

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 11, 2024

Weekly Prayer

God of all creation and God of relationships, how good it is when we can live together in unity! Knit us together as your people in one family. Equip us for the hard work of living together as your family. As we are blessed through our relationship with you, may we become a blessing to each other and a witness to all the world; in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Monday, August 12

Scripture: Numbers 34:1-2, 11; 2 Kings 15:29

The Lord said to Moses: Command the Israelites and say to them: When you enter the land of Canaan, this is the land that will fall to you as an inheritance. The land of Canaan according to its boundaries:

The border will descend from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain. The border will go down and meet the eastern slope of the Galilee Sea.

In the days of Israel's King Pekah, Assyria's King Tiglath-pileser came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor. He also captured Gilead, Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali. He sent the people into exile to Assyria.

Observation

Numbers 34 was the first Biblical mention of Galilee. The book, written later when they knew the land's geography, credited Moses with the words before the Israelites had ever been in Canaan. 2 Kings 15 documented that the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel lost Galilee to the Assyrian Empire, which fully seized and scattered them by 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:5-6). History showed that practical implications of God's promises are worked out in relation to circumstances.

Application

2 Kings showed a big shift for Israel. In the Old Testament story, the only big power Israel has had to worry about is Egypt. Now the Assyrians have an empire in the north of modern Iraq and have extended their sphere of influence to the west for the sake of the trade potential in that direction. The prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:2-17) urged their kings to trust God, not military alliances. The kings found that unrealistic. How can you trust God more than human forces today?

Prayer

Lord God, too often our phrase "the real world" means a view that ignores your principles and seeks short-term advantages. Help me keep learning how to trust you even when that stretches my faith. Amen.

Tuesday, August 13

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-14, 19-23; Luke 2:51-52

When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him.” Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt.

After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. “Get up,” the angel said, “and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.

Observation

Unlike Mary, Joseph has no speaking part—we don’t read a single word he speaks in the Gospels. Yet Jesus’ earthly father did much more than stand by the manger as shepherds worshiped baby Jesus. Joseph’s prompt obedience to a God-given dream saved Mary and baby Jesus from King Herod’s paranoid violence. Back from Egypt, Joseph chose the safety of obscure Nazareth in Galilee over his town of Bethlehem, minutes from Jerusalem.

Application

Joseph surely didn’t do whatever he dreamed about every day. Yet promptly obeying the dreams Matthew recorded was a life-and-death matter. How can you discern which thoughts, dreams or “inner nudges” are from God? (In our Messiah library, we have books like Dallas Willard’s *Hearing God* and Adam Hamilton’s *Why?* that offer in-depth insights into that question.) Does seeing that Joseph, Mary and Jesus were refugees from political violence affect how you see today’s often-heated refugee issues?

Prayer

Loving Lord, like your people of old, you came out of Egypt, thanks to your vigilant, obedient parents. Help me know how to mix wisdom and compassion in welcoming strangers in your name. Amen.

Wednesday, August 14

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:12-17

Nonetheless, those who were in distress won’t be exhausted. At an earlier time, God

cursed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but later he glorified the way of the sea, the far side of the Jordan, and the Galilee of the nations.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.
On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.

Now when Jesus heard that John was arrested, he went to Galilee. He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, which lies alongside the sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said:

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
 alongside the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles,
the people who lived in the dark have seen a great light,
 and a light has come upon those who lived in the region and in shadow of death.

From that time Jesus began to announce, “Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!”

Observation

Matthew said Jesus left his hometown of Nazareth (a tiny farming village), and based himself in Capernaum, a larger fishing town on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Trade routes brought many different people through Capernaum.

Application

Isaiah called the region “Galilee of the nations” (or “Galilee of the Gentiles” in Matthew’s Greek version). That referred to Assyria’s actions to fill the conquered area with people who weren’t Jewish. The overarching theme of the Gospel of Matthew is the role of Jesus as the Christ in relation to God’s plan of salvation for all humanity. How can Matthew’s vision that Jesus’ “light” was for all people, not just a favored few, guide us as we face divisions in the church?

Many English translations say Jesus’ message was “Repent.” But we can misunderstand that message: They have thought it means ‘feeling bad about yourself.’ It doesn’t. It means ‘change direction,’ ‘turn round and go the other way;’ or ‘stop what you’re doing and do the opposite instead.’ How you feel about it isn’t the really important thing. It’s what you do that matters. How does Jesus’ call most resonate in your mind and heart at this stage of your spiritual journey?

Prayer

Jesus, I know what it is to ‘live in the dark.’ I choose to identify myself with you as the Lord of my life. Shine your “great light” into my very self—and then out of me to others. Amen.

Thursday, August 15

Scripture: Mark 1:28, 39

Right away the news about him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee.

He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.

Observation

The shores of the lake were the site of towns—Capernaum, Bethsaida, etc.—where much of Christ’s ministry was carried out. In his time, they formed a flourishing, almost continuous, belt of settlement around the lake, and communicated and traded across it with each other. Its agriculture, fisheries and commerce provided him with his cultural background, and are reflected in his parables and teaching. Its dense scattering of settlements formed their first mission field.

Application

Inhabitants of Jerusalem regarded Galilee as a backward locale (Acts 2:7), peculiar first of all because of its dialect (Matthew 26:73). Ironically, Galilee was a better spot for much of Jesus’ ministry because of the prejudice of Jerusalem’s spiritual and political elite. Fewer of its people were sure they already had all of life figured out. In what ways have you had to lay aside ideas you learned from human sources to fully live out the principles Jesus taught?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you found promising human “soil” for your message in Galilee, along with some who hated what you stood for. In some ways, this sounds a lot like my world. Give me your vision and steadfast courage. Amen.

Friday, August 16

Scripture: Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 4:18-22

As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. Come, follow me,” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” Right away, they left their nets and followed him. After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee’s sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.

As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” Right away, they left their nets and followed him. Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father repairing their nets. Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Observation

Many people really like fishing today, but in most areas, there are fewer who make a living from it. When Jesus spoke of “fishing for people,” that image made a lot of sense to many of the people who heard him. The abundance of fish in the Jordan River and Sea of Galilee resulted in the fishing industry being a primary source of income for Galileans. Fishermen

from Capernaum were among the first to become followers of Jesus (Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20).

Application

As we study Jesus' ministry, we find that he called people to change their work (as in today's reading), habits, attitudes or beliefs, relationships, and even their understanding of life's ultimate purpose. Is there any part of your life where you believe God is calling you to change something, maybe even "right away"? If so, how much are you responding as the men in this story did?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, sometimes I'd rather not hear your call. But I sense that it's a bigger risk to miss your call—so keep my ears and heart open to you and your calling on my life. Amen.

Saturday, August 17

Scripture: Luke 5:1-11

One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God's word. Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, "Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch."

Simon replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I'll drop the nets."

So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Leave me, Lord, for I'm a sinner!" Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. James and John, Zebedee's sons, were Simon's partners and they were amazed too.

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people." As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Observation

If we only had the stories we read yesterday (Matthew 4 and Mark 1), we might think Jesus called total strangers who instantly dropped everything to follow him. Luke's gospel made it clear that it took more than one short conversation. He showed that Jesus and Simon knew each other before today's story (Luke 4:38-39). And today's story also showed that Jesus' vision always reached farther than just the one area that many of them had known all their lives. He asked those first disciples to "push into the deep water" on the Sea of Galilee, a hint of the ultimate task he had for them. In the end, "fishing for people" carried them into the deep waters of a whole world filled with suffering and spiritual hunger.

Application

Jesus was a rabbi and a religious teacher. Peter and his partners caught fish for a living. Why should “pros” like them listen when Jesus said, “Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch” (verse 4)? They agreed “Because you say so.” Have you ever had a sense that Jesus was calling you to something that was more than “usual” or “logical”? Were, or are, you open to saying, “Because you say so, Lord”? “When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Leave me, Lord, for I’m a sinner!” (verse 8) When did you most vividly realize “This ‘God’ business is way more than just human common sense”? In that moment, did you feel any fear like Peter expressed in this passage? Did you take in Jesus’ reassurance: “Don’t be afraid” (verse 10)? How has realizing who God is, who you are, and who God wants to be in your life changed things for you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are my heavenly friend and brother—but you are also Lord of the universe. As I love and trust you, help me to also hold you in awe and respect. Amen.