

Grow, Pray Study for the Week of June 2, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Holy God, may this time together with you be a joyful response for all that you have done, for all that you are doing, and for all you will continue to do. Inspire and strengthen me today, that I carry your love with me into the world. Amen.

Monday, June 3

Scripture: Matthew 7:9-12

Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread? Or give them a snake when they ask for fish? If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him. Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.

Observation

In this passage, Jesus summed up the big ideas he taught in the Sermon on the Mount, including God's wisdom about relationships. We're told to love our enemies, be honest, and show mercy (among other practices). These are not individual rules, but are collectively how we are called to care for one another. Verse 12 holds these practices and behaviors together in what we call the "Golden Rule."

Application

Loving one another is no simple task! Jesus added, "The gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it" (verse 14). What people or conditions make it hardest for you to treat others as you'd like them to treat you? What are some ways you have proactively tried to treat others in "Golden Rule" fashion? How easy or hard was it to do that?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to live more and more in line with your teaching. Help me to treat others in the ways I wish they'd treat me. Amen.

Tuesday, June 4

Scripture: Ephesians 4:29-32

Don't let any foul words come out of your mouth. Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what you say. Don't make the Holy Spirit of God unhappy—you were sealed by him for the day of redemption. Put aside all bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil. Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

Observation

This passage lists key qualities that destroy relationships, and others that heal them. Treating one another in un-Christlike ways ("bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil") damages and often destroys relationships. Letting Christ change your life from the inside out opens you to growing qualities like compassion, kindness, and a forgiving heart. God works through these qualities to strengthen our relationships.

Application

This passage reminds me of the common phrase many parents tell their children, "if you can't

say anything nice, don't say anything at all." Have you heard this? Have you *said* this? Harsh and unkind words strain and harm any relationship, but compassion, kindness, and forgiveness are the fertilizer which helps us grow.

Prayer

Lord, help me to speak with kindness, putting aside any bitterness or anger. Do your transforming work in me, that my relationships flourish with your love and compassion. Amen.

Wednesday, June 5

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-9

Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.

Observation

In these verses the apostle Paul talked about gladness, gentleness, an absence of anxiety, a spirit of gratitude, and a deep abiding peace. But these things didn't just happen naturally, without any awareness on our part. Paul ended by saying "practice these things." We become strong Christians by choosing to direct our thoughts and our actions toward our God, who promised us rich spiritual and relational rewards.

Application

In high school, these verses were highlighted in pink in my Bible. I hung them on my locker door and used them as a guide for how to live. The teenage years are challenging times, as young people face many choices and temptations in their lives. While wisdom may come with age, even as we grow we face many decisions and temptations in our daily life. Today, notice: how does meditating on these words help you choose love in your words and actions? And: how might you support teens today, praying and supporting them as they learn and grow?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us the way of life. Help me today to choose all that is true, holy, and just. Guide my day, that I am aware of your presence and encouraged by your love. Amen.

Thursday, June 6

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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

Throughout this book, Paul is teaching and encouraging the people of Corinth how to live in right relationship and community with one another. In this famous passage, Paul defines love. It

is patient and kind. It is not jealous, arrogant, or rude. Collectively, we hear how love is optimistic and always working for the good.

Application

How is your love? Living in relationships and community is no simple task! While Paul describes what love is, the practice of love is not so easy. Meditate on these words today. If you have any particularly troublesome relationships, spend time in prayer with God, seeking wisdom for how to offer and receive love well.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for teaching us how to love. Help me to not only love in this way, but to see myself as worthy as being loved the same. Bring healing to any relationship or community that is suffering, that we might know healing. Amen.

Friday, June 7

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

To the churches in Galatia, the apostle Paul listed key qualities God offers to grow in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Who wouldn't want those qualities in a spouse, a date, a friend, or a co-worker? As scholar N. T. Wright put it, "The nine qualities Paul lists in verses 22–23 are not things which, if we try hard enough, we could simply do without help, without the spirit." Paul clearly believed that God's people could depend on the Holy Spirit's guidance. But the Spirit seldom confronts us with flashing signs. God's guidance usually reaches us in quiet, subtle ways. What steps can you take to keep your spiritual "ears" open to the Spirit's direction?

Application

Practicing these qualities begins at an early age. The last few weeks, our KID Street kids have been learning a song about the Fruits of the Spirit on Wednesday nights. Even as young children, they can learn how to experience and notice the Spirit at work. As you meditate on these fruits in your life, also pray for our children: that they see, know, and embody the gifts of God all their lives.

Prayer

God of love, joy, and peace – fill me with your Spirit. May your children, of every age, know your goodness, helping us grow in patience, kindness, and gentleness. Amen.

Saturday, June 8

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27

"Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on

sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.”

Observation

Picture yourself on a beach, standing on the water’s edge. What happens to the sand under your feet as the water flows in and out? It literally moves out from under your feet and often causes you to lose your balance. Now, imagine a house that is built on sand. What is going to happen when the rain falls, the floods come, and the wind blows? The sand is going to wash away, and the house will collapse. This is the image Jesus used to conclude the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This isn’t just any sermon, either. It’s Jesus’ *magnum opus*, “a great work; especially, the greatest achievement of an artist or writer” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Anyone “who hears these words of mine and doesn’t put them into practice” is like someone who builds a house on sand. The final impression that Jesus left his listeners with was a warning that it’s not just about hearing Jesus’ words. It’s about doing them.

Application

I’ve noticed this week that many of our scripture passages are common Sunday School songs. Perhaps you remember learning these songs, or memorizing verses as a child, too? I think this is the result of two things: love and living in community is essential, no matter our age; and, loving and living in community well takes a lifetime of practice. The practices you have today, if built on solid rock, will make a positive impact in your heart, your life, and our world. What are two or three ways you can practice love in your relationships today?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that your love for me is always a “house firmly set on bedrock.” Help me to follow your example today and practice love in my relationships. Amen.