



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of November 5, 2023

Weekly Prayer

God, as I read your holy word today, speak to me so I might listen and pay careful attention. Fill me with your holy generosity and grace. Make me ready to welcome Jesus into my life. Open my heart to those who are in need. On this day, I choose to serve you. Amen.

Monday, November 6

Scripture: Proverbs 3:9-10

Honor the LORD with your wealth
and with the first of all your crops.
Then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will burst with wine.

Observation

The *first fruits* refers to the practice of giving to God's use the first and best portion of the harvest. This demonstrates that God, not possessions, have the first place in our lives and that our resources belong to God. We are only managers of God's resources. Giving God our firsts helps us conquer greed, helps us manage God's resources, and opens us up to receive God's special blessings.

Application

From the beginning, Christian churches have served not only as spiritual outposts but also as economic units. Wisdom in earning, saving, and giving money has allowed Christians to look after each other. These activities are part of our roots as the church. Though some people think the church is separate from the "real" world of finance and economics, the first Christians did not separate financial accountability from their call to be faithful disciples. Neither should we.

Prayer

Giver of all good gifts, grant us a share of our wisdom as we seek to witness in all we sing, pray, praise, and spend. Amen.

Tuesday, November 7

Scripture: Mark 4:1-9

Jesus began to teach beside the lake again. Such a large crowd gathered that he climbed into a boat there on the lake. He sat in the boat while the whole crowd was nearby on the shore. He said many things to them in parables. While teaching them, he said, "Listen to this! A farmer went out to scatter seed. As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path; and the birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn't deep. When the sun came up, it scorched the plants; and they dried up because they had no roots. Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked the seeds, and they produced nothing. Other seed fell into good soil and bore fruit. Upon growing and increasing, the seed produced in one case a yield of thirty to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of one hundred to one." He said, "Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!"

Observation

The parable of the soils, found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, is no exercise in gardening. When the farmer goes out to his field to sow, it is an act that could mean life or death for his family. Their economic well-being depends on how well he does his job. In this parable, Jesus tells us how seeds fall on various kinds of soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.

Application

Jesus went on to explain how the word of God can be planted in different people. In some, it will wither and fail, while in others it will bring forth great fruit. Perhaps the reason this parable is so well remembered is that that's what life is like for so many people. Give thought and prayer as to how might you "scatter seeds" so that your work bears abundant fruit?

Prayer

God, we are together around this great globe and are your servants. Bless the works of my hands and heart so that I might be a blessing to others. Amen.

Wednesday, November 8

Scripture: Proverbs 30:7-9

Two things I ask of you;
don't keep them from me before I die:
Fraud and lies—
keep far from me!
Don't give me either poverty or wealth;
give me just the food I need.
Or I'll be full and deny you,

and say, "Who is the LORD?"
Or I'll be poor and steal,
and dishonor my God's name.

Observation

A *marshal* is a term used in the Book of Proverbs for a saying that is self-evident, that means what it says. In the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs, we meet a sage named Agur who uses a marshal to make an important point about wisdom and economics. Everything about Agur is mysterious. His name and lineage suggest he might be a foreign-born official who had important duties in Israel. He is a masterful poet, a perceptive observer of human nature, and he offers a prayer that is striking because it encapsulates the contentment most of us ought to seek in having enough but not too much.

Application

Our culture is telling us that having enough is not enough. We need more. The result is that many of us believe we never have enough, even if we achieve more success than we ever dreamed possible. The way of the world is a fraud and a lie. If our choices about money are taken out of the realm of faith and wrestled with in only a worldly setting, we will never find the place Agur points to, neither very rich nor very poor. What changes might you make in your life to seek greater contentment with all that you have?

Prayer

Lord God of all days and all seasons, may we never forget you, whether rich or poor, in prosperity or adversity. You are with us always, even unto the end of the ages. Amen.

Thursday, November 9

Scripture: Luke 16:1-9

Jesus also said to the disciples, "A certain rich man heard that his household manager was wasting his estate. He called the manager in and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of your administration because you can no longer serve as my manager.' "The household manager said to himself, 'What will I do now that my master is firing me as his manager? I'm not strong enough to dig and too proud to beg. I know what I'll do so that, when I am removed from my management position, people will welcome me into their houses. "One by one, the manager sent for each person who owed his master money. He said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil.' The manager said to him, 'Take your contract, sit down quickly, and write four hundred fifty gallons.' Then the manager said to another, 'How much do you owe?' He said, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.' He said, 'Take your contract and write eight hundred.' "The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly. People who belong to this world are more clever in dealing with their peers than are people who belong to the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it's gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal homes.

Observation

Before you condemn the unjust steward, consider this: the economic system in Jesus' time made it very difficult for poor farmers to succeed. They knew what it was like to fall into spiraling debt, never to recover. Many were offered cheap credit on their family farms but were unable to keep up with the payments and lost their land. That's one reason why day laborers appear so often in the parables. When Jesus told the story, these people may have found themselves cheering for what was done, even if it was dishonest.

Application

Jesus concluded the parable by challenging those of us who consider ourselves to be "children of the light" to treat each other as well as those who seem less than honest appear to do. Consider how you might work hard and not cut corners or change reality to earn all you can. You can do it the way that's honest and long-lasting, through ambition, attitude, and action.

Prayer

Lord, grant me wisdom and patience as I seek to be responsible in all things. Amen.

Friday, November 10**Scripture: Proverbs 13:11**

Riches gotten quickly will dwindle,
but those who acquire them gradually become wealthy.

Observation

If you go to Proverbs looking for soul-stretching theological insights or dramatic narratives about the way God intersects with the human existence, you'll be sorely disappointed. Proverbs' great gift to us is that it provides practical wisdom for making our way through the mundane places and ordinary relationships of life.

Application

As fun as it might be to dream of becoming rich quickly, today's scripture from Proverbs reminds us that when it comes to earning all we can, nothing is more certain to produce riches than hard work.

Prayer

God who bestows daily blessings, bless me and mine with the ability and opportunity to work, to save, and to give. Amen.

Saturday, November 11

Scripture: James 1:2-8

My brothers and sisters, think of the various tests you encounter as occasions for joy. After all, you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let this endurance complete its work so that you may be fully mature, complete, and lacking in nothing. But anyone who needs wisdom should ask God, whose very nature is to give to everyone without a second thought, without keeping score. Wisdom will certainly be given to those who ask. Whoever asks shouldn't hesitate. They should ask in faith, without doubting. Whoever doubts is like the surf of the sea, tossed and turned by the wind. People like that should never imagine that they will receive anything from the Lord. They are double-minded, unstable in all their ways.

Observation

Jesus redefines "family" as whoever does God's will. The identity of James' audience is taken from Israel's history; they are the people of God. And like us, they are restored and yet challenged by life in a world that does not follow God's ways.

Application

Wisdom is God's gift that supports us in our times of trial. God is the source of all wisdom. The gift of wisdom is more about enabling us to act insightfully than giving us information. Can you recall a time when the wisdom of God carried you through a difficult financial situation?

Prayer

God of life, whether I'm dealing with great amounts or small, I count on you to direct me in gaining, saving and giving. Amen.