

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 12, 2022

Weekly Prayer: Eternal God, you have set forth the way of life for us in Jesus of Nazareth. We confess that we are easily distracted from his way. You have stretched out your hands to us through our brothers and sisters, and too often we have passed by. Forgive us, O God, and grant that we may be more faithful and constant in our love and service through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Monday, June 13

Scripture: Micah 6:6-8

With what should I approach the LORD
and bow down before God on high?
Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,
with year-old calves?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with many torrents of oil?
Should I give my oldest child for my crime;
the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?
He has told you, human one, what is good and
what the LORD requires from you:
to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

Observation: These verses contain one of the most memorable statements in the Old Testament defining a proper relationship to God. Micah was speaking to all of Israel about the kind of obedience God expects from us. Disciples are to act justly because God is just; to love mercy because God is merciful; to walk humbly with God, because God is holy.

Application: How have you observed these three character traits of God being played out in your life? Justice and love are only possible if we “walk humbly with God.” What distracts you or keeps you from a daily focus on walking with God?

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for showing me how to live. With all that I must do today and with all that may unexpectedly come my way, keep me focused on justice and love. Help me with what is the most loving response as I walk with you today. Amen.

Tuesday, June 14

Scripture: Isaiah 1:16-17

Wash! Be clean! Remove your ugly deeds from my sight. Put an end to such evil; learn to do good. Seek justice: help the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow.

Observation: The prophet Isaiah conveyed instruction on God’s behalf according to a vision he had regarding Judah and Jerusalem. God has high expectations for his followers’ involvement in eradicating injustices in the world in which they live, but equally important is God’s expectation for what we will do before we get to work.

Application: Ask God to show you areas in your life that need to be washed clean by his power so that you will be able to respond to the needs around you with pure hands and spotless heart. Where are the unmet needs (physical, emotional, relational, spiritual) around you that have your attention?

Prayer: Let your Holy Spirit be at work with me to remove whatever is keeping me from your way. Help me to hear your call to action. Empower me to be the neighbor that someone around me will need today. Amen.

Wednesday, June 15

Scripture: Luke 18:1-8

Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him, asking, 'Give me justice in this case against my adversary.' For a while he refused but finally said to himself, I don't fear God or respect people, but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. Otherwise, there will be no end to her coming here and embarrassing me." The Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. Won't God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them? I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. But when the Human One comes, will he find faithfulness on earth?"

Observation: When it comes to praying and working for justice, Jesus could hardly have been more explicit about our perseverance in faith. He told this parable about the need to pray always and not to lose heart. A widow had no one to uphold her cause. Only justice and her own persistence were in her favor.

Application: The Bible does not teach that we will prevail in every battle against injustice, but it does teach us that God will prevail. God goes with us. God brings his power and protection on our behalf. God will prevail. What does this mean when you are tempted to say, "there is nothing I can do"? Someone has said: "the struggle for justice always stands or falls on the battlefield of hope." What does this say to you about hope and about embodying that hope for others?

Prayer: Dear God of hope and love, when all else fails, you are still the God of hope and love. I want to be part of what you want for this world. Let your hope and love be seen through the way I live this day. Amen.

Thursday, June 16

Scripture: Hebrews 13:1-3

Keep loving each other like family. Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place.

Observation: Doing the work of justice is being obedient to Jesus' command to love our neighbor in a world of injustice. Doing the work of justice is practicing the command: To love God with our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Justice is doing for others what we would want done for us.

Application: Verse 3 puts the work of justice in the context of love. Can we say that we love our neighbors if we do not draw near and seek justice on their behalf? What keeps you from drawing near? When have you experienced someone drawing near to stand with you? How was that an expression of love?

Prayer: Merciful God, you know me so very well. You know the challenges that I face. You know those things within me that become detours and distractions from what you want for me. So, I place my life in your hands. Help me to answer your call to move toward those persons and places that need what you can do through me. Amen.

Friday, June 17

Scripture: Matthew 18:16-18

But if they won't listen, take with you one or two others so that *every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses*. But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven.

Observation: Jesus invites his disciples to live in the kingdom and rule of God now. That is the preferred vision of the world – to walk in the way of Jesus, to experience the presence of God, to live daily in a completely different way because we know Jesus.

Application: That's how we become the answer to the prayer, "thy kingdom come." What does Jesus mean when he says we will never enter the kingdom of God unless we receive it like a child? Could he mean when you come in the weakness and vulnerability of a child? And how would it change our lives if we lived as if this were true?

Prayer: Thank you for the gift of children – for in them we see a curiosity and a boldness that draws them into the world. Often our adult experience leaves us seeking an escape from the world and its cries for help. Give us the wisdom that we need to know what to do and the courage to do it. Amen.

Saturday, June 18

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:8-10

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. We always carry Jesus' death around in our bodies so that Jesus' life can also be seen in our bodies.

Observation: Paul was an apostle – that is, he was "sent out" into the world with the message of the gospel. He knew suffering and physical hardship as a direct result of his faithfulness. If you want to see resurrection at work, you have to be prepared to see crucifixion at work as well.

Application: Responding to the needs of others and crying out for justice will come with hardship. It may feel that you are crushed and defeated, but it may actually mean that you are living out the gospel. When have you considered the risks of reaching out and standing alongside others? Did the risks keep you from acting or serve as a confirmation that you should act?

Prayer: In the quietness of this moment, help me to feel and to hear the beating of my heart and to know that you have made me for a purpose. In the quietness of this moment, help me to sense and to hear the deepest needs of those whose names come to mind. Then lead me to a place where my purpose will intersect the needs. Allow me to see that you are there. Amen.