



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of May 12, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Jesus, let your divine spirit fill me today as I praise you. Open my heart and let the loving breath of the spirit guide me to live, grow, and lead as I build my own nets of connection and friendship. I do all of this in your holy name, amen.

Monday, May 13

Scripture: Exodus 34:5-7; Psalm 136:1-9

The Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him, and proclaimed the name, "The Lord." The Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed:

"The Lord! The Lord!
a God who is compassionate and merciful,
very patient,
full of great loyalty and faithfulness,
showing great loyalty to a thousand generations,
forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion,
yet by no means clearing the guilty,
punishing for their parents' sins
their children and their grandchildren,
as well as the third and the fourth generation."

Give thanks to the LORD because he is good.

God's faithful love lasts forever!

Give thanks to the God of all gods—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of all lords—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the only one

who makes great wonders—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the one who made the skies with skill—

God's faithful love lasts forever.
Give thanks to the one who shaped the earth on the water—
God's faithful love lasts forever.
Give thanks to the one who made the great lights—
God's faithful love lasts forever.
The sun to rule the day—
God's faithful love lasts forever.
The moon and the stars to rule the night—
God's faithful love lasts forever!

Observation

Today's reading samples the first nine verses from the longer Hebrew poem we call Psalm 136. All 26 stanzas of the poem or hymn ended with the line "God's faithful love (Hebrew *hesed*) lasts forever." *Hesed* is one of the most important words in the Old Testament, a Hebrew word translated as "faithful love." The word occurs twice in God's self-revelation to Moses (rendered 'loyalty' in Exodus 34:6-7). It's a one-word summary of God's character.

Application

Exodus 34's definition of God's character as *hesed* was central for the Israelite people. The revelation of these divine characteristics to Moses was so significant that this passage is echoed on six other occasions in the Old Testament (Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). It's likely that people used Psalm 136 in worship, with the refrain about *hesed* repeated by listeners. What has helped you grasp that "faithful love" is central to who God is?

Prayer

Lord God, in wonder, love and praise, I thank you that everything you do in my life springs from your unchanging, ever faithful love. Amen.

Tuesday, May 14

Scripture: Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory. But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. It isn't often that someone will die for a righteous person, though maybe someone might dare to die for

a good person. But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Observation

The salvation God lovingly offers us brings splendid times of joy and peace. But feelings are volatile. We do not always feel that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts.” Neither did reformers like Martin Luther or John Wesley. Author Steven Paulson says, “The story of Scripture, Luther began to understand, is not how we make our way up the mountain by getting grace and then topping it off with love and works. Scripture is the story of how God came down to meet us—while we were yet sinners.”

Application

The apostle Paul twice used forms of the Greek verb *kauchaomai* in chapter five of Romans. In verse two, the Common English Bible renders it “we boast in the hope of God’s glory.” Verse three reads, “We even take pride in our problems,” which may be harder to believe. In both spots, the verb implied “to rejoice, be very happy.” Has the shift Paul described from trouble to endurance, to character, to hope ever helped lead you to trust in God’s love “poured out” in your heart?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you didn’t just wish me well from a distance. You came to this flawed planet, and lived, died, and then lived again to save me. I open my heart again today—pour your love into it. Amen.

Wednesday, May 15

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:28-31

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength.

You must not take revenge nor hold a grudge against any of your people; instead, you must love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”

Jesus replied, “The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”

Observation

Scholar William Barclay noted that rabbis in Jesus’ day disagreed. Some believed “there were lighter and weightier matters of the law... great principles which were all-important to grasp.” Others “held that every smallest principle was equally binding.” Jesus didn’t

hesitate when asked about that—he said some principles are central, far more vital than others. Loving God and loving your neighbor, Jesus said, are the greatest commandments, the defining expressions of what God wants.

Application

The second verse Jesus called one of the “great commandments” was “You must love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). What has helped you learn that loving others as Jesus commanded is impossible over the long haul, that only as God’s love makes you inwardly healthy can you truly love anyone else?

Prayer

Dear God, you know that it’s not always natural for me to love. Please keep loving me as I stretch and grow in my ability to reflect your amazing, mind-stretching love to others. Amen.

Thursday, May 16

Scripture: John 15:12-17

This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don’t call you servants any longer, because servants don’t know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. You didn’t choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. I give you these commandments so that you can love each other.

Observation

“I chose you,” Jesus told his disciples, “so that you could go and produce fruit.” At first glance, that might sound to us like a command from a domineering “boss.” But Jesus prefaced that statement by telling his followers he didn’t call them servants, but friends. And the first and foremost “fruit” he asked them to produce was to live in God’s love and to love one another.

Application

Read verses 12-15 of this passage again. If a project, team or workplace leader, or a pastor, told a group that included you that, in that spirit, they’d chosen you to “bear fruit,” do you think the impact would be positive or negative? How might that kind of message affect your attitude and that of others on the team? How would it shape communication and cooperation as you moved forward?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we’re 2,000+ years into your great human building project, and it’s still going.

Help my life to bear the fruit of love, making your kingdom more real to people I care about. Amen.

Friday, May 17

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-12

Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love. This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.

Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us.

Observation

The apostle John didn't just say God loves us. God, he asserted, IS love, and that's why we can love one another. Scholar Leon Morris wrote, "For [Jesus'] love depends on the nature of the lover rather than that of the beloved. Jesus loved because he was a loving person, not because he found attractive qualities in those he loved. His followers are to be loving people, not simply to be drawn to attractive people."

Application

Why did John bother to say, "No one has ever seen God" (verse 12)? He went on to say, "If we love each other, God remains in us." In other words, when we're getting it right, people can see God in us. It's like the line in Gordon Jensen's song that says, "You're the only Jesus some will ever see." **Click here** to hear the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJenByd9bcE>

As your capacity grows to take in God's love, to see yourself as loveable in God's sight, how is this changing the way you see and relate to others?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, let the people with whom I come in contact—yes, even the bored store clerk or the annoying neighbor—see you and your love in me. Amen.

Saturday, May 18

Scripture: Ephesians 3:16-19; 1 John 4:13-16

I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length,

height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you'll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.

This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. If any of us confess that Jesus is God's Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them.

Observation

Too often, non-religious and nominally religious people's experiences lead them to see "righteous" people as not very pleasant to be around, to think being a Christian makes a person judgmental and unloving. That was not the apostle John's view, as he said in today's reading! Similarly, in the apostle Paul's letter to Christians at Ephesus, he asked lyrically that the Holy Spirit, dwelling in their hearts, would give all believers "the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth." And he emphasized that we grasp the vastness of God's love best "together with all believers." Inspired by both apostles, Methodism's founder John Wesley closed a sermon at the laying of the foundation of a new chapel in London with these words: "Let us provoke all men, not to enmity and contention, but to love and to good works; always remembering those deep words, (God engrave them on all our hearts!) 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him!'"

Application

Even the earliest Christians found it hard not to condemn others who did some things differently. That's why the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Rome, "Love is what fulfills the Law" (Romans 13:10). If their disputes about proper food practices or days for worship (Romans 14:2-6) tore down love, they were in fact breaking God's deepest law. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "The old world, the 'present age', is rumbling on. Most people are ordering their lives in accordance with its style and habits. But... God's new age has begun.... Those who follow Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection inaugurated that new age, are commanded to live now according to the rules of the new world.... For a Christian, anger and bitterness are just as much forbidden as drunkenness and off-limits sexual activity, though you wouldn't think so from many churches." How can you stand for truths that matter to you without acting unlovingly toward those who disagree?

Prayer

God of love, you know that "hurt people hurt people." I'm sad when others hurt me, but I'm also sad when I hurt others. Let your love heal my hurting self and transform me from the inside out. Amen.