



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of February 4, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Good morning, God. This is the day that you have made, let me rejoice and be glad in it. Help me to grow in love of you today. Send your Spirit upon me and bless me. Open my heart to your presence. Heal and forgive my brokenness. Lift any despair or doubt and encourage me by your grace. Amen.

Monday, February 5

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground."

Observation

As scripture begins, God creates our world. There are two accounts of creation in Genesis, but today we read how God created humanity. "Let us make humanity in our image," God begins – declaring already that all of humanity have been made in the image and likeness of God. That little "our" reminds me that we have been made in the likeness of all of God's forms: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. But in our creating, God also tells us *why* we have been made: "so that they may take charge of... all the earth."

Application

God has made you with purpose! You have been made to reflect the One who has not only made the earth, but who redeems, cares, and nurtures all life. Your greatest "family trait" is that you reflect God. And your purpose is to care for the earth: its people, animals, and environment. How do you suppose God hoped this would look? In what ways have we

found our purpose? In what ways have we strayed? How might God be calling you, today, to tend and care for God's masterpiece?

Prayer

Good and loving God, thank you for making me in your image and inviting me to care for your beautiful earth. Keep me mindful of the purpose you've given me, that my words and actions are aligned with reflecting your image into the world. Amen.

Tuesday, February 6

Scripture: Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd.

I lack nothing.

He lets me rest in grassy meadows;

he leads me to restful waters;

he keeps me alive.

He guides me in proper paths

for the sake of his good name.

Even when I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no danger because you are with me.

Your rod and your staff—

they protect me.

You set a table for me

right in front of my enemies.

You bathe my head in oil;

my cup is so full it spills over!

Yes, goodness and faithful love

will pursue me all the days of my life,

and I will live in the LORD's house

as long as I live.

Observation

One of the biggest questions of faith is "why do bad things happen to good people?" It's a question that arises because we want *good* things to happen when we are good. At its core, I think, we simply want to be able to control and avoid suffering. And yet, we all know that just as the rain falls on areas of drought and flood – so too, do struggles find their way to us all. The real question then, might be: "how do we remain faithful amid suffering?"

Application

Scripture is filled with stories of good, faithful people who experienced suffering. We could look to the story of Joseph (Genesis 37), Job, Ruth, or many others for examples of people of God who suffered great loss and tragedy *and* found hope. One of my favorite reminders of God's presence is Psalm 23. This Psalm gives an image of a long journey. At its center, it declares "Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are

with me" (23:4). Not only do the words remind us of God's presence, but the poem is written carefully, so the very center words are these: *you are with me*. In Hebrew, the language in which this was written, there are exactly the same number of words before and after. Even in its shape, the psalm reminds us: in the middle of it all, you are not alone.

Prayer

Shepherding God, as you guide me throughout life – toward water and banquets, amid valleys and shadows, remind me that you are near. Draw me close and keep me near. Amen.

Wednesday, February 7

Scripture: Psalm 13

How long will you forget me, Lord? Forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long will I be left to my own wits,

agony filling my heart? Daily?

How long will my enemy keep defeating me?

Look at me!

Answer me, Lord my God!

Restore sight to my eyes!

Otherwise, I'll sleep the sleep of death,

and my enemy will say, "I won!"

My foes will rejoice over my downfall.

But I have trusted in your faithful love.

My heart will rejoice in your salvation.

Yes, I will sing to the Lord

because he has been good to me.

Observation

It was (and is) possible to trust God even when hurting. Psalm 13 was one of about 50 "laments," poetic expressions of sadness, pain, and disappointment. At the end, it expressed continued faith: "I have trusted in your faithful love."

Application

When have you felt the pain and frustration reflected in the psalmist's opening question: "How long will you forget me, Lord? Forever?" The Hebrew phrase about God "hiding his face" meant it felt as if God had withdrawn divine favor. Are there ways in which you are waiting for God today? What choices can help you sustain patience and trust in God's unfailing love as you wait?

Prayer

Lord God, whether I've been brave enough to say it aloud or not, you know at times my

heart asks, "How long?" I thank you that your faithful love is always with me. I never have to wait for that. Amen.

Thursday, February 8

Scripture: Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory. But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Observation

Some challenges are minor; others test every fiber of our being. In our reading, Paul reminds us that even through challenges, in God we are given tools to meet all of life with hope.

Application

Romans 5 details a cycle that follows sufferings, including endurance, character, and hope. When has God's love been "poured out" in your heart? How can you open your heart to let God fill you with hope?

Prayer

God, keep teaching me to see life your way, to value the flexibility and trust you can grow in me during tough times. Amen.

Friday, February 9

Scripture: Acts 14:19-22

Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and won the crowds over. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead. When the disciples surrounded him, he got up and entered the city again. The following day he left with Barnabas for Derbe. Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the good news to the people in Derbe and made many disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, where they strengthened the disciples and urged them to remain firm in the faith. They told them, "If we are to enter God's kingdom, we must pass through many troubles."

Observation

Our reading opens dramatically as a crowd who thought they had killed Paul with stones had dumped his body outside the town of Lystra. This helps us understand Paul's words

when he says, honestly and reflectively: "If we are to enter God's kingdom, we must pass through many troubles."

Application

Following God means causing (to borrow from John Lewis) "good trouble." We hear it in Paul's story and throughout the life of Jesus. Paul gives us an example, not only of "good trouble," but of remaining faithful to God even when things are not easy. What is God calling you to do today that might cause some "good trouble"?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you sent Paul through unfamiliar, hostile territory. Often you just ask me to be a good neighbor, or to be your presence in my workplace or school. Give me courage to do whatever you ask. Amen.

Saturday, February 10

Scripture: John 16:32-33

Look! A time is coming—and is here!—when each of you will be scattered to your own homes and you will leave me alone. I'm not really alone, for the Father is with me. I've said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world."

Observation

John wrote that, on the night before he went to the cross, Jesus plainly told his followers, "In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world." Jesus promises us a life that is filled with God's love and hope. Jesus promises us a whole and lasting, fully redeemed life. But never did Jesus say it would be easy.

Application

When I read these verses, I am comforted because I am reminded that Jesus – who is God in flesh – has experienced it all. He has known grief and fear, worry and death. It feels comforting to me that our God chose to experience human life, so that we can be fully known by God. How do these words greet you today: "be encouraged because I have conquered the world"? May they bring you peace.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for taking on flesh and living among us. Thank you for making me a resurrected person. Bring me comfort and encouragement when life is difficult. Help me to find strength in you. Amen.