



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of May 26, 2024**

### **Weekly Prayer**

Gracious God, open my heart to hear you speaking. I confess I have not loved you, or my neighbor, fully. Forgive me, dear God, and renew me. Help me to embody a love that is generous, patient, faithful, and kind. In your name I pray, Amen.

### **Monday, May 27**

#### **Scripture: Exodus 20:1-3; Deuteronomy 11:13-16**

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You must have no other gods before me.

Now, if you completely obey God's commandments that I am giving you right now, by loving the LORD your God and by serving him with all your heart and all your being, then he will provide rain for your land at the right time—early rain and late rain—so you can stock up your grain, wine, and oil. He will also make your fields lush for your livestock, and you will eat and be satisfied. But watch yourselves! Otherwise, your heart might be led astray so you stray away, serving other gods and worshipping them.

#### **Observation**

Before listing any of the ten commandments, God reminds Israel of their history - that it was God who freed them from slavery. Following the commandments are not, then, a means of earning God's favor. We already have that. Rather, they are a sign of our love for God.

#### **Application**

The Jewish and Christian faith that shaped the Bible (and, later, the Muslim faith too) taught what we call "monotheism"—that is, that there is only one true God who deserves our worship and praise. Remember, the Israelites had just left Egypt, a land that worshipped multiple "gods" of nature, as well as their Pharaohs. How might this commandment remain relevant for us? How do we make "other gods" of things around us? And when we do, how might we change our behaviors to worship the one true God?

#### **Prayer**

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, you are worthy of my love, worship, and

praise. Keep my eyes, and heart, on you that I stand strong against temptation to make allegiance to anyone but you. Amen.

## **Tuesday, May 28**

### **Scripture: Acts 10:34-36; Romans 10:9-13**

Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him. This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!

Because if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and in your heart you have faith that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Trusting with the heart leads to righteousness, and confessing with the mouth leads to salvation. The scripture says, *All who have faith in him won't be put to shame.* There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives richly to all who call on him. *All who call on the Lord's name will be saved.*

### **Observation**

In Acts 10, Peter said God "doesn't show partiality," and that the good news is that Christ is Lord of all. It can be easy to think that "we" know the "right way" to worship and follow Jesus. Indeed, since the early church Christians have disagreed. But we're reminded that God celebrates our diversity of background and practices, calling us to find unity in love.

### **Application**

If God's love and grace extend to all, regardless of background or belief, as today's readings say, how should this influence your interactions and relationships? The passage from Romans 10 spoke of God's impartiality and desire to save all people. How does this fit with the reality of suffering and injustice in the world? How does this influence our actions and behaviors?

### **Prayer**

God, I humbly come before you, recognizing You are the Lord of all creation. Your boundless love knows no borders, reaching every corner of the world and embracing people of every nation. Amen.

## **Wednesday, May 29**

### **Scripture: Matthew 6:20-21, 24-25**

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.

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. "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?"

### **Observation**

Jesus' teaching echoed the wisdom of ancient Hebrew sages in saying that amassing "treasures" of this world does not produce a satisfying life. Sadly, many in Jesus' day overlooked or ignored that part of their tradition. But Jesus said treasure in heaven, treasure by God's standards, is the most precious item we can "collect." Our heart follows our treasure—and what we treasure shows where our heart's loyalties really lie.

### **Application**

Jesus was clear. He didn't say we "shouldn't" serve both God and money. He said we "cannot" do that. (The Greek word translated "money" meant all types of material goods.) Note, Jesus did not oppose wealth. He strongly opposed putting wealth above God in our priorities. Our hearts have room for only one ultimate master. When you face ethical choices, or career or family decisions, what determines your course: God's values, or the material and social payoffs you expect?

### **Prayer**

Holy God, sometimes my priorities get out of order, in little things or even in big things. Help me prioritize you above all else in my life, to honor you as my true master. Amen.

## **Thursday, May 30**

### **Scripture: Colossians 3:1-5, 12-14**

Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God's right side. Think about the things above and not things on earth. You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. So put to death the parts of your life that belong to the earth, such as sexual immorality, moral corruption, lust, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

### **Observation**

As we study "love," we know there are many ways in which people link "love" with false "gods," attitudes or acts that lead us away from God's design for our lives. Verse 5 in today's Scripture reading gave a broad list of some of those false "gods" that vie for our

love and loyalty. But a few verses later, we're also given a list to help guide our attitudes and actions to stay aligned with God.

### **Application**

I wonder what our own lists would look like – what are the things that pull us away from God? Perhaps worry, busyness, or fear of missing out would make our lists. An old colleague once said, “if the devil can't make you sin, he'll make you busy.” How does the second list (vs 12) help guide our actions in a new way? Can compassion combat worry? Can humility offer rest for our busyness? Today, try focusing on the ways God invites you to “put on love” and think “about things above.”

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, whenever my life ends, I want to have my greatest treasure stored up with you. Guide me into the kind of life that is rich toward you. Amen.

## **Friday, May 31**

### **Scripture: Romans 6:12-16**

So then, don't let sin rule your body, so that you do what it wants. Don't offer parts of your body to sin, to be used as weapons to do wrong. Instead, present yourselves to God as people who have been brought back to life from the dead, and offer all the parts of your body to God to be used as weapons to do right. Sin will have no power over you, because you aren't under Law but under grace.

So what? Should we sin because we aren't under Law but under grace? Absolutely not! Don't you know that if you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, that you are slaves of the one whom you obey? That's true whether you serve as slaves of sin, which leads to death, or as slaves of the kind of obedience that leads to righteousness.

### **Observation**

The apostle Paul tirelessly preached about God's grace to sinful humans and reminded us that grace is always bigger than our sin. One mocking response might be, “Great! No need to change my life, as there is always grace!” But in these verses (v15), Paul reminds us that following God includes *trying* to change our ways and do better. God desires that we know an abundant and thriving life. But to know this, we must change our ways to know and experience God's love.

### **Application**

We tend to think we *choose* all our actions, but that ignores the power of habits. What hurtful habits have for a time (or still) held you captive? Do you want a life captive by sin, or freed by Christ? N. T. Wright asked Christians, “Think of the ways in which, in your former life, you employed a lot of energy in going after things which you now regard as wrong. Are you using that same energy, imagination and initiative in working for God's kingdom, in extending his covenant purposes in the world?” How can Jesus' love free you to live in energetic, imaginative, kingdom-building ways?

## **Prayer**

God, I choose you to be the one I obey, the one who shapes my life. Free me from damaging thoughts and actions, set my life aglow as an outpost of your love. Amen.

## **Saturday, June 1**

### **Scripture: Deuteronomy 11:13-21**

Now, if you completely obey God's commandments that I am giving you right now, by loving the LORD your God and by serving him with all your heart and all your being, then he will provide rain for your land at the right time—early rain and late rain—so you can stock up your grain, wine, and oil. He will also make your fields lush for your livestock, and you will eat and be satisfied. But watch yourselves! Otherwise, your heart might be led astray so you stray away, serving other gods and worshipping them. Then the LORD's anger would burn against you. He will close the sky up tight. There won't be any rain, and the ground won't yield any of its crops. You will quickly disappear off the wonderful land the LORD is giving to you. Place these words I'm speaking on your heart and in your very being. Tie them on your hand as a sign. They should be on your forehead as a symbol. Teach them to your children, by talking about them when you are sitting around your house and when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are getting up. Write them on your house's doorframes and on your city's gates. Do all that so your days and your children's days on the fertile land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors are many—indeed, as many as the number of days that the sky's been over the earth!

### **Observation**

In these verses, we're given instruction for how to follow God's commandments. These instructions include binding them to our heart, our home, and to future generations. They also tell us to keep God's word in front of us in all way say and do.

### **Application**

How do you remember to keep God's commandments? Some of us have art hung in our homes, tattoos, or even stickers on our water bottles to help us remember. My kids have backpack tags (give to them from Messiah Church) that remind them of God's love. Small, daily reminders of how God loves us, *and* how God calls us to act in love are important to help us remain faithful. Look around. Are there places where you could use a reminder of God's love and invitation?

## **Prayer**

God of creation, thank you for loving me and inviting me to faithful discipleship. Help me to notice you every day and be assured of your presence and guidance. Amen.