



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

## Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of November 20, 2022

### Weekly Prayer

Thank you, God, for everything. Thank you for life, for relationships, for the resources we have received. Most of all, thank you that you are always faithful and always at work in our lives. Help us to see our lives and everything we have as a trust from you to be your hands and feet in this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### Monday, November 21

#### Scripture: Ephesians 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light. Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth.

What I mean is this: the one who sows a small number of seeds will also reap a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop. Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. As it is written, *He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever.* The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us.

**Observation:** Ephesians 5:8 did not say, as we might expect, something like "You belong to the light." It used a stronger phrase: "Now you *are* light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light." And that light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness (as well as justice and truth). The Spirit's good fruit of generosity is not just about money. (Of course, it doesn't exclude money, either.) Paul was writing in 2 Corinthians about funds he was collecting among the Gentile Christians to support poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. But he kept using words like "*everything* you need *always* and *in everything*" and "You will be made rich *in every way* so that you can be generous *in every way*." He made it clear that God is generous with everything we need. That's why we can generously share time, talents, energy and caring (as well as money) with others.

**Application:** Ephesians was sure that, living in Jesus' grace and power, Christ-followers can live as "children of light," whose goodness, justice and truth bring Christ's light to others. What is the source of the light that shines from your life in your best moments? Can you recall one or more times when you recognized that Christ's light shining through you had brightened another life? What are some resources God's generous goodness has placed most lavishly in your life? What are some resources others seem to have more of than you? Modern science agrees with the Bible that a grateful spirit is good for us. How does being grateful for what you have, rather than resenting what others have, help you be generous with anything you have an abundance of, so you can bless others as God has blessed you?

**Prayer:** God, you are the ultimate source of all that is. Any good thing I have or am is a gift from you. Loosen my tight fists and grow the Spirit's fruit of goodness and generosity in me every day. Amen.

**Tuesday, November 22**

**Scripture: Proverbs 11:24-28**

Those who give generously receive more,  
but those who are stingy with what is appropriate will grow needy.  
Generous persons will prosper;  
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.  
People curse those who hoard grain,  
but they bless those who sell it.  
Those who look for good find favor,  
but those who seek evil—it will come to them.  
Those who trust in their wealth will wither,  
but the righteous will thrive like leafy trees.

**Observation:** Proverbs gave varied views on money, which take some work to find. The words 'wealth,' 'wealthy,' 'riches,' and 'rich' occur 45 times in the book of Proverbs, and the words 'poor' and 'poverty' occur the same number of times. We can't just pick one or two favorite proverbs. A single proverb isn't appropriate for every circumstance. According to the book of Proverbs, neither poverty nor wealth is given high status in God's eyes, except as they have to do with one's pursuit of wisdom.

**Application:** In Proverbs 11:25, A liberal man [or "generous persons"] is literally "a soul of blessing".... "Will be enriched" is literally 'will be made fat,' which is an idiom for 'grow rich' or 'become prosperous.' The sense of this line is that the generous person will be rewarded with wealth. Does life always work that way, money-wise, for generous people? When you give generously of yourself (your time, means, love, spiritual gifts), what non-financial rewards have you received?

**Prayer:** Lord God, you care about my money, not so much because of what it says about my bank account as because of what it says about my heart. Keep my heart growing more generous. Amen.

### **Wednesday, November 23**

#### **Scripture: Mark 12:41-44**

Jesus sat across from the collection box for the temple treasury and observed how the crowd gave their money. Many rich people were throwing in lots of money. One poor widow came forward and put in two small copper coins worth a penny. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than everyone who's been putting money in the treasury. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needed to live on."

**Observation:** The Jerusalem Temple was a huge religious, social, and even business center, bustling and noisy. Sustaining the institution took many large gifts—and many people gave such gifts. (Matthew 6:2 even hinted that some people hired a bugler to attract notice as they gave large gifts to good causes.) But Jesus noticed, and honored, a different kind of giver. He praised a generous, trusting widow who gave her "fortune"—two tiny copper coins—to the Temple.

**Application:** The woman gave all she had. Most of us are not in a position to sacrifice our entire paycheck, but we could have a taste of what this might feel like. Look at the line items in your budget for the week; how much do you plan to spend on food? Could you eat the food that you have already in your home – in the pantry, fridge, and freezer - and donate the money you would have spent? If a week is not possible, could you do so for one meal?

**Prayer:** Lord of heaven and earth, teach me how to love you as much as the widow Jesus noticed. Teach me how to offer my time, my talents, my treasures, and myself for your glory. Amen.

### **Thursday, November 24, Thanksgiving Day**

#### **Scripture: Psalm 136:1-9**

Give thanks to the LORD because he is good.

God's faithful love lasts forever!

Give thanks to the God of all gods—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of all lords—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the only one who makes great wonders—

God's faithful love lasts forever.  
Give thanks to the one who made the skies with skill—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
Give thanks to the one who shaped the earth on the water—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
Give thanks to the one who made the great lights—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
The sun to rule the day—  
God's faithful love lasts forever.  
The moon and the stars to rule the night—  
God's faithful love lasts forever!

**Observation:** The psalmist located the center of our gratitude to God in the refrain he repeated over and over in this psalm: "God's faithful love lasts forever!" Above all else, the grand story of the Bible is the story of a God who loves us with a tireless, durable, embracing, never-ending love. What a promise! "Give thanks to the Lord!"

**Application:** Reflect on the greatness of God and the blessings you have experienced in the past year. Have a joyous Thanksgiving Day! In whatever way you mark the day, and with whomever, consider reading this psalm, or singing a favorite thanksgiving song, as a way of deepening your sense of gratitude on this day.

**Prayer:** Lord God, in wonder, love and praise I thank you that all you do in my life springs from your unchanging love. Amen.

## Friday, November 25

### Scripture: Matthew 19:16-26

A man approached him and said, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus said, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There's only one who is good. If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments." The man said, "Which ones?" Then Jesus said, "*Don't commit murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.*" The young man replied, "I've kept all these. What am I still missing?" Jesus said, "If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me." But when the young man heard this, he went away saddened, because he had many possessions. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I assure you that it will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. In fact, it's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom." When his disciples heard this, they were stunned. "Then who can be saved?" they asked. Jesus looked at them carefully and said, "It's impossible for human beings. But all things are possible for God."

**Observation:** Jesus called a rich young man to reset his priorities. He couldn't do it. He went away sad. He seemed to want to follow Jesus, but he didn't do it because he wanted all his earthly possessions even more. Like many people then (and now), Jesus' disciples thought earthly riches always meant God had blessed the owner. Jesus shocked them when he said, "It will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven." Very hard, but not impossible: "All things are possible for God" (verse 26).

**Application:** God did NOT tell many affluent Bible characters (e.g. Abraham in the Old Testament, Lydia the seller of royal purple cloth in the New Testament—see Acts 16:11-15) to sell all they had. What do you believe was the heart issue Jesus knew the wealthy young man needed to address? What was the central obstacle that kept him from responding to Jesus' call?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you offer me heaven's riches. Give me a heart that can accurately assess the treasure of your kingdom, and value it properly against all other claims. Amen.

## **Saturday, November 26**

### **Scripture: Matthew 6:19-24**

"Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. Therefore, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how terrible that darkness will be! No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

**Observation:** In today's reading, Jesus reminds us that there can only be one most important focus, one top priority, in our life. It is not possible to make God and the values of the unseen kingdom of heaven most important if our priorities are ruled by the values of the tangible life and culture around us.

**Application:** Jesus says you cannot serve two masters. Who or what is the master you are you serving, as measured by where you put the most energy, time and focus? In what ways, if any, have you experienced the power of money to control and direct your life? What forces besides purely financial ones (e.g. social prestige, children) can become your treasure, more important to you than God? How do you find that living in God's kingdom makes you a better parent, citizen, friend, etc., if at all?

**Prayer:** Thank you, God, for everything. I am grateful for so much. Most of all I am grateful for the One who makes it possible to have so many other "gratitudes" in my life. Let thanksgiving for everyone and everything else find its source in you. Amen.