

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of January 28, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Loving God, I give you thanks for your incredible faithfulness. I praise you for never giving up on me and for loving me with a love from which nothing can separate us. May I become more aware of your activity and presence, so that I will see you more clearly at work in the midst of all the pain and joy of my life. Amen.

Monday, January 29

Scripture: Romans 15:30-32; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Brothers and sisters, I urge you, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggles in your prayers to God for me. Pray that I will be rescued from the people in Judea who don't believe. Also, pray that my service for Jerusalem will be acceptable to God's people there so that I can come to you with joy by God's will and be reenergized with your company.

I was given a thorn in my body because of the outstanding revelations I've received so that I wouldn't be conceited. It's a messenger from Satan sent to torment me so that I wouldn't be conceited. I pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me alone. He said to me, "My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness." So I'll gladly spend my time bragging about my weaknesses so that Christ's power can rest on me. Therefore, I'm all right with weaknesses, insults, disasters, harassments, and stressful situations for the sake of Christ, because when I'm weak, then I'm strong.

Observation

The apostle Paul, one of God's most loyal servants, asked Roman Christians to pray that God would rescue him in Jerusalem so he could travel freely to Rome. That didn't happen (Acts 21:27-36). He wrote to Corinth that he prayed three times for God to remove a "thorn in my body" (a bodily ailment). He never gave more detail, but clearly wished he didn't have to deal with the issue in his missionary travels. God did not fix the physical problem, but Paul said he "gladly" trusted God's nurturing grace.

Application

Paul did not blame God for causing his ailment. He did plead with the Lord "three times for it to leave me alone" (i.e. to heal it). Much of Paul's travel must have been on foot. How strong a case can you imagine him making for God to restore him to full health? Did the fact that his physical problem persisted mean God didn't care about him or his important mission?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I'm human, and you know I'd rather get what I ask for rather than not. Help my trust in you to keep growing, even at times when things don't turn out the way I pray they will. Amen.

Tuesday, January 30

Scripture: Luke 22:31-34; Matthew 26:36-39, 45-47

"Simon, Simon, look! Satan has asserted the right to sift you all like wheat. However, I have prayed for you that your faith won't fail. When you have returned, strengthen your brothers and sisters." Peter responded, "Lord, I'm ready to go with you, both to prison and to death!" Jesus replied, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster won't crow today before you have denied three times that you know me."

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. He said to the disciples, “Stay here while I go and pray over there.” When he took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, he began to feel sad and anxious. Then he said to them, “I’m very sad. It’s as if I’m dying. Stay here and keep alert with me.” Then he went a short distance farther and fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it’s possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”

Then he came to his disciples and said to them, “Will you sleep and rest all night? Look, the time has come for the Human One to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up. Let’s go. Look, here comes my betrayer.”

While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came. With him was a large crowd carrying swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests and elders of the people.

Observation

Jesus said Peter would fail despite Jesus' prayers for him. Did Jesus lack faith? Jesus also asked, strongly, to be able to avoid the cross. But he accepted that God might not stop the crucifixion. One website listed these “common reasons” for unanswered prayer: “You are not seeking to please the Lord, you have unconfessed sin in your life, you pray with improper motives, you lack faith.” This is an absurd list to explain Jesus’ unanswered prayers.

Application

When someone is ill, we boldly ask God to give that person full physical healing, even though we know that, by definition, miracles are rare. Jesus, too, directly asked God for what he wished for. Does fear of disappointment keep you from asking God for what you most want? Practice: pray a prayer about a concern (big or small) that’s on your heart. But, like Jesus, avoid praying in a way that tries to tell God that he has to do what you ask.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you know first-hand how disappointing it is to ask for something I deeply want, and not receive it. You know the pain I sometimes feel. I thank you for promising to walk through it with me. Amen.

Wednesday, January 31

Scripture: Mark 1:35; Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:16, 11:1

Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer.

When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone.

But Jesus would withdraw to deserted places for prayer.

Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

Observation

Jesus prayed—often. Sometimes we treat prayer as only a way to tell God about what we want (often we seem to assume God won’t know about that unless we tell him). Jesus even mentioned one reason some people give for not praying—“your Father knows what you need

before you ask.” But that didn’t stop him—right after that, in Matthew 6:8-13, he taught his disciples the Lord’s Prayer.

Application

If prayer isn’t just to fill God in on your needs and worries, and the solutions you want, what is it for? How do you respond to the idea that prayer, often, is less about changing God and more about changing yourself? In his book, *Prayer, Does It Make Any Difference?* * Phillip Yancey wrote, “The simplest answer to the question ‘Why pray?’ is ‘Because Jesus did.’” Is regular communication vital to other important relationships you have? If Jesus needed to pray, why would any of us think we don’t?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, it doesn’t make sense to say I love someone, and then never talk to them. Thank you for always listening when I pray, and for sometimes speaking in the depths of my heart and mind. Amen.

**A copy of this book can be found in the Messiah Church Library.*

Thursday, February 1

Scripture: John 17:9, 14-24

“I’m praying for them. I’m not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours.

I gave your word to them and the world hated them, because they don’t belong to this world, just as I don’t belong to this world. I’m not asking that you take them out of this world but that you keep them safe from the evil one. They don’t belong to this world, just as I don’t belong to this world. Make them holy in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. I made myself holy on their behalf so that they also would be made holy in the truth. “I’m not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word. I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. I’ve given them the glory that you gave me so that they can be one just as we are one. I’m in them and you are in me so that they will be made perfectly one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you have loved them just as you loved me. “Father, I want those you gave me to be with me where I am. Then they can see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Observation

John recorded another “Lord’s prayer,” one Jesus prayed just before his arrest. Even at this time of crisis, Jesus focused most of his prayer on the spiritual well-being and safety of his followers. He didn’t ask God to take his people out of the world’s pain and evil, but to unify them, strengthen and sustain them no matter what they faced. Be sure to note that he was not just praying for the group around him on that evening. Jesus prayed for you that night, too (verse 20).

Application

In verse 14, Jesus said, a bit surprisingly, that his followers “don’t belong to this world” any more than he did. In what ways are you most interested in, and attentive to, this world? In what areas of life do you most sense your energy and focus shifting to God’s Kingdom, both in God’s mission in this world and in the hope of eternity beyond this world that God offers?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, it humbles me that, with the cross right ahead of you, you prayed for me. Help me to pray, as you did, for spiritual victory in life rather than escape from life's challenges. Amen.

Friday, February 2

Scripture: Philippians 4:5-9

Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.

Observation

Paul wrote this letter in prison (Philippians 1:13-14). He knew his jailers might execute him or set him free (Philippians 1:20-26). On the day he had a scribe write these words, he awoke in a dank Roman dungeon, never sure about whether and when guards might come to end his life. So, his words were much more than just religious "happy talk." With every reason to be anxious, he instead urged prayer, peace, and a focus on the good and beauty in life.

Application

Paul said God's peace "exceeds all understanding." At times, even in situations far short of what Paul faced, you may think worry and anxiety are the only "reasonable" attitude. How can an inner demand for total understanding, for everything to be logical, get in the way of peace? How can you value your mind, yet not expect or demand purely human explanations of everything? Can you trust that a prayer for God's gift of inner peace is one prayer God will always answer?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I want to walk every day in your peace, to focus on the excellent and admirable, even beyond the latest scandal or conflict. Keep my heart and mind safe in your hands. Amen.

Saturday, February 3

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:10-11; 4:8-9, 16-18

God rescued us from a terrible death, and he will rescue us. We have set our hope on him that he will rescue us again, since you are helping with your prayer for us. Then many people can thank God on our behalf for the gift that was given to us through the prayers of many people.

We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren't crushed. We are confused, but we aren't depressed. We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren't knocked out.

So we aren't depressed. But even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day. Our temporary minor problems are producing an eternal stockpile of glory for us that is beyond all comparison. We don't focus on the things that can be seen but on the things that can't be seen. The things that can be seen don't last, but the things that can't be seen are eternal.

Observation

The apostle Paul knew firsthand about physical challenges and pain (2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:7-10). The toll of the hardships he'd been through likely gave a very personal meaning to "Even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day." It is not an idle cliché to say that he (and the other apostles) prayed his way through life — there are over 30 references to prayer in the book of Acts. That allowed Paul to believe, adapting Frederick Buechner's words that "the worst thing is never the last thing." In Christ, he could (and we can) look beyond even the worst to the "eternal stockpile of glory" Jesus opened to all of us. Jesus moved steadfastly through the worst that hatred and evil could do, reached the triumph of his resurrection, and will walk that road with every faithful follower.

Application

Do you think the apostle Paul was a success or a failure? What standards do you use to define whether you are a "success" or not? Does Paul's perspective in any way challenge you to rethink your goals and standards of measurement? Paul said he focused on the things we can't see yet which are more enduring than what we can see. What hopes do you hold that remain out of sight right now? What steps do you take to anchor your hope in God's goodness, and to live with patience and trust? How much daily focus do you give to keeping your physical self well and strong? How much to keeping your relationship with God strong? How can prayer open your heart and mind to let God renew the person you are on the inside every day?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, you weren't shortsighted. You looked beyond the obvious and visible. Give me your eyes to see, however dimly, the glory of eternity, and to live in that light. Amen.