



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 9, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Creator God, all creation is your handiwork; your breath and love gives life to all that is. You have shaped me and formed me by your Spirit, giving me gifts, and calling me to use them in ways that honor and glorify you. May your Spirit be at work in and through me today, dear God, amen.

Monday, July 10

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this.

Observation

As you read this, my family is heading out on vacation. My boys will experience their first airplane ride, and we will spend a few days with friends in Cincinnati. As I *write* this, I am preparing for that trip – making lists of things to pack, things to buy, hoping I'm not missing anything. But now, I am adding these gifts of the Spirit to my "packing list!" Oh, how I hope we all bring a big piece of peace, a lot of patience, and an abundance of joy with us in the days to come.

Application

Noticing my own "need" to pack up these various fruits of the Spirit, I invite you to do the same. What will you carry with you intentionally today? If you packed a bag (or a basket, to keep with the metaphor) of this fruit – which would you carry?

Prayer

God, thank you for these gifts of the Spirit. Bless me, that as I focus on the fruit I 'need most' today, that I may also notice your presence and guidance at work. Give me your love, your peace and patience, your kindness, goodness, faithfulness, along with your gentleness and self-control. Amen.

Tuesday, July 11

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires. If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit. Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other.

Observation

Can you picture the Spirit as a flowering, fruit-filled plant in your garden? I imagine that it is overflowing with perfectly ripe and delicious fruit for our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But just like any plant in our homes or gardens, the fruit of the Spirit requires the right amount of tender care. Without the right balance of sunshine and water, without being harvested at just the right time – this fruit, too, will fail to thrive and grow properly.

Application

We are sitting with this passage again today, because it is “ripe” with wisdom! (See what I did there?) Now, I am *not* a good gardener, but I hope I am better at cultivating the gifts of the spirit in my life! As you read this list, are there certain gifts that come easier to you? Others that need more attention in order to flourish? Maybe some that seem prone to 'over watering'? Notice your feelings, your words, and your actions today – paying attention to the ways that you are tending to the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

Prayer

God, in creation you made a garden. At Jesus' resurrection, you were revealed in the garden again. And now, in the gifts of the Spirit, you are making a garden within me. Help me to nurture my garden well: tending and caring for your gifts, that my whole life may fruit and flourish. Amen.

Wednesday, July 1

Scripture: Isaiah 64:8

But now, LORD, you are our father.

We are the clay, and you are our potter.

All of us are the work of your hand.

Observation

Here, Isaiah reminds us that we are all a part of God's creation. Just as an artist takes time to work the clay – molding and shaping it with loving care – so too, does God shape and mold us. But also, like any artist knows, the end result can be a bit unpredictable! That is part of the joy of art, I think. God created and guides you, but God also delights in the ways that you grow and find your own way.

Application

Are there areas in your life where you might need to return to the “potter’s wheel” for some additional molding or shaping? Places that require God’s attention and grace today? And maybe, there is something in your life that makes you think, “I bet God is really delighted with how this turned out!” You can bring your thanks to God for the ways you, God’s most beloved art, have found your own way in the world and flourished.

Prayer

Mold me and shape me, dear God. Set within me your goodness, your grace, and love. And then, may my days find their “final form” in ways that bring you delight in how I love you and your created world so well. Amen.

Thursday, July 13

Scripture: Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it’s not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn’t hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don’t see, we wait for it with patience. In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don’t know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God’s will.

Observation

The apostle wrote that even when we find ourselves at a loss, “the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans.” The ministry of the Spirit is to help believers pray, and even to pray for them.... Jesus also prays for believers (Romans 8:34). If there are questions or pains that leave you speechless, ask the Spirit to help you lay them at God’s feet today.

Application

The apostle Paul faced many griefs and hardships, yet we never find him asking, “Why did God send that mob to attack me?” We never find him resignedly sighing, “Everything happens for a reason. Nero’s madness and injustice are just God’s will.” Instead, Paul expressed a deep trust that even when bad things occur, things God never wished for, the Holy Spirit gives us hope, even pleads our case in prayer when words fail us, and guides us to lives “consistent with God’s will.”

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank you for being a source of encouragement and guidance. Thank you for interceding, and for interpreting my prayers – even when they are merely “sighs too great for words.” Amen.

Friday, July 14

Scripture: Romans 8:1-5

So now there isn't any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. God has done what was impossible for the Law, since it was weak because of selfishness. God condemned sin in the body by sending his own Son to deal with sin in the same body as humans, who are controlled by sin. He did this so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us. Now the way we live is based on the Spirit, not based on selfishness. People whose lives are based on selfishness think about selfish things, but people whose lives are based on the Spirit think about things that are related to the Spirit.

Observation

The apostle Paul echoed the core of Jesus' words: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). We can choose to live oriented toward self (i.e. away from God), or to live by the Spirit oriented toward God. That's the choice that joins us to Christ's new community, living in peace. As *The Message* put Romans 8:1, "Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud."

Application

Verse 5 said our whole life, not just one day a week or even a few minutes a day, is based on "the Spirit." How have you sensed a shift, over time, from basing your life on self-interest to basing it on the principles God's Spirit teaches you and guides you in living? Where is your life's "growing edge" right now—in what areas is that shift (not without struggles) taking place?

Prayer

Jesus, I want to follow you faithfully, yet I still lose my way. Thank you for your patience, and for continuing to pull me back towards you. Help me to deepen my faith, to grow closer to you each day, amen.

Saturday, July 15

Scripture: John 3:1-5

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born anew,^[a] it's not possible to see God's kingdom." Nicodemus asked, "How is it possible for an adult to be born? It's impossible to enter the mother's womb for a second time and be born, isn't it?" Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it's not possible to enter God's kingdom.

Observation

Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader, “came to Jesus at night.” He praised Jesus’ “miraculous signs.” When Jesus said the vital thing was to be born “anew” or “from above” (the Greek word John used could mean both), Nicodemus seemed stuck on understanding Jesus’ words literally. But Jesus wasn’t saying people should crawl back into their mother’s womb. He was comparing the more abstract idea of spiritual renewal to being born again, as a new person, filled with God’s Spirit.

Application

Part of human development is moving from concrete thought patterns to abstract/conceptual thinking. Nicodemus had surely developed that, yet he chose a literal meaning for Jesus’ words. Maybe that was because inherent in being born again would be the sense that following Jesus isn’t a 9-5 job. It’s a new way of living that transforms every part of a person’s life. How does following Jesus transform your life? Have you/do you ever resist parts of that transformation?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, cleanse me in your healing and life-giving waters. Pour out your Spirit, and their gifts, into my heart and life. Let me be born, every day, in you. Amen.