



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 24, 2022

Weekly Prayer: Lord, I want to believe; help my unbelief! Even when I have that sinking feeling, give me the wisdom to turn to you. Give me faith, small as a mustard seed, so that I can be faithful to you, believing in your power to save and that I can share this good news with everyone I meet. Amen.

Monday, April 25

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. The tempter came to him and said, "Since you are God's Son, command these stones to become bread." Jesus replied, "It's written, *People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*" After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*" Jesus replied, "Again it's written, *Don't test the Lord your God.*" Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said, "I'll give you all these if you bow down and worship me." Jesus responded, "Go away, Satan, because it's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*" The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

Observation: God's people, Israel, wandered in the desert for 40 years before they entered the Promised Land. The Israelites gave in to the temptation to distrust God. Jesus, God's son, spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness. He, too, was tempted, but did not succumb. He loved and trusted God, and built his life on the Bible's principles.

Application: Unlike Jesus, you've probably never been tempted to turn stones to bread. The temptation "fit" him—he could use his power to be the political, material kind of messiah most Israelites hoped for. In what ways have you been tempted to use your unique abilities and powers for your own glory and advancement, rather than to bless others and build God's kingdom?

Prayer: Lord, every day I'm tempted to take my eyes off you. Please help me treasure your word enough to learn it and bring it to my mind when I need to resist temptation. Amen.

Tuesday, April 26

Scripture: Hebrews 11:39-12:2

All these people didn't receive what was promised, though they were given approval for their faith. God provided something better for us so they wouldn't be made perfect without us.

So then, with endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne.

Observation: Author Bob Goff said, "The plan to free yourself is simple: keep your eyes fixed on Jesus." The writer to the Hebrews cited a historic list of faithful servants of God. Some had fairly happy lives, some met tragic earthly fates. Frederick Buechner said God's grace says, "Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us." Hebrews didn't say, "Fix your eyes on these faith-filled humans." It called us to "fix our eyes on Jesus," as they did.

Application: Hebrews 12:2, after calling us to "fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter," seems to be the only Bible verse which put the words "cross" and "joy" together. It reminds us that God's gift of inner joy (closely linked to hope as well as recalling what God did in the past) is deeper and more enduring than surface happiness due to cheerful circumstances. What is one habit you could adopt that would help you "fix your eyes on Jesus" every day in every situation?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when things go well, it's easy for me to forget that I need you. When things go badly, it's easy for me to think you've abandoned me. Thank you for being with me in both light and dark days. Amen.

Wednesday, April 27

Scripture: Numbers 13:1-3, 17-20, 25-33

The LORD spoke to Moses: Send out men to explore the land of Canaan, which I'm giving to the Israelites. Send one man from each ancestral tribe, each a chief among them. So Moses sent them out from the Paran desert according to the LORD's command. All the men were leaders among the Israelites.

When Moses sent them out to explore the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the arid southern plain and into the mountains. You must inspect the land. What is it like? Are the people who live in it strong or weak, few or many? Is the land in which they live good or bad? Are the towns in which they live camps or fortresses? Is the land rich or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Be courageous and bring back the land's fruit." It was the season of the first ripe grapes.

They returned from exploring the land after forty days. They went directly to Moses, Aaron, and the entire Israelite community in the Paran desert at Kadesh. They brought back a report to them and to the entire community and showed them the land's fruit. Then they gave their report: "We entered the land to which you sent us. It's actually full of milk and honey, and this is its fruit. There are, however, powerful people who live in the land. The cities have huge fortifications. And we

even saw the descendants of the Anakites there. The Amalekites live in the land of the arid southern plain; the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the mountains; and the Canaanites live by the sea and along the Jordan.” Now Caleb calmed the people before Moses and said, “We must go up and take possession of it, because we are more than able to do it.” But the men who went up with him said, “We can’t go up against the people because they are stronger than we.” They started a rumor about the land that they had explored, telling the Israelites, “The land that we crossed over to explore is a land that devours its residents. All the people we saw in it are huge men. We saw there the Nephilim (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We saw ourselves as grasshoppers, and that’s how we appeared to them.”

Observation: With the law given (and re-given) at Sinai, God instructed Moses to lead the people toward the Promised Land. As they got close, Moses sent out 12 spies, one from each tribe, to scout the land. After all, none of them had ever been there. They reported that yes, it was a good, fruitful land. But 10 of the 12 spies were also gripped by fear and said they didn’t dare try to take the land. They seemed to utterly forget that God’s power, not their own, had brought them this far.

Application: One of the spies, Caleb, refused to join in the others’ fear-driven report. “We are more than able to do it,” was his resolute, courageous report to the people. What kind of inner spiritual/psychological compass does it take to speak out with courage and hope when everyone around you is gripped by fear? Have you ever had the privilege of knowing a Caleb?

Prayer: Lord God, help my faith and courage to keep growing, so that I do not let fear block me from whatever you call me to. Amen.

Thursday, April 28

Scripture: Romans 8:14-25, 31-32

All who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons and daughters. You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, “Abba, Father.” The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God’s children. But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God’s heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.

I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us. The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God’s sons and daughters. Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God’s children. We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it’s not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn’t hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don’t see, we wait for it with patience.

So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He didn’t spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. Won’t he also freely give us all things with him?

Observation: The apostle Paul tirelessly preached Jesus, even as the Roman Empire (and many Hebrew religious leaders) fought him, imprisoned him at times, and finally executed him. Paul’s

foes often seemed impossibly strong. The great apostle felt human emotions but refused to let fear govern his life or determine what he would do. That was not just human resolve. In his letter to Christians in Rome, he stated his guiding conviction clearly: “If God is for us, who is against us?”

Application: Paul contrasted a fear-filled spirit of slavery with the image that God adopts us as God’s own children, fully included in God’s loving family. What role, if any, has fear played in your spiritual life? Have you ever had times where you sought desperately to please God by “trying harder”? How can it change the way you serve God to let Paul’s words soak deeply into your spirit: “If God is for us, who is against us?”

Prayer: Dear God, teach me how to trust your steadfast love more completely. In my relationships with others and with you, guide me to live free from fear because I know that you are “for” me. Amen.

Friday, April 29

Scripture: Mark 9:2-13

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain where they were alone. He was transformed in front of them, and his clothes were amazingly bright, brighter than if they had been bleached white. Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus. Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Rabbi, it’s good that we’re here. Let’s make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He said this because he didn’t know how to respond, for the three of them were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the cloud, “This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!” Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Human One had risen from the dead. So they kept it to themselves, wondering, “What’s this ‘rising from the dead’?” They asked Jesus, “Why do the legal experts say that Elijah must come first?” He answered, “Elijah does come first to restore all things. Why was it written that the Human One would suffer many things and be rejected? In fact, I tell you that Elijah has come, but they did to him whatever they wanted, just as it was written about him.”

Observation: A dazzling transformation, Moses, Elijah, God’s voice—wow! Seeing Jesus glorified left Peter, John, and James speechless. This was not just a random light show. It was a preview of God’s kingdom arriving in power to strengthen Jesus and his disciples to face the cross (the completely counter-intuitive path to the kingdom). Which meant that they couldn’t find true greatness in God’s kingdom by staying isolated on a mountain top.

Application: Peter, John, and James likely expected Jesus to leave the mountain and drive out the Romans! But the voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!” With regular stumbles, Peter, James, and John chose to listen. What does it mean for *you* to listen to Jesus? Are you willing to do it?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, grow in me a spirit willing to obey the divine command: “Listen to him!” Teach me how to quiet my plans, my wishes, my dreams when I need to listen to you. Amen.

Saturday, April 30

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

"Therefore, I say to you, don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or what you'll drink, or about your body, what you'll wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds in the sky. They don't sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are? Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these. If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, won't God do much more for you, you people of weak faith? Therefore, don't worry and say, 'What are we going to eat?' or 'What are we going to drink?' or 'What are we going to wear?' Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Observation: Jesus saw, as we often do not, that worry makes us focus on the wrong things. We often fixate on food, clothing, and other material goods because we fear that at some future time we might not have enough. "Desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness," Jesus said, inviting us to trust that God really cares for us. In God's hands, he said, we are always eternally secure, through any trouble life brings.

Application: Jesus said that "Gentiles" (meaning people who were not viewed, where he lived, as interested in following God's ways) longed for answers to "What are we going to eat?' or 'What are we going to drink?' or 'What are we going to wear?'" In other words, they thought those questions took in the essence of life. In what ways have you found (if at all) that desiring God's kingdom and righteousness first and foremost make those other issues, not insignificant, but secondary?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you were too aware to claim that every earthly life has a happy short-term ending. You knew a cross waited for you. And yet you spoke of peace, of not worrying. Fill me with your trusting peace in a broken world. Amen.