

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 31, 2021

Weekly Prayer: God of Love, we give you thanks and praise for your steadfast mercy, love and grace. Through faith, we trust that you are with us in every season of life and in every transition and change. We trust in your goodness and know that with each ending, comes new beginnings. So, come, Holy Spirit, come. Guide, strengthen, and encourage us on the journey that lies before our Messiah Church family. It's the assurance of your unfailing love which enables us to trust you with all the transitions we go through in life, even when there are uncertainties about the future. May your Word dwell in us richly and your peace rule in us powerfully, and may your glory be our main passion and greatest delight. We pray this prayer in the powerful and precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Monday, November 1

Scripture: Acts 2:41-43, 46-47; Acts 5:12-14

Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day.

The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles.

Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. They would come together regularly at Solomon's Porch. No one from outside the church dared to join them, even though the people spoke highly of them. Indeed, more and more believers in the Lord, large numbers of both men and women, were added to the church.

Observation: In one day, the early Christian community in Jerusalem went from about 120 members (Acts 1:15) to 3,120 members! What made that first Christian church so appealing? They certainly had an awesome truth to proclaim ("the apostles' teaching"), a strong connection with God ("prayer"), and caring hearts ("demonstrated God's goodness"). But it's easy to skip over one aspect of their spiritual life so meaningful Luke named it twice. They "shared meals" (verse 42) and "shared food with gladness and simplicity" (verse 46). They came alongside to bless one another.

Application: One commentary suggests, "Life together in the early church is described as breaking of bread and prayers. In order for people to be galvanized into oneness in Christ, it takes time to be together to listen to each other, care, and be for each other." In what ways has relating to others more deeply than you can in a couple of minutes after worship helped you to grow spiritually?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I'm tempted to think, "It's just a meal." Remind me of all the times you reached people's hearts as you ate with them and help me to value that more highly. Amen.

Tuesday, November 2

Scripture: Romans 12:9-18

Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. Bless people who harass you—bless and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people.

Observation: The apostle Paul provided a portrait of what a Christian life should look like in this passage. Paul had never been to Rome (Romans 15:22-24), but he was aware from friends who had been there that Jewish and Gentile Christians had tensions about parts of the faith, even as they faced Roman enemies all around them. Paul offered advice on how best to interact with each other and with people hostile to Christian faith.

Application: How can we best live out the love of others that Paul described in this passage? How can we live at peace with all people today, at a time when many political and social voices try to polarize us, and set us against one another? How have you fallen short of Paul's counsel? How have you lived up to the wisdom he offered?

Prayer: God, open me to your Word. Bless my enemies. Humble me in all aspects of my life. Give me your wisdom and love, so that I may follow your commands to love others and live in peace with them. Amen.

Wednesday, November 3

Scripture: Hebrews 10:22-25

Therefore, let's draw near with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water. Let's hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable. And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.

Observation: As Acts 2 reported, the very first Christians in Jerusalem formed a congregation that met regularly, shared life, and supported one another. As the gospel spread, Christians in other places also formed congregations, often more than one in each city. They knew they were part of something bigger than just their local congregation. But they also knew that they belonged, grew and served together in those local churches.

Application: Think about the depth and quality of the connection you have with other people in your church. Is anyone on your "2 a.m. call list" if you faced a serious problem? Are you on anyone else's list? That kind of connection never happens overnight; building trust takes time and shared experiences. How can you let the Holy Spirit deepen your friendships now, so that you are there to uphold one another through any of life's storms?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for connecting me to your family. Help me to “spark” love and good deeds in others, and to be receptive to your sparks as they arrive in my life. Amen.

Thursday, November 4

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-18, 26-27; Galatians 5:26-6:2

Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. Certainly the body isn’t one part but many. If the foot says, “I’m not part of the body because I’m not a hand,” does that mean it’s not part of the body? If the ear says, “I’m not part of the body because I’m not an eye,” does that mean it’s not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted.

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it. You are the body of Christ and parts of each other.

Let’s not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other.

Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won’t be tempted too. Carry each other’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Observation: The apostle Paul reminded his readers in Corinth that their varied gifts were not tools to outdo others in a quest for power or glory. Connected in Christ, they needed to depend on and support one another. To the Galatian Christians, he wrote that part of their God-given mission was to “carry each other’s burdens.”

Application: John Wesley built the Methodist movement by inviting people into a kind of life he called “watching over one another in love.” Are there people in your life with whom you have the kind of trust, candor, and mutual support Galatians 6:1-2 describe? What concrete choices can make this a reality in the relationships you value most?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, so often the world around me says, openly or subtly, “It’s every man (and woman) for him/herself.” You call me to a very different approach to life. Give me the heart to live out your calling. Amen.

Friday, November 5

Scripture: Romans 14:13-19

So stop judging each other. Instead, this is what you should decide: never put a stumbling block or obstacle in the way of your brother or sister. I know and I’m convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is wrong to eat in itself. But if someone thinks something is wrong to eat, it becomes wrong for that person. If your brother or sister is upset by your food, you are no longer walking in love. Don’t let your food destroy someone for whom Christ died. And don’t let something you consider to be good be criticized as wrong. God’s kingdom isn’t about eating food and drinking but about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ this way pleases God and gets human approval. So let’s strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.

Observation: Paul wrote to Roman Christians about disputes over food choices, urging “the strong” to care about and encourage “the weak,” rather than mocking or discouraging them. They didn’t always agree on how best to live their faith. We can differ on the details, Paul said. The central command is to love. Life in God’s Kingdom is about “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Application: Paul wrote that as Christians focus their spiritual walk on “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,” they are able to stop sniping at one another. How easy or hard do you find it to lay aside a value system built on “being right” to live a life that seeks to lift up others? What helps you see whatever good things you have as gifts meant to bless others, not just to cling to for your own sake?

Prayer: Lord God, only you are wise enough to judge the thoughts and intentions of each person’s heart. Help me release the urge to judge others, and instead to seek to live with all people in your peace and love. Amen.

Saturday, November 6

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-12

Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn’t love does not know God, because God is love. This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us.

Observation: As John wrote about how Christians treat one another, he likely thought about himself and Jesus’ other disciples. They jockeyed for position, and got angry with one another at times (Mark 10:35-45). Over time, Jesus reshaped their thoughts and actions. John knew that loving others with Christ’s love doesn’t spring from a naturally warm human disposition. It goes much deeper than just being “nice.” This kind of active love comes from the heart of the God of the universe. God loves us—that is the reason that we love.

Application: Have you heard the expression: “To live above with saints we love—ah, that will be glory! To live below with saints we know—well, that’s another story.” But John said that, in Christ, we are able to grow beyond that. Which people, inside or beyond the church, do you find it hardest to love? Read and pray through this passage, plugging in their names and faces. Ask God to help you live out God’s love even toward them.

Prayer: Dear God, you ARE love—what an amazing, mind-stretching truth. You know that it’s not quite as natural for me to love. Please keep loving me as I stretch and grow in my ability to reflect your love to others. Amen.