



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 22, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Loving God, You invite me over and over again to redefine what love looks like. Continue to expand my understanding of You. Expand my sight to see each person as one You love. As You welcome me, help me to show Your expansive welcome in my community and beyond. Amen.

Monday, October 23

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:14-22

Clearly, the LORD owns the sky, the highest heavens, the earth, and everything in it. But the LORD adored your ancestors, loving them and choosing the descendants that followed them—you!—from all other people. That's how things still stand now. So circumcise your hearts and stop being so stubborn, because the LORD your God is the God of all gods and Lord of all lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God who doesn't play favorites and doesn't take bribes. He enacts justice for orphans and widows, and he loves immigrants, giving them food and clothing. That means you must also love immigrants because you were immigrants in Egypt. Revere the LORD your God, serve him, cling to him, swear by his name alone! He is your praise, and he is your God—the one who performed these great and awesome acts that you witnessed with your very own eyes. Your ancestors went down to Egypt with a total of seventy people, but now look! The LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the nighttime sky!

Observation

The Bible is clear: as children made in God's image, we are to treat the foreigner/immigrant with empathy, compassion, justice, and inclusion. This is not an isolated passage; it is part of a major theme throughout the Bible starting in Genesis 1 and continuing through Revelation. God is known as one who acts for the poor and the outsiders. Providing for the poor and weak was one of the ways that the ideal king was pictured in the ancient world. Time and again throughout scripture God blesses those who treat the stranger with kindness, and curses those who do not.

Application

The core motivation in this passage is empathy "...for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Since God will always be a stranger to us, receiving God is receiving a stranger,

someone different from us. Receiving God, therefore, is an act of faith and so is receiving others. Are there any stories from your own family's history that might help you relate to the new immigrants among us?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for sending your son to save the least and the lost, including me. Guide me to the ways I can join You in doing that great, world-changing work. Amen.

Tuesday, October 24

Scripture: Matthew 22:36-40

"Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?" He replied, "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.* All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

Observation

Jewish rabbis debated: were all commandments equal or was there a greater one? Asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus chose not one but two. The first was Deuteronomy 6:4: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind." But he added Leviticus 19:18: "You must love your neighbor as you love yourself." Jesus said the point of all other truths is to lead us to love God and neighbor more fully. God wants us to show contagious love to all we know.

Application

Jesus said every key Bible principle, all the truths we know about what God wants, depend on the two commands he quoted. The second command can be especially challenging. Loving others the way we love ourselves is based on how God loves us—never giving up, no matter what. Our humanity makes it hard for us to love ourselves or others with God's unwarranted love with no hesitation. But God calls us to move toward that, for our own sake and the sake of others. What has stopped you or made it hard for you to love yourself or someone else persistently? How might you love the stranger more fully?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for loving me unconditionally. Help me to recognize the moments in my life when I can relentlessly love those around me. Amen.

Wednesday, October 25

Scripture: Ezekiel 34:1-8, 11-12; Luke 15:1-7

The LORD's word came to me: Human one, prophesy against Israel's shepherds. Prophesy and say to them, The LORD God proclaims to the shepherds: Doom to Israel's shepherds who tended themselves! Shouldn't shepherds tend the flock? You drink the milk, you wear

the wool, and you slaughter the fat animals, but you don't tend the flock. You don't strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strays, or seek out the lost; but instead you use force to rule them with injustice. Without a shepherd, my flock was scattered; and when it was scattered, it became food for all the wild animals. My flock strayed on all the mountains and on every high hill throughout all the earth. My flock was scattered, and there was no one to look for them or find them. So now shepherds, hear the LORD's word! This is what the LORD God says: As surely as I live, without a shepherd, my flock became prey. My flock became food for all the wild animals. My shepherds didn't seek out my flock. They tended themselves, but they didn't tend my flock.

The LORD God proclaims: I myself will search for my flock and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out the flock when some in the flock have been scattered, so will I seek out my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered during the time of clouds and thick darkness.

All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose someone among you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them. Wouldn't he leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and search for the lost one until he finds it? And when he finds it, he is thrilled and places it on his shoulders. When he arrives home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost sheep.' In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes both heart and life than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives.

Observation

Jesus, God in the flesh, came to this planet on a very real rescue mission. Drawing from the image in Ezekiel 34, Jesus told a story about a shepherd who lost one sheep from his flock. That was only 1% of the flock, but the shepherd cared deeply about any lost sheep. He dropped everything, searched until he found that sheep – and felt great joy when he found it. Jesus' critics thought he should write off the human lost sheep (Luke 15:2), but Jesus in fact searched tirelessly for them.

Application

Ezekiel's metaphor goes beyond the normal responsibilities of making sure that the sheep are protected and fed. Instead, it focuses on the remedial duties, caring for the sick and finding the lost. These equate to the need for kings to bring about justice for alienated and disenfranchised people. What are some of the ways you can actively support and work for justice for alienated or disenfranchised people around you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that You've never seen me (or anyone) as disposable, a stranger, or as someone who doesn't matter. Give me Your heart for everyone in Your human family. Amen.

Thursday, October 26

Scripture: Romans 13:8-10

Don't be in debt to anyone, except for the obligation to love each other. Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law. The commandments, *Don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, don't desire what others have*, and any other commandments, are all summed up in one word: *You must love your neighbor as yourself*. Love doesn't do anything wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is what fulfills the Law.

Observation

Paul sent this letter to Roman house churches (there were no big cathedrals in his day). Some were mainly Jewish, others mostly Gentile. Their standards of righteousness varied (see Romans 14:1-15:13). It was easy for them to criticize each other. Paul said the purpose of God's law or rules is to help us love. "Love doesn't do anything wrong to a neighbor" was a big challenge to people who disagreed. It was (and is) vital, because "Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law."

Application

How might ugly religious conflicts of the past (such as the Salem witch trials or the Inquisition) have been different if Christians had always aimed to fulfill the law by loving? How can you stand for truths that matter to you without acting in unloving ways toward those who disagree? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in the inner qualities (that may not come naturally) that help you live out the law of love.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, "love is what fulfills the Law" sometimes feels too easy to me. Until, that is, I try to do it. Then I realize how high and hard a standard that really is. Teach me how to love the way that You love. Amen.

Friday, October 27

Scripture: Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 19:1-10

Jesus traveled among all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, announcing the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest."

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When Jesus came to that

spot, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today." So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus. Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much." Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. The Human One came to seek and save the lost."

Observation

Our reason to be as a congregation grows from Jesus' actions and teaching. Jesus was a man on a mission. He did many admirable, valuable things during his ministry on earth. He healed the sick, broke down barriers of prejudice and exclusion, taught people how to live better lives, and challenged religious hypocrisy. Yet all that grew from his one central mission. First and foremost, Jesus said, he came to seek and to save the lost.

Application

Jesus said he "came to seek and save the lost." In his commentary, William Barclay wrote, *"In the New Testament 'lost' does not mean damned or doomed. It just means in the wrong place.... A man is lost when he has wandered away from God; and he is found when once again he takes his rightful place as an obedient child in the...family of his Father."* In what ways has God found you, and given you your rightful place in God's family? When have you been able to help God find someone else?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming "to seek and save the lost," including me. Guide me to the ways I can join You in doing that great, world-changing work. Amen.

Saturday, October 28

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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.

Love is patient, love is kind, it isn't jealous, it doesn't brag, it isn't arrogant, it isn't rude, it doesn't seek its own advantage, it isn't irritable, it doesn't keep a record of complaints, it isn't happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things.

Observation

Paul was emphatically practical in his letters to the Christians in Ephesus and Corinth. He would have grown up reciting the Shema, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus said that was the greatest

commandment, and added, “You must love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). The next logical question for Paul, like Jesus’ followers ever since, was, “What does it look like to love my neighbor?” These were his answers. It looks like being humble – not thinking of yourself more highly than others. It looks like being gentle – take a deep breath if you feel angry, speak carefully. It looks like being patient – while waiting, focus on God instead of yourself. Love requires compassion (suffering with others), kindness (honor and consideration) and forgiveness to all God’s children.

Application

As you read this list of loving actions, how do you feel? Great? Guilty? Condemned? If you’re not perfectly living this list, remember none of us are. Start with, how can you be more loving this week? Instead of trying to grow in all areas at once, choose one characteristic Paul lists and focus on living into a new way of loving. You might consider plugging into a Faith Group as an opportunity to do life together with other Christians who are supporting each other in this wonderful yet challenging work of being loving people.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I want to love all my neighbors everywhere. Help me start close to home and guide me as I expand my vision to be more and more like Your vast, world-changing vision. Amen.