesus likes to scold His followers. For example, the way the children's song, "Zacchaeus," is often performed, children use a scolding tone (often accompanied by a wagging finger and stomped foot) to voice Jesus telling Zacchaeus "YOU COME DOWN" from the sycamore tree. However, the biblical account (Luke 19:1-10) has no hint of scolding or displeasure from Jesus. Similarly, many assume Jesus scolded Peter for his fear when He sank into the waves. But that doesn't make much sense when we consider the other disciples who were both afraid and unwilling to step out of the boat and walk to Jesus. Instead, Jesus was giving Peter some gentle guidance to prepare him for the next time he stepped out in faith, since we know Jesus wants His disciples to do the things He does.

This passage has two prayers. The first is the bold request to walk upon the sea to Jesus. The second is the fearful cry for rescue. Jesus was pleased to respond to both. –WM

Personal Reflection:

"Jesus show me what You are doing in my neighborhood. Give me the courage to walk with You in ways that are impossible by my own means and abilities. Give me the faith to cry out for rescue and correction when my focus wavers. Teach me to trust you in all things. Amen."

Prayer for Healing

MARCH 9, 2024

Read: Matthew 20:29-34

The prayer of the two blind men is one of sight, mercy, and ultimately healing. While these two men cried out for physical sight, we pray for the Lord to open our eyes to see Him. We desire to see Who He is, not in the sense of physical blindness or literally see Him, but to see Him above all. We pray to not let other things distract us from knowing Him.

My favorite verses show how much we need Jesus and how to follow Him.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2, NIV)

One way that I fix my eyes on Jesus and really see Him is through the people at University Baptist Church. I have looked up to so many people at this church who have shaped me into the Christian I am today. My great cloud of witnesses includes: Youanna, for coming up with a new and amazing Sunday school lesson every week for the youth girls; Jason, for encouraging me and showing me what a dedicated Christian looks like; Martha, for inspiring my love for kids and helping at the church; and April, for coming to camp with me and helping me make my decision to get baptized.

My decision to follow Jesus is rooted in His mercy, for it shows me my need to know Jesus and His never-ending grace. Believing in Jesus and His sacrifice for me means that I am healed. I am no longer spiritually blind. We are all like the blind men crying out for mercy and healing because we need Jesus. The men asked Jesus for His help and healing in a literal, physical sense, but we need healing from Jesus spiritually. We receive this healing by asking for forgiveness of our sins.

Imagine if Jesus asked you: "What do you want me to do for you?" How would you respond? –GBC

Personal Reflection:

"Lord Jesus, thank You for giving me Your mercy. Thank You for Your love that heals me by forgiving me of my sins. Give me the sight to see You above everything else in my earthly life."

"GIVING THANKS TO GOD"



DAVIS SIMON

SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2024
TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” (Ps. 118:24, ESV) Pour out your gratitude to God in prayer this Sunday morning. Thank Him for the freedom to gather and worship as we please, and intercede for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who do not have this privilege. Throughout this Lent season, thank our Heavenly Father for all the spiritual blessings He has given us in our Lord Jesus Christ.

ENTERING A NEW WEEK PRAYING FOR...

Prayers of Pride and Humility

MARCH 11, 2024

Read: Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told a parable of two completely opposite men of Jewish society: one being the revered Pharisee and the other a pariah, the tax collector. They both went to the Temple to pray, but there the similarities stop.

The Pharisee, a name meaning “separated,” probably went to a prominent area in the Temple and prayed. However, the words seem less directed toward the Lord and more for the attention of others. “God, I thank you that I am not like other people.” (v. 11, NIV) It was a prayer of thanks, but also an opportunity for the Pharisee to exalt himself over others, including the nearby tax collector. He congratulated himself on his deeds and even supported this claim with his accomplishments. He regularly went beyond the Law of Moses, fasting twice a week and giving tithes of all his possessions, beyond the requirements. This man felt he had peaked by all legalist standards.

In stark comparison, the tax collector pulled himself aside. He took a posture of shame before God. As he prayed, he beat his chest at the sheer grief from the unnamed sins he had committed. He pleaded, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” (v. 13)

Jesus finished the parable by stating the tax collector who humbled himself was the one who would be exalted, not the Pharisee.

In the thought of the time, the Pharisee who accomplished such great deeds in adherence to the law should receive admirable final judgment. However, God wishes for a people who “will humble themselves and pray and seek my face” and in exchange the Lord, “will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (2 Chron. 7:14) The Pharisee wanted no part of humility, and thus no part of the forgiveness of sin or the healing of Israel. The Pharisee wanted only the social display, and that was what he got.

All have sinned and fallen short. God sees all sin as equally detestable. All need forgiveness. Some people believe we are prepared for God’s judgment by our actions in Kingdom work. We serve on committees, or make ourselves available for prayer, or find places of service on Sunday mornings. Those actions do not save us. Only by the grace freely given by God, through the sacrifice of His Son, are we saved. –DN

Personal Reflection:

Why am I serving? Do I serve with humility or for recognition? When I notice others struggling, am I quick to criticize, or do I come alongside and support them? Do I leave worship unchanged like the Pharisee?

Prayer for Disciples

MARCH 12, 2024

Read: John 17:6-26

Have you ever been prayed over? It's a particularly moving experience for a godly person (or godly people) to pray aloud for you. It is also incredibly meaningful to hear the words being spoken to God on your behalf. These prayers often encourage and challenge us at the same time. And, we know that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." (James 5:16, NIV)

In John 17, Jesus prayed out loud for His disciples after the Last Supper and before the Garden of Gethsemane. They had certainly already had a confusing evening, with much worse yet to come. The disciples had started the Passover meal with an inversion of everything they thought they knew about servanthood. After that foot-washing incident, Jesus talked about betrayal and persecution, mixed in with words of comfort and encouragement.

Eventually, Jesus prayed, first for Himself, and then for the disciples. It's hard to know how much they could have understood in that moment. Surely their heads were already swimming with talk about vines and branches, roosters crowing, and bread and wine as Jesus's body and blood. But, in this prayer Jesus asked for some interesting things.

He asked that his disciples be sanctified by the truth. (v. 17) He asked that they would be brought to complete unity. (v. 23) He asked for their protection from the evil one. (v. 15) He asked that those for whom He was praying would see His glory. (v. 24)

What's particularly interesting is that He wasn't just praying for the eleven men with Him at that time. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." (v. 20) Jesus was praying for us! Those of us reading these words in 2024 who believe in Jesus do so through the message of the disciples.

So, not only did those followers of Jesus have the experience of the world's only perfect Man interceding for them, but we do too! We didn't get the experience of hearing it out loud (I don't speak Aramaic anyway.), but we can read the words that He spoke. We can be encouraged that they were (and are) "powerful and effective." –AuP

Personal Reflection

"Father, I ask that You align my priorities with those of Jesus. May I always seek sanctification in truth and unity in love. Let me see Your glory and protect me from the evil one. Let Your love fill me and other believers. Amen."

Prayer of Intimacy

MARCH 13, 2024

Read: Psalm 139

In 2021 I rescued a dog that I didn't need, but in a moment of impulse I caved. Instantly, this puppy was giving me a run for my money. He was small enough to hide under my bed, barely out of reach, when he knew he had been naughty. It was a constant game of him hiding and me coaxing him out. Eventually he got too big to hide under the bed and would get stuck. Though frustrating, I always helped him out, hoping he'd remember. Didn't he realize the person he was hiding from rescued him every time?

Even humans have gone to extreme measures to hide from God. Adam and Eve felt shame and covered their nakedness; Jonah jumped on a ship and ended up in a fish's belly; David orchestrated Uriah's death to cover up his adultery.

So, when David, sinful like you and I, prayed the prayer, "Search me, O God," and truly meant it, his example is noteworthy. David's prayer was bold and vulnerable. He asked God to reveal his sin, and he rejoiced and marveled that God knew him so intimately. So, David listened and learned of a better, God-intended path that leads to abundance. When we flee from the Lord, we miss out on abundant life and the purpose He has for us.

Most of us probably land in one of two camps with God's intimacy. Either the idea that the Lord knows everything about us — "when we sit and when we rise" — brings a sense of comfort or anxiety. The thought of Him "hemming us in, behind and before" makes us feel safe or trapped. We should have great comfort and peace in knowing that God sees us for who we are and loves us anyway. But sometimes guilt and shame take hold and the thought of opening ourselves up for examination and instruction feels too heavy. We see intimacy as judgment instead of love.

God knows us better than we know ourselves — our thoughts, intentions, tendencies. He knows what we do when no one else is watching — good and bad, actively and passively. Nothing surprises Him. He's our Savior for a reason. We need saving every day. He has trapped us, but in the best way. We can't escape His presence, and it's for our own protection. He pulls us out of hiding, loving us since the day we were created. –SJ

Personal reflection:

What parts of myself am I trying to hide from God? How would my life differ if I prayed Psalm 139 daily?

Prayer for Boldness

MARCH 14, 2024

Read: Acts 4:23-31

“They’re coming to arrest you tomorrow!”

A close friend of mine heard these words when talking to his wife on the satellite phone after spending three days in an unreachable indigenous village. He had been careful to get written permission from the chief of the village to be there, but apparently an organization in town was very much against the idea.

After spending some time in prayer, my friend and his disciple/friend felt that they should continue with the original plan — head back to town the following day. They loaded up and set out on the nine-hour boat ride, and sure enough, about halfway back, they encountered a boat stopped in the middle of the river, loaded with very hostile men. The two believers explained how they had gotten the necessary permissions, but the unfriendly men responded, “You didn’t get permission from us! If you’re not in our office at 9:00 a.m. tomorrow, we will arrest you!”

My friend and his disciple spent the rest of that day in prayer and fasting. They felt that the Lord simply said, “I will give you the words to say.” So, they went in the next day where about 10 angry men were waiting for them. They sat silently as those men accused them of many things, all of which were false. My friend was about to stand up, when his disciple stood up and said, “I am from the village where we visited. We obtained permission from the chief and elders to be there. We didn’t know that we needed your permission as well. If we have done something wrong, we are sorry, and we ask for your forgiveness.”

When this indigenous Christian asked for forgiveness, the tension in the room seemed to melt away, and my friend was able to share a soda with those men. He even shared God’s vision of salvation with all who were present.

I was so impacted by this story because so often I feel compelled to pray for safety in scary situations. But that’s not what my friend did in the incident just described. That’s not what the early church did in Acts when Jewish authorities told them not to share about Jesus. Instead, they prayed for boldness to share even more! “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken.” (v. 31, NIV) As we pray for boldness to proclaim Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit moves with great power! –MK

Personal Reflection:

How often do I pray for boldness to proclaim Jesus Christ?

Prayer for Enemies

MARCH 15, 2024

Read: Acts 7:54-60

Imagine, for a moment, that the only thing non-believers knew of Christianity was that their martyrs called upon God not to curse or destroy those who would torture and kill them, but to bless and forgive them. What is this religion in which these people love those who hate them, even when facing death at their hands?

The story of Stephen's murder is powerful. His prayer for his executioners seems exceptional to us, but should it? Was he not simply obeying Jesus' command to love his enemies and pray for his persecutors? (Matt. 5:44) If asked why he loved his enemies as they killed him, he likely would have said, "That's what Jesus does." This is a central and non-negotiable part of Jesus' teaching and work, and Stephen was just obeying it.

Trust that God works through your obedience as you love your enemies. He has shown over and over again in the Bible that loving your enemies can bring about profound and unforeseeable good. Consider this: Before you were made new in Christ, you were God's enemy. (Rom. 5:6-10) Had Jesus not loved you enough to empty Himself of divine privileges and become a servant-sacrifice for us, you would still be an enemy of God without hope. The salvation we now have in Christ is because He loved His enemies.

Because Stephen loved his enemies enough to share the truth of Jesus with them, Saul the persecutor's life was forever changed. Stephen's sermon so affected Saul's heart that he remembered every single word as he recounted the story to Luke years later. Is it possible that without Stephen's love and prayer for his enemies' forgiveness the greatest missionary ever recorded might have never have come to know the Lord? We will never know, but we can conclude this: loving your enemies leads to unimaginable good.

Praying for your enemies today may require you to ask God to help you see others the way Jesus and Stephen did: as created souls who bear the image of God, who are lost but loved by their Creator. Your Father loves them. His Son died for them. Can you, then, with love in your heart, pray for them? –DH

Personal Reflection:

"Lord, help me to love the people you created the same way that You love them. Help me to see them the way Jesus sees them, so that I may love them, especially when they hate me and hurt me. Forgive them, Lord. Bring them to Jesus. In His name, Amen."

Prayer for Unity

MARCH 16, 2024

Read: Romans 15:1-6

Christ is the means and mediator of believers' unity because He is our peace (Eph. 2:14), Reconciler (2 Cor. 5:18), and Redeemer (Eph. 1:7). Paul's prayer for unity among believers derives from the unity all believers receive as part of salvation — their union with Christ. Our harmony with fellow believers results from our union with Jesus (1 Cor. 12:13, 27). Oneness with other believers is interwoven with our identity in Christ.

Paul based his prayer for believers' unity on our self-denial on behalf of fellow believers (15:1-2). The key to Christian unity is the humility of mind that comes from regarding "one another as more important than yourselves." (Phil. 2:3, NASB) Unity of believers has a Christ-centered focus (15:5) because we must have the mind of Christ to attain such harmony. (Phil. 2:5) God provides perseverance and encouragement to have the "same mind with one another." Believers' unity glorifies God the Father and serves as a visible sign of doctrinal stability and spiritual maturity. (15:5-6)

Since the act of edification (15:1-2), writing of the Scripture (15:4), and glorifying God (15:6) relate to the Holy Spirit's ministry, these verses imply a trinitarian focus on unity without mentioning the Spirit. God the Father is the source, nature, and center of unity. (John 17:22-24) Christ, as the Revealer and Redeemer, mediates the unity between believers and the Trinity. The Spirit unites each believer with the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:13) Believers' exercise of unity is God-centered, Christ-centered, and Spirit-empowered. Diversity often makes it difficult to get along with others. Awareness of our identity in Christ is essential for us to have the "same mind with one another." (15:5)

The unity of believers begins with the high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17. Jesus expected a future community (the church) through the ministry of His disciples. He envisioned a visible unity to be manifested within that community, "that they may all be one." This unity should follow the pattern of the unity between Jesus and His Father, "even as you, Father, are in me and I in you." The goal of unity is missional, "so that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:21)

With divisions within and without today's churches, we too must pray as Paul did, "Lord, help us reflect the mind of Christ that we may live in complete harmony with one another." –PCS

Personal Reflection:

Does my life reflect the mind of Christ, enabling me to get along with every believer as part of one body, the body of Christ?

"LIFTING ARMS IN PRAYERFUL PRAISE"



LAUREL JONES

SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2024
TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

What does it look like when you pray? Try different prayer postures this week, such as kneeling, standing with arms uplifted, standing with arms outstretched to form a cross, sitting and holding your hands on your lap with your palms facing up, lying prostrate on the floor, sitting in a dark enclosed area. How does your posture and actions affect your praying and your relationship with God?

ENTERING A NEW WEEK PRAYING FOR...

Prayers for Relief

MARCH 18, 2024

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

We live in a fallen world, where things are not the way they should be. The fragility of our bodies reminds us we have little control over life and death. The social, economic, and political systems of the world exercise communal powers that often bring destruction and suffering to the weakest persons in societies around the globe. No one escapes at least some level of pain and suffering, no matter how powerful or privileged he or she might be. The Apostle Paul was no different.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul briefly referenced a “thorn in the flesh” that was an unnamed physical, spiritual, or emotional affliction. And because pain has a way of focusing the mind and reordering priorities, it humbled Paul. On at least three occasions, Paul engaged in a season of prayer and begged God for permanent relief. But God showed Paul that when he was conscious of his weakness, God’s divine power and authority were manifested. In a similar way, Jesus learned obedience to the Father from the things which He suffered. (Heb. 5:8) Jesus, even though He was the Son of God, had to purposefully align Himself with the Kingdom (rule and authority) of God. That alignment represents much of the significance of His baptism and the wilderness temptations.

Contrary to popular teaching, the focus of the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament is not about “going to Heaven,” but about entering into and living in the eternal Kingdom of God. Active obedience to the way of Jesus prepares us for the day when Jesus will return and set the world right again. We must learn to trust God’s grace and live righteously so we will be prepared to live in a world conformed to God’s character.

In Christ, suffering can be an aid to moral and spiritual transformation. The experience of suffering gives us the needed empathy and authority to meaningfully serve others who are going through a similar ordeal. Pain does not have the last word, and sickness and death are not the end. One day death will be swallowed up in victory, and its sting will end. (1 Cor. 15:54-55) Until then, we persevere in obedience, knowing our temporary afflictions are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comprehension. (2 Cor. 4:17) –WM

Personal Reflection:

“Lord Jesus, help us recognize that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will eventually be revealed to us. Give us grace to persevere so that we may share in your glory.” (Rom. 8:18)

Prayer for Spiritual Understanding

MARCH 19, 2024

Read: Ephesians 1:15-23

After my freshmen year of college, I felt stuck. I'd made some bad grades, didn't like my major, and wasn't sure what to do. After lots of worry and stress, I finally cried out to God, "Help me! I need some understanding for my situation!"

Each day we encounter choices that require understanding so we can make good decisions. Maybe it's a new job opportunity, or a decision about what school to attend, or how to care for a family member in need.

So, what should we do when we need understanding?

According to Paul, a follower of Jesus who wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus, when we need understanding, we should ask God for help.

Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus, "asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you *spiritual wisdom and insight* so that you might grow in your knowledge of God." (Eph. 1:17, NLT, italics added)

Just like us, the people in ancient Ephesus needed understanding as followers of Jesus. But notice, Paul did not pray for them to simply make good choices. Instead, he prayed that they would know God more deeply.

Knowing God more deeply is about growing closer to Him. It's about living according to His will, and not our own. It's about submitting our lives to Him and allowing His Spirit to direct and guide our circumstances.

The more deeply we know God, the more we grow in spiritual wisdom and knowledge, enabling us to live according to God's will. (v. 17) The more we live in His light, the more confident hope we have in Christ's power, giving us strength to overcome our worries and challenges. (vv. 18-21) The more we understand Christ's authority, the more we experience His love for us as His church, giving us fulfillment and meaning in a world of longing and desire. (vv. 22-23)

Over that summer I spent lots of time with God. As I grew closer to Him, I understood more about His love for me and will for my life. Through that closer relationship with God, I grew in spiritual understanding that enabled me to make the right decisions for the next steps in my journey.

Do you need understanding today? Pray Ephesians 1:15-23 over yourself. Then, pray this same prayer over someone else in your life who also needs spiritual understanding. –TW

Personal Reflection:

"Father, give me spiritual wisdom and insight that I might grow in my knowledge of You and love You more."

Prayer for Spiritual Power

MARCH 20, 2024

Read: Ephesians 3:14-21

“Instead of constantly praying for your children to be happy, pray for them to be strong,” proclaimed the conference speaker. I don’t remember who spoke those words, but they continue to influence my prayers.

In Ephesians 3, the apostle Paul revealed his heart for a similar message. Still child-like in their faith journey, Paul understood the Christians in Ephesus and Asia Minor faced hardships living in their pagan surroundings. So, he did what we do for our children and loved ones. He prayed.

Paul prayed to the Father for the Christians in Asia Minor to receive strength in the areas most needed for obedience to God’s way — the soul, the heart, and the mind. First, Paul requested that brothers and sisters in Christ receive strength from the power of the Holy Spirit in each one’s inner being — the soul. Next, Paul called for Christ to fully live in each heart. His abundant love provides the power to affect all one’s thoughts and actions. Then, Paul asked for the power to understand with one’s mind this love that goes beyond our knowledge. Though not to be fully gained in this life, the ability to comprehend God’s love grows gradually and quietly.

The spiritual powers for which Paul prayed give Christ’s followers strength for daily living, both then and now. We have the power of hope; we have the power of comfort; we have the power to be used by God beyond our expectations; we have the power to endure; we have the power to be struck down but not destroyed; we have the power to help others in their lives; we have the power to carry the message of Christ to others. We receive numerous other powers from God.

The Lord gifts believers with the opportunity to “be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3:19, NRSV) Life becomes more satisfying when the Holy Spirit, Christ Jesus, and the Father’s divine presence fill your soul, heart, and mind. Your strength is complete, and joy overflows to declare His glory. –RP

Personal Reflection:

Ephesians 3:14-21 is my favorite prayer to pour out over others, both Christians and non-believers. I read the Scripture, but each time “you/your” appears, I substitute the name of an individual who currently needs God’s strength and power. Join me now in praying these verses over a specific person you know.

Prayer for Greater Love

MARCH 21, 2024

Read: Philippians 1:9-11

At age 22, I moved 1,000 miles away from home to pursue a graduate degree. My supportive family helped me pack and move. After all, my mom had moved 700 miles from home at the same age for the same reason. Her mom, too, had moved 900 miles from her home to pursue her education. Each of us followed where God led in our lives.

I moved in August. The first time I truly felt the distance between us came at Thanksgiving. According to our family tradition, the extended family gathered for the holiday. I loved spending time with this family. When I knew they were all together that Thanksgiving and likely had finished eating, I called to say hello. They passed the phone around to several people, making my heart smile. I wished them each a happy Thanksgiving and a great time together. I wanted their hearts to be full of joy from being together, even if I couldn't be there with them.

Being away from loved ones, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, stirs a longing in the soul. Paul held close in his heart his Christian brothers and sisters in Philippi. While he sat in prison, he remembered the help they offered him and their faith in God. He wrote them a letter to thank and encourage them. His prayer for them (Phil. 1:9-11) sounds like that of a loved one whose physical distance fosters a visceral yearning for their wellbeing.

Paul's love for the Lord stirred in him a desire to know God more. He wanted his Philippian friends to share that desire. The Lord had given Paul a deep love for these believers. He wanted their love for God and for one another to be pure and faultless in a way that attracted others to know and praise Christ.

I want this kind of love for my children also. As they consider their future education, I pray their love for God will enable them to "see the difference between good and bad and choose the good" (v. 10, NCV), prompting them toward an ever-closer relationship with God and greater understanding of His leading in their lives. I pray their choices bring glory to God, both in academics and in their relationships. "Nothing gives me greater joy than to hear that my children are following the way of truth." (3 John 1:4) –KR

Personal Reflection:

"Father, increase my love first for You and then for others. Increase my children's love for You and others also. Let our lives bring You glory."

Prayer for Knowing God's Will

MARCH 22, 2024

Read: Colossians 1:9-14

In my work with college students, one of the most frequent questions I hear is “How do I know God’s will for ... what to major in, whom to marry, what kind of job to take, where to live ...?” These young adults often struggle to feel confident about God’s path for them. They sometimes tell me, “I’ve prayed and prayed, but I’m still not sure. Why won’t God make it clear?” They worry that, even as they seek God, they might miss His plan and end up in the wrong place.

Paul prayed that the church at Colossae would know God’s will. (Col. 1:9-14) Intriguingly, his reasons for this prayer differ from those of my college students. He did not say that the Colossians should know God’s will so they end up in the right place, doing the right job at the right company, or living alongside the right people. Instead, Paul prayed that God fill them with the knowledge of His will so they may live lives pleasing to the Lord. Knowing God’s will is less about getting to the right place than becoming the right person.

Paul told us what a life worthy of God looks like: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in our knowledge of God, being strengthened with God’s power and glorious might, having great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father for qualifying us to inherit Jesus’ kingdom. (vv. 10-14) That is quite a list! I wonder what would happen if, rather than always praying that God show me what to do, I asked Him to help me do these things He has already shown me.

God does reveal His specific will for our lives. But as Romans 12:2 reminds us, we are first transformed, and then we can test and approve His direction. And that transformation comes as we grow in the areas that Paul prayed for in his prayer for the Colossian believers. As we bear fruit, God strengthens us and directs us toward the next fruit-bearing task. As we grow in our knowledge of Him, He guides our thoughts and actions. As we have endurance and patience, He reveals His direction in His time. As we give thanks for our inheritance in Christ, He gives us an eternal perspective to guide us. –VM

Personal Reflection:

How am I praying that I live a life worthy of God and pleasing to Him? How am I praying that God makes me the right person rather than He only gets me to the right place?

Prayer for Increasing Love

MARCH 23, 2024

Read: 1 Thessalonians 3: 11-13

Think about those you love, preferably those outside your immediate family. Do you know this kind of love that Paul talked about — love that increases and overflows?

Paul focused on love in 1 Thessalonians because he wanted the church to know how fundamental our love for others is, not only for fellow believers, but also for all people. (v. 11) Jesus talked about this love, “By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35, ESV) Our love for one another is a mark of the church and a mark of our new selves in Christ. So, how are you loving others? More specifically, how are you loving those who don’t look like you? Or don’t believe what you do? Or those that might be “hard” for you to be around?

I hope these questions help you take an honest look at your heart. All of us will, at some point, be challenged to love individuals who might be “hard” for us to love well — a friend, a colleague, another believer, or even a family member. When that moment arises, look to Paul’s example and pray. Pray for these persons. Pray that your love for them would increase and overflow. Pray for hearts to be strengthened so that they will be blameless and holy when Christ comes again.

When things get difficult in any relationship, I challenge you to lean “in” instead of “out.” That may look different depending on the circumstances and the need to set healthy boundaries, but don’t forget how Jesus calls us to love others radically. Would the person in your difficult relationship, if asked, know that you are a follower of Christ because of your love? Would others observing that relationship know that you are a follower of Christ? If the answer to these questions is “no,” then pray. Pray that your love would abound for that individual. Pray for the Lord to strengthen your heart.

I believe our love for Christ is especially apparent in how we love those who are different than ourselves. So, believers, my reminder and challenge for you is this: Love others the way that Jesus has loved you, even when things aren’t “pretty” according to the world’s standards. By this, the world will know you belong to Him. –EH

Personal Reflection:

“Lord, thank You for how You love me. Show me how to love others well. I pray that the world will know I belong to You because of how I love others. Amen.”

"THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE"



PETER LINTZ

SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2024
TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He anticipated the suffering He would endure within hours. Yet, He bore that pain and humiliation, taking the deserved punishment for our sins, because He loves us.

Enter a time of confession, humbling yourself before the Lord who loves you and makes your forgiveness possible. As you end your prayer, surrender yourself anew to the Lord and ask Him for a willingness to affirm each day, "Savior, not my will but Yours be done."

ENTERING A NEW WEEK PRAYING FOR...

Prayer for God's Equipping

MARCH 25, 2024

Read: Hebrews 13:20-21

This benediction to the Book of Hebrews demonstrates our need for God to equip us to do His will. We cannot do His will by our own strength; we are too weak. Before you approach Him today to ask Him to equip you for His ministry, consider the disposition with which the “God of peace” looks upon you.

Imagine a caring mother who strokes the hair of her young son as he drifts to sleep, or a tender father who looks into the eyes of his daughter before kissing her goodnight. Each looks upon their child in these moments with great peace towards them. They don't dwell on their children's shortcomings or the challenges of parenting. The children approach their parents freely for any reason without hesitation, and they inherently trust their parents to equip them to succeed in every situation.

As a father to his child, God looks upon you with peace. He has offered you peace, true peace that only comes through being reconciled to God. He provided reconciliation by sending and putting to death the great Shepherd of the sheep. The God of peace now looks upon you with the love of an approachable Father because your sins have been cleansed by Jesus' blood. He does not hold your shortcomings, disobedience, and tendency to serve yourself against you. You can approach Him freely in all things and without fear because Jesus bought that peace for you with His blood.

Now, if earthly parents know how to equip their children for success, how much more richly will the God of peace equip you to succeed in doing His will if you ask? (See Matt. 7:11.) So, approach Him boldly and freely today like His child (that you are), ready to offer all of yourself to Him to be equipped and used for His kingdom work however He pleases. Ask Him, “what do You want me to do today, Lord?” and trust that in Jesus, He will equip you to handle whatever answer He gives. –DH

Personal Reflection:

“Lord, am I open to being equipped to do Your will? Am I prepared to ask, ‘What do You want me to do today?’ knowing that You will answer me? Do I trust that You will give me what I need to obey You fully, even if Your answer takes me far outside my comfort zone? I need You now as much as ever, Lord. In Jesus' name, use me however You want. Amen.”

Prayer of Surrender

MARCH 26, 2024

Read: Luke 22:39-46

We all have a “usual”: the food we *always* get at the restaurant we *always* go to. It’s safe, consistent, familiar. For me, it’s a black americano (espresso and hot water) from any coffee shop. “Usuals” show up in other ways, too. The “usual” people we spend time with. The “usual” routine we follow. The “usual” places we go. It’s “usually” rather mundane to recount the “usual.” Jesus, however, shows us the power of “usual.”

In this passage, Jesus was in a familiar garden, His knees bent under the weight of eternity. Jesus' earthly ministry — indeed all of history — was building to crescendo in this moment. With complete understanding of the moment's enormity, Jesus did something unexpected — He chose the “usual.” (v. 39)

What “usual” could be fitting for this King of kings? We expect a palace; He knelt in ruts worn by His own knees. We expect angel armies; He rallied sleeping disciples from their slumber. We expect an eloquent soliloquy; He uttered only a single recorded sentence.

Jesus opened His prayer with the language of familiarity: “Father.” Close one. Dear one. My “usual.” He requested from that familiarity: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.” (v. 42, NIV) Jesus knew the Father cared about Him because He had been with Jesus for the grand and the “usual.” In this unrivaled struggle, we see how consistent, “usual” acts are deeply formative.

Most of us believe we will be ready for the big things that happen. The athlete who wins the championship, though, does so on the back of thousands of unseen hours of practice. The couple weathering the cancer diagnosis do so from the strength of having weathered countless dark nights together. Faithfulness in the “usual,” the mundane, prepares us for times when things are unusual — when they are new, different, even tremendously hard.

The goal of such faithfulness, as Jesus demonstrated here, is surrender. When we go to God, we can present our requests with full assurance that they are heard. When He is our “usual,” we can surrender to trust, laying down our need for control and saying, “yet not my will, but Yours be done.” –JS

Personal Reflection:

Is God my “usual?” Is living by the Spirit a daily reality or an unusual request? Will I commit today to showing up to a “usual” place to spend time with the Lord? “Father, help me to surrender to trust — not my will, but Yours be done.”

Prayer of Forgiveness

MARCH 27, 2024

Read: Luke 23:33-45

The crucifixion story is very gruesome. When watching this scene in any of the movies that have dramatized the Gospels' account, it brings tears to your eyes. Their depiction makes more real what happened to Jesus on behalf of our sins.

Many things were going on in front of Jesus while He suffered on the cross. The soldiers mocked Him. The crowd hurled insults at Him. A few of Jesus's followers were watching at a distance while the crowd yelled at Him and agreed to His crucifixion. The soldiers cast lots to see who would receive His clothes. The rulers, soldiers, and even one of the two criminals who was crucified with Jesus sneered at Him. All were yelling the same insult, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (v. 39, ESV)

Anyone but God would have looked down from the cross and said that all those people were ungrateful and didn't deserve forgiveness. Bitterness often sets in for individuals because of their unforgiveness and when they hold on to the hurt instead of God. Such people hold strong grudges and resentments against the offender instead of love and compassion. They take justice into their own hands instead of entrusting God with the justice. Over time, the truth of what happened gets distorted, and hurt persons grow cold to the offender.

Yet, on that day, Jesus prayed to God the Father and asked Him to forgive those who were sinning against Him. He asked for all to be forgiven. This included the soldiers, the rulers, and all who sneered at Him to be forgiven. And, He asked for you and me to be forgiven. Jesus did not make exclusions – and we should not either.

Don't let hurt, bitterness, grudges, and resentments stop you from forgiving all who need to be forgiven. Release the hurt to God and trust that He will carry out the justice for you. Praise Christ Jesus for enduring the cross for the forgiveness of all sins. His power is enough to cleanse us from all our sins against Him and our sins against others. His love was so strong that He endured the cross, enabling all to receive forgiveness. –AnP

Personal Reflection:

Am I holding on to unforgiveness, bitterness, or a grudge against someone? "Lord Jesus, I release my hurt to You, and I entrust justice to You. I forgive _____ as You have forgiven me. In Your name, Amen."

Prayer of Despair—and Praise

MARCH 28, 2024

Read: Psalm 22

Have you ever heard someone say after a crisis, “Where was God when this happened? Why did He abandon me?” When have you felt God was distant? Most of us have probably experienced this emotion at some point in our lives. Yet, God is always with us — despite our feelings of abandonment.

Psalm 22 reflects David’s anguish in a time of suffering. God seemed to have abandoned him. He was frustrated that God had apparently not answered his pleas for help. Yet, David also declared his confidence that God would indeed deliver him. He prayed back-and-forth between despair and praise.

During our times of distress, we can also voice our complaints to God. “Why have You deserted me?” We can bluntly tell the Lord about our struggles. With our faith challenged, however, we can also recall God’s character, our past experiences of trusting Him, and how the Lord answered our prayers.

Our prayers can show both urgency and confidence in God’s deliverance. We can admit our own inability to cope. We can ask for God’s nearness. “Do not stay so far from me, for trouble is near, and no one else can help me.” (v. 11, NLT). “O Lord, do not stay far away! You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!” (v. 19) In trust we can affirm that God hears and answers us in our trials. “You answered me!” (v. 21, CSB). We can praise the answering, delivering God, thus encouraging others in their faith.

David’s prayer finds its greater meaning in the innocent, unjust suffering of Jesus. On the cross, Jesus Himself appropriated Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46, NIV) Though Jesus felt forsaken by God, He knew God had not abandoned Him. “For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.” (v. 24, NIV)

The Psalm ends with a ringing affirmation: “He has done it!” (NIV). Jesus’ last words on the cross echo this declaration, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) Despair — even death — gives way to victory and praise!

If God seems to have abandoned us, we keep on praying for His help. He does not forsake us when we struggle. He answers our prayers and gives us reason to praise Him before others. –SG

Personal Reflection:

“Thank You, Father, for not abandoning Jesus during His agony on the cross. Thank You for never abandoning me. I praise You for Your faithful deliverance.”

Prayer of Communion

MARCH 29, 2024

Read: Luke 23:42-46

To dwell in communion with God is our great aim as believers. (Rev. 21:3) Every spiritual discipline has this goal in mind. When we read Scripture, we do so not just to learn about God. He is not an academic subject. He is a Person. He is relational. We read a word that is “living and active.” (Heb. 4:12, ESV) We are with God. This holds true for other disciplines also. For instance, each hunger pang of fasting reminds us that the One who sustains us is closer than the very sustenance we crave. It is nearness to God that changes us.

The reward for the thief who hung on the cross near Jesus gives evidence to this. His prize was neither earthly riches nor bodily deliverance. No, for his faith the thief was rewarded with a “togetherness” with the Savior. (23:43) St. John of the Cross taught that the greatest reward is not the benefits of Jesus, but Jesus Himself.

This is why the cross hurt the disciples so deeply. To love anyone and lose them is a hard burden. But to lose Love Himself — it was a dreadful shock for the disciples. God had walked with them in flesh as Jesus. They had shared all that life brings with the Author of life Himself. Now, He was dying.

In fear and anguish, many of His followers fled the scene. Yet some stayed close, loving deeply enough to risk further hurt. These would hear in Jesus’ final words a prayer which would kindle an eternal hope.

In perfect, righteous submission Jesus bowed on the cross and prayed, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (23:46, NIV) This shows our great hope: there is nothing that can separate the love of God from His children. (Rom. 8:38-39) He is our great reward. He is with us on this side of eternity, as He will be on the next.

The cross sought defeat, but through it the Holy Spirit brought victory. Friday may bring darkness, but take heart — Sunday is coming. —JS

Personal Reflection:

Let me be among You. / Tangled up and engulfed by You; / on Your lap, against Your chest, / surrounded by the fragrance of You. / Satisfied and unsatisfied, / full and yet thirsty, overwhelmed / yet in peace with You — / dancing within Your dance, / singing within Your song, / chasing and embracing You. / I want to be among You, / As You are among You. / Always.

-Strahan Coleman, Prayer Vol. 2

Prayer of Confidence, Not Anxiety

MARCH 30, 2024

Read: Psalm 16; Acts 2:22-33

Psalm 16 is a joyful meditation and a portrait of a life characterized by confidence in God. Reading this brief psalm, we see David found protection in the presence of God, knowing no person, position, or possession he had compared with Him. Moreover, the community of faith (other lovers of God) that surrounded him, brought David joy and confidence.

David contrasted his situation with the plight of those who pursued and worshipped other gods, refusing even to say the names of those gods. David chose God and discovered that God had also chosen him, giving David an inheritance and blessings. God also illuminated his mind, both during the business of the day as well as in his ease at night. Because his focus was on God, he was not shaken or discouraged when life became difficult. David also knew that his body would someday live again.

The Apostle Peter quoted the latter part of Psalm 16 in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:22-33) Peter explained that David had died, and his grave was near to them, but David knew that his descendant, Jesus, would not be held by the grave. And neither will the grave forever hold the bodies of His disciples. (John 5:28-29)

Even more than David, Jesus embodied confidence in the Father and the Spirit. If someone wanted to describe Jesus in just one word, a good choice would be “relaxed.” That doesn’t mean that Jesus didn’t feel the intensity of emotions (joy, grief, and anguish at the appropriate times), but that Jesus was not consumed by anxiety like so many of us today. In the midst of a storm about to swamp the boat, He was asleep (Mark 4:37-38). He took time for people in need, even when He or other people had plans for His time (for instance, Matt. 9:20-22; 14:12-14; 20:29-34). Jesus taught His disciples to have confidence in God instead of being captive to anxiety. (Matt. 6:25-34)

The Apostle Paul, echoing this teaching, stated the truth in this way, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7, ESV).

–WM

Personal Reflection:

“Lord Jesus, give me confidence to face the challenges of life without fear and anxiety. Remind me daily that, by the grace of God, not even death can harm me.”

"THE EMPTY TOMB"



PRISCILLA SANTHOSH

SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024
TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Raise your voice in a prayer of praise on this Resurrection Day. The tomb is empty! Christ the Lord is risen! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

ENTERING A NEW WEEK PRAYING FOR...

PRAYER: NURTURING OUR LIFE IN JESUS

We pray the example of these biblical prayers and those who prayed them inspired you in your own practice of prayer. We pray that they taught, encouraged, and challenged you to get to know God Himself, building your relationship with Him. We pray your soul experienced needed nurture. We trust you understand more clearly that on-going conversations with the Lord help us cultivate our life in Jesus.

Our 40-day “prayer walk” has led us from the darkness of winter to the glory of spring. Our journey through this Lent season ends with the proclamation of the greatest news: He is risen! He is risen indeed! Through our risen Lord Jesus, we ourselves have been brought from death to everlasting life.

How do we respond to this life-changing message? We must commit ourselves each day to this Gospel. Commitment is a daily practice to ensure we experience this new life in Jesus. Is that the response you are willing to make?

We now ask you to spend the next couple of weeks reading through the Key Convictions of our church and prayerfully considering the questions after each one. How will you commit to Jesus this year? Where do you want to grow? How will you serve the body of Christ and your community? As you reflect upon these questions, we hope that you will personally re-commit to following Christ in very practical and meaningful ways.

We also understand that following Christ is not just a personal journey, it’s a communal one. Our prayer is not just for God’s power to be at work in our lives, but in our church. As the Lenten season draws to a close, we further our focus, not just on our commitments as individuals but our commitments as a church. You’ll be hearing more about where God is leading our church and how your personal commitment can be a part of God’s power being unleashed in our lives.

As that day approaches, let us continually nurture our life in Jesus by devoting ourselves to prayer with an alert mind and thankful heart.


Jeremiah Smith

KEY CONVICTIONS

These are the key convictions of our church, the tenets that guide us and lead us in everything we do as we seek to glorify God and be His disciples. We ask that you read these convictions and the reflection questions that follow, and use them as a guide for your own personal growth and commitment for the year.



GOSPEL CENTERED

The central characteristic of UBC is an unwavering commitment to the gospel. The gospel is consistently proclaimed in the weekly services and in the lives of the members. It is a clear expectation that everyone associated with UBC has an opportunity to hear the gospel and be encouraged to share the gospel. *1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11*

Is everything in my life centered on the Gospel?

What areas in my life to I need to re-evaluate to make them more Gospel-centered?



BIBLICALLY GUIDED

We consult the Scriptures and submit to them in all things that we do. We pursue doctrinal integrity to the best of our ability by seeing the Word of God as authoritative and living and active. *2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17*

Am I spending time reading and meditating on God's word consistently?

Am I demonstrating an obedience to God's word with my thoughts and actions?



PRAYER DRIVEN

UBC strives to be a praying church in all aspects of service. We seek to acknowledge that God leads us in all things. Consequently, prayer is essential to who we are and is a core part of our identity. *EPHESIANS 6:18-20*

What areas in my life am I praying to see God's power unleashed?

KEY CONVICTIONS

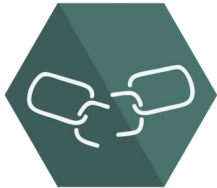


DISCIPLESHIP FOCUSED

Ministry efforts at UBC are anchored in the core principles of discipleship. As seen in the Great Commission, we are committed to go make disciples. We seek to take Gospel to the lost and not wait for the lost to come find us. We pray earnestly for a movement of God that leads to salvation and baptisms among the lost. We also commit to teaching our church family to obey all that He has commanded. In short, this means we are a church that makes disciples who make disciples. MATTHEW 28:18-20; PSALM 67; ACTS 2:41, 47

Am I committed to regularly participating in our three areas of discipleship at UBC — Worship, Sunday Enriched Group and a Discipleship Group?

Am I committed to impacting lostness and nominality by investing in the lives of others? If so, who are those people?



EMPHASIS ON FASTING

Fasting complements and accentuates prayer. It is a physical and holistic response to help facilitate our prayers. Fasting and prayer spotlights God's freedom that sets prisoners free, provides justice and community. ISAIAH 58

Have I committed to set aside one day each month to fast? If not, why?

What steps can I take to move forward in greater commitment and/or understanding of fasting and prayer?



SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

The key theological message of worship is one that adheres to the truths found in Romans 12. Specifically, worship is much more than a weekly expression of a genre of music but a way of life. It is found in a renewed mind and offering ourselves as living sacrifices. UBC seeks to stress this truth in every capacity. ROMANS 12:1-2

Do I live my life as an act of worship?

Read Romans 12 and reflect on what it means to live a life of spiritual worship.

KEY CONVICTIONS



HOLISTIC GIVING

We seek to be a church that gives sacrificially, generously and cheerfully. Rather than emphasizing a financial formula we cultivate an atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to surrender not only their finances to God but all other areas of life as well. As Paul encourages the church in Corinth, we seek to excel in faith, speech, knowledge and earnestness in love, as well as the grace of giving. 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7, 9:7

Am I living a life of radical generosity that is rooted in radical love?

How will I give cheerfully, sacrificially and generously of my time, skills and finances this year?



FAMILIES VALUED

Families are a priority for UBC. We are a church for every stage of life and a church that emphasizes the importance of family. DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

In what ways can I go deeper with my family and spend more intentional time with them this year?

Is God opening my heart to consider fostering, adopting or supporting someone who is?



A LOVING COMMUNITY

UBC is a place for all people. We seek to love everyone who comes through those doors no matter their gender, race, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status or any other delineation by which an individual can be defined. UBC will be a place where all people can come and be well loved. 1 JOHN 4:7-12

Am I committed to a radical and unyielding love for my neighbor, both within and beyond the walls of UBC?

Do I serve my church and community? If not, why?

Thank you

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HELPED MAKE THIS YEAR'S
LENT DEVOTIONAL BOOK POSSIBLE!

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DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO PRAYER WITH AN ALERT
MIND AND A THANKFUL HEART.
COLOSSIANS 4:2 (NLT)