



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of November 12, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Loving and generous God, as I read your Word today, teach me what it means to be a good and faithful servant so that my life produces a great harvest for you and for your kingdom. In Jesus's name, amen.

Monday, November 13

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-15

"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After he agreed with the workers to pay them a denarion, he sent them into his vineyard. "Then he went out around nine in the morning and saw others standing around the marketplace doing nothing. He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I'll pay you whatever is right.' And they went. "Again around noon and then at three in the afternoon, he did the same thing. Around five in the afternoon he went and found others standing around, and he said to them, 'Why are you just standing around here doing nothing all day long?' " "Because nobody has hired us,' they replied. "He responded, 'You also go into the vineyard.' "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the workers and give them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and moving on finally to the first.' When those who were hired at five in the afternoon came, each one received a denarion. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarion. When they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 'These who were hired last worked one hour, and they received the same pay as we did even though we had to work the whole day in the hot sun.' "But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I did you no wrong. Didn't I agree to pay you a denarion? Take what belongs to you and go. I want to give to this one who was hired last the same as I give to you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I'm generous?'

Observation

In Jesus' startling story, some workers agreed to work all day for a *denarion*, a typical day's wage. Others joined in at various points during the day, including some who started just an hour before quitting time. The master paid them a *denarion*, which led the all-day workers to grumble. (We may identify with those all-day workers—this may not feel "fair.")

Then Jesus said that the master (God) asked pointedly, “Are you resentful because I’m generous?”

Application

Does the master’s way of paying the workers in this story feel unfair to you? It was not unfair, of course. No one was underpaid; it was just that some received ‘unreasonable’ generosity. That is what the kingdom of heaven is like. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul said Christ was treated as we deserved so that we would be treated as he deserved. In what ways does that “unfair” exchange draw your heart toward Christ?

Prayer

Lord God, I’m not yet there, but you already see me and treat me as the person you made me to be. Thank you for your generosity to me. Keep growing that quality in my life. Amen.

Tuesday, November 14

Scripture: Matthew 25:14-28

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was leaving on a trip. He called his servants and handed his possessions over to them. To one he gave five valuable coins, and to another he gave two, and to another he gave one. He gave to each servant according to that servant’s ability. Then he left on his journey. “After the man left, the servant who had five valuable coins took them and went to work doing business with them. He gained five more. In the same way, the one who had two valuable coins gained two more. But the servant who had received the one valuable coin dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money. “Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five valuable coins came forward with five additional coins. He said, ‘Master, you gave me five valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained five more.’ “His master replied, ‘Excellent! You are a good and faithful servant! You’ve been faithful over a little. I’ll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.’ “The second servant also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained two more.’ “His master replied, ‘Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful over a little. I’ll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.’ “Now the one who had received one valuable coin came and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven’t sown. You gather crops where you haven’t spread seed. So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what’s yours.’ “His master replied, ‘You evil and lazy servant! You knew that I harvest grain where I haven’t sown and that I gather crops where I haven’t spread seed? In that case, you should have turned my money over to the bankers so that when I returned, you could give me what belonged to me with interest. Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins.’

Observation

Three servants—two called “good and faithful,” the third fired for being “wicked and lazy.” A *talent* was a lot of money—up to 20 years of a typical worker’s wages. But in Jesus’

story, the servant with two *talents* was as faithful as the one with five. Jesus said our faithfulness to God shows in our willingness to use whatever resources of energy, time, skills, money, or other assets God gives us to bless others and build God's kingdom.

Application

What resources has God placed in your life? How are you using those resources to serve the Kingdom of God and bless others? Are there any resources you have "buried in a hole in the ground," so to speak? If so, how can you begin to use them actively for God's purposes?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I want to be a good and faithful servant—but, I admit, sometimes I'd also like to keep the resources you entrust to me all for myself. Teach me daily more about what it means for me to be good and faithful. Amen.

Wednesday, November 15

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Proverbs 11:23-28

Now if there are some poor persons among you, say one of your fellow Israelites in one of your cities in the land that the LORD your God is giving you, don't be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward your poor fellow Israelites. To the contrary! Open your hand wide to them. You must generously lend them whatever they need. But watch yourself! Make sure no wicked thought crosses your mind, such as, The seventh year is coming—the year of debt cancellation—so that you resent your poor fellow Israelites and don't give them anything. If you do that, they will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin. No, give generously to needy persons. Don't resent giving to them because it is this very thing that will lead to the LORD your God's blessing you in all you do and work at. Poor persons will never disappear from the earth. That's why I'm giving you this command: you must open your hand generously to your fellow Israelites, to the needy among you, and to the poor who live with you in your land.

The desires of the righteous end up well,
but the expectations of the wicked bring wrath.
Those who give generously receive more,
but those who are stingy with what is appropriate will grow needy.
Generous persons will prosper;
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.
People curse those who hoard grain,
but they bless those^[a] who sell it.
Those who look for good find favor,
but those who seek evil—it will come to them.
Those who trust in their wealth will wither,
but the righteous will thrive like leafy trees.

Observation

In defending Mary, who generously anointed his feet with costly perfume before his death and burial, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 15:11 (John 12:4-8). His words have at times been misused to justify an uncaring spirit toward the poor—an impossible meaning when we read their full setting in Deuteronomy 15. The sages who compiled the Proverbs closely linked generosity with righteousness, praising those who trust in God's values and share generously with people in need.

Application

Following God means valuing and admiring God's qualities and wanting to have them yourself (Matthew 5:48). When we serve a generous God, it makes sense that we will want to grow in our own practice of generosity. Have you ever felt (in the words of Deuteronomy 15) "hard-hearted" or "tight fisted" toward poor people, and "resented" giving to help them? In what ways is God helping you feel better about "opening your hand generously" to "the needy among you"?

Prayer

Lord God, help me trust you enough that I am able to "refresh others" from an overflowing heart, and to thrive more and more each day in the sunlight of your inexhaustible love. Amen.

Thursday, November 16**Scripture: Luke 16:10-15**

"Whoever is faithful with little is also faithful with much, and the one who is dishonest with little is also dishonest with much. If you haven't been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? If you haven't been faithful with someone else's property, who will give you your own? No household servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

The Pharisees, who were money-lovers, heard all this and sneered at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves before other people, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued by people is deeply offensive to God."

Observation

Israel in Jesus' day (like most countries today) had a few extremely rich people, and lots who were very poor. Jesus' message in today's reading was clear, and it was controversial. Jesus challenged the values of the religious leaders who were among the rich, saying it is impossible to serve God and wealth. Those who saw all their wealth as a sign of God's favor sneered. Jesus replied, "What is highly valued by people is deeply offensive to God."

Application

Scholar N.T. Wright wrote of this passage, “Money is not a possession, it’s a trust: God entrusts property to people and expects it to be used to his glory and the welfare of his children, not for private glory or glamour.” The Message said the religious leaders thought Jesus was “hopelessly out of touch.” Does Jesus’ teaching about worldly wealth and true riches seem “out of touch” to you? Does it challenge you? Does it inspire you?

Prayer

Heavenly Master, your greatest blessing in my life is not my bank account, home, or car. It is your eternal love for me. Help me to grow in my willingness to use all my other resources to bless others. Amen.

Friday, November 17

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?” Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.” Then he told them a parable: “A certain rich man’s land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, Here’s what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That’s where I’ll store all my grain and goods. I’ll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?’ This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren’t rich toward God.”

Observation

Jesus stated a basic principle of his kingdom in verse 15: “One’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions.” He followed up with a parable. It was a simple story – a rich man, reaping a large crop, thought of nothing but how to keep it all, adding it to his already abundant supply. Absorbed with earthly wealth, he forgot that, when life ended, none of it would be of any use to him. Jesus knew better and urged his hearers to become “rich toward God.”

Application

Scholar William Barclay said this rich farmer made two crucial errors. First, “he never saw beyond this world.” For a Christian, mortality is no longer something to fear (Hebrews 2:14-15)—but it is a reality to take seriously. In what ways are you planning and living for the time when this world’s material possessions will no longer matter?

The farmer’s second error, Barclay said, was that “he never saw beyond himself.” In contrast, he cited Methodism’s founder John Wesley: “At Oxford he had an income of 30 British pounds a year. He lived on 28 British pounds and gave 2 away. When his income

went up to 60 pounds, 90 pounds and 120 pounds a year, he still lived on 28 and gave the rest away.” In what practical ways do you look beyond yourself when you evaluate and make changes to your standard of living?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, whenever my life ends, I want my greatest treasure to be stored up with you, and not left behind for an auctioneer to dispose of. Guide me into the kind of life that is rich toward you. Amen.

Saturday, November 18

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:6-19

Actually, godliness is a great source of profit when it is combined with being happy with what you already have. We didn't bring anything into the world and so we can't take anything out of it: we'll be happy with food and clothing. But people who are trying to get rich fall into temptation. They are trapped by many stupid and harmful passions that plunge people into ruin and destruction. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some have wandered away from the faith and have impaled themselves with a lot of pain because they made money their goal. But as for you, man of God, run away from all these things. Instead, pursue righteousness, holy living, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness. Compete in the good fight of faith. Grab hold of eternal life—you were called to it, and you made a good confession of it in the presence of many witnesses. I command you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and Christ Jesus, who made the good confession when testifying before Pontius Pilate. Obey this order without fault or failure until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. The timing of this appearance is revealed by God alone, who is the blessed and only master, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He alone has immortality and lives in light that no one can come near. No human being has ever seen or is able to see him. Honor and eternal power belong to him. Amen. Tell people who are rich at this time not to become egotistical and not to place their hope on their finances, which are uncertain. Instead, they need to hope in God, who richly provides everything for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.

Observation

Paul's first letter to Timothy ended by pointing to one of the "great reversals" Jesus' message brings. Some people in Timothy's church had lots of money. Paul didn't want this often-short-lived wealth to blind them to God, "who richly provides" for our well-being. After describing the spiritual dangers that go with a lust for money, Paul told Timothy, "Run for your life from all this" (verse 11, The Message).

Application

How rich (or poor) are you, by the measure these verses suggest? If your “contentment quotient” is strong, reflect on how it got that way. What changes might disrupt your contentment and for what reasons? If your quotient is lower, ask God to help you raise it. Ask the most contented person you know what values and choices led toward contentment. Verse 19 said generosity, sharing and a wealth of good deeds allow God’s people to “take hold of what is truly life.” What moments have you had that let you know that generosity and sharing are key aspects of a life truly worth living?

Prayer

Dear God, my TV, social media, most of the items in my mailbox and my emails push me toward measuring my life in terms of material things. I’m thankful the Bible points me to your very different values. Teach me how to live more fully by your measure of what is truly life. Amen.