



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of September 10, 2023**

### **Weekly Prayer**

Faithful One, make me rich in faith. As I study your Word today, let my faith spill out from my heart into all I do and say. Let it feed and clothe, comfort, set free, reconcile, and make new. Let it change not only me but also others. You are faithful. Let me be faithful as well. Amen.

### **Monday, September 11**

#### **Scripture: James 2:1-7, 14-17**

My brothers and sisters, when you show favoritism you deny the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been resurrected in glory. Imagine two people coming into your meeting. One has a gold ring and fine clothes, while the other is poor, dressed in filthy rags. Then suppose that you were to take special notice of the one wearing fine clothes, saying, "Here's an excellent place. Sit here." But to the poor person you say, "Stand over there"; or, "Here, sit at my feet." Wouldn't you have shown favoritism among yourselves and become evil-minded judges? My dear brothers and sisters, listen! Hasn't God chosen those who are poor by worldly standards to be rich in terms of faith? Hasn't God chosen the poor as heirs of the kingdom he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Don't the wealthy make life difficult for you? Aren't they the ones who drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who insult the good name spoken over you at your baptism?

My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity.

#### **Observation**

James addresses the relationship between faith and good works. He argues that for faith to be alive, it has to be expressed in good works.

## **Application**

As resurrection people, we are called to put our faith into action. Not as a way to earn salvation, for that is a gift from God, but as a natural result of being transformed into a new creation. How can you put your faith into action this week?

## **Prayer**

God, even as a person of faith my life can be messy and difficult. I want to devote myself to faithful living. By reading your word and by your grace, may I live out what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus. Amen.

## **Tuesday, September 12**

### **Scripture: 2 Kings 10:15, Romans 14:1-4**

Jehu departed from there and encountered Rechab's son Jehonadab. Jehu greeted him, and asked, "Are you as committed to me as I am to you?" Jehonadab responded, "Yes, I am." "If so," said Jehu, "then give me your hand." So Jehonadab put out his hand, and Jehu pulled him up into the chariot.

Welcome the person who is weak in faith—but not in order to argue about differences of opinion. One person believes in eating everything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Those who eat must not look down on the ones who don't, and the ones who don't eat must not judge the ones who do, because God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servants? They stand or fall before their own Lord (and they will stand, because the Lord has the power to make them stand).

## **Observation**

John Wesley's "Catholic Spirit" sermon asked: "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? ... Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences." (He used the root meaning of "catholic" – "including many different types of thing; universal." He did not mean the Roman Church, which in his day was a denomination that did not love Christians who thought differently.) Wesley taught us much about a "Catholic Spirit," but he did not originate this way of thinking and living. The idea is Scriptural, from ancient Israel to the apostle Paul.

## **Application**

God made each person unique and wonderful (Psalm 139:14). Paul reminded the Roman Christians that since each person is unique, each person's spiritual journey is, too. Encouragement and accountability are vital for spiritual growth, but comparing others to ourselves and judging them is dangerous and destructive. How can you best help others on their personal journey of "knowing, loving, and serving God and others," without comparing or judging it by yours? Who has helped you in that way?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, your family is large and diverse. Give me your spirit of non-judgmental love (John 3:17), so that differences that do not bother you will not bother me either. Amen.

## **Wednesday, September 13**

### **Scripture: Psalm 119:1-16**

Those whose way is blameless—  
    who walk in the LORD's Instruction—are truly happy!  
Those who guard God's laws are truly happy!  
    They seek God with all their hearts.  
They don't even do anything wrong!  
    They walk in God's ways.  
God, you have ordered that your decrees  
    should be kept most carefully.  
How I wish my ways were strong  
    when it comes to keeping your statutes!  
Then I wouldn't be ashamed  
    when I examine all your commandments.  
I will give thanks to you with a heart that does right  
    as I learn your righteous rules.  
I will keep your statutes.  
    Please don't leave me all alone!  
How can young people keep their paths pure?  
    By guarding them according to what you've said.  
I have sought you with all my heart.  
    Don't let me stray from any of your commandments!  
I keep your word close, in my heart,  
    so that I won't sin against you.  
You, LORD, are to be blessed!  
    Teach me your statutes.  
I will declare out loud  
    all the rules you have spoken.  
I rejoice in the content of your laws  
    as if I were rejoicing over great wealth.  
I will think about your precepts  
    and examine all your paths.  
I will delight in your statutes;  
    I will not forget what you have said.

### **Observation**

It was ironic that his critics called Wesley an unruly agitator. He did reach people in atypical ways that shocked some staid British clergymen, but he was in fact a very disciplined man. It's no surprise to find that, in the same spirit as the writer of Psalm 119,

he wrote in his journal, "About fifty of us being met, the Rules of the Society were read over and carefully considered one by one; but we did not find any that could be spared. So we all agreed to abide by them all and to recommend them with our might."

### **Application**

Bishop Reuben Job, in his book *Three Simple Rules*, paraphrased the three General Rules as "do no harm," "do all the good you can," and "stay in love with God." How can these rules (which Wesley never claimed were on the same level as God's law in the Bible) help you live into the reality the psalmist expressed: "I will give thanks to you with a heart that does right as I learn your righteous rules" (verse 7)?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, thank you for accepting me just as I am. Now guide me as, in grateful response to your love, I seek to use these rules to guide me in living more faithfully. Amen.

## **Thursday, September 14**

### **Scripture: Psalm 68:3-6**

But let the righteous be glad  
and celebrate before God.  
Let them rejoice with gladness!  
Sing to God! Sing praises to his name!  
Exalt the one who rides the clouds!  
The LORD is his name.  
Celebrate before him!  
Father of orphans and defender of widows  
is God in his holy habitation.  
God settles the lonely in their homes;  
he sets prisoners free with happiness,  
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.

### **Observation**

At one point, John Wesley's parents refused to live together for 12 months, because they disagreed on who ought to be king of England. Augustine Birrell noted wryly, "If John Wesley was occasionally a little pig-headed, need one wonder?" Like many of us, Wesley bore scars from his flawed family. He loved his parents, but he put his ultimate trust in God, who said through the psalmist that he is the uniquely reliable parent for even the orphaned or lonely.

### **Application**

Part of our faith heritage from John Wesley is the faith that we are God's voice, God's hands and feet, in a hurting world. In what ways can you join in God's work of blessing orphans, widows, the lonely and prisoners? Do you know anyone who may not be an

“orphan” or “widow” in the concrete sense of the term, but who you could bless by extending God’s love and care?

### **Prayer**

O God, the psalmist said you are “Father of orphans and defender of widows.” Thank you for always being with me. Give me eyes to see others who are hurting, and use me to bless them with your love and caring. Amen.

## **Friday, September 15**

### **Scripture: Romans 8:18-28**

I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us. The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God’s sons and daughters. Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God’s children. We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it’s not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn’t hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don’t see, we wait for it with patience. In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don’t know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God’s will. We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

### **Observation**

John Wesley’s early years were tough. His family was poor, and had a mix of strengths and weaknesses. Religious and political divisions sowed hatred in England, and with a huge gap between rich and poor, many people had given up faith. Yet many of those very factors helped shape the man he became--a man who for around 40 years rode an estimated 8,000 miles per year on horseback, preached an estimated 1,000 sermons per year, and dramatically changed England (and America, too) for the better. He loved God, and God worked all things for good in his influential life, as Romans 8:28 promised.

### **Application**

Today’s scripture does not say, as people sometimes think, that “all things” are good—because they’re not. It says God, who is always good, can take all things, even the painful and difficult ones, and bend them to serve a good purpose in our life, if we are willing to put them in God’s hands. Can you look back and see how God has brought good out of hard things you have faced? What are you facing right now that is painful, frustrating or scary? Spend time honestly telling God how hard those things are, and expressing trust that, in God’s own timing, he can bring good for you out of them.

## **Prayer**

Jesus, thank you for being with me in good times and bad. Thank you for using your power to bring good out of even the bad times I face. Teach me to trust you more and more as I journey through life. Amen.

## **Saturday, September 16**

### **Scripture: Luke 14:12-24**

Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, "When you host a lunch or dinner, don't invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And you will be blessed because they can't repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected." When one of the dinner guests heard Jesus' remarks, he said to Jesus, "Happy are those who will feast in God's kingdom." Jesus replied, "A certain man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. When it was time for the dinner to begin, he sent his servant to tell the invited guests, 'Come! The dinner is now ready.' One by one, they all began to make excuses. The first one told him, 'I bought a farm and must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I bought five teams of oxen, and I'm going to check on them. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' When he returned, the servant reported these excuses to his master. The master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go quickly to the city's streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.' The servant said, 'Master, your instructions have been followed and there is still room.' The master said to the servant, 'Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

### **Observation**

Jesus lived among many religious people who recoiled at the idea of sharing God's kingdom with "sinners" (a term they defined roughly as "not as good as I am"). To some of them, Jesus told a shocking story about a king who invited even the town's street people to a royal banquet. In that spirit, John Wesley and the early Methodists preached faith to people of all social classes. In 1739, Wesley wrote ironically in his journal about his own inner struggle with his "upright" background: "At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people."

### **Application**

Priest and writer Brennan Manning loved to quote the college student who, after reading the gospels, said, "Wow—God sure has a thing for ragamuffins." Learning about John Wesley's conversion experience and the powerful preaching that followed poses two very personal questions. First, can you see the degree to which you are a ragamuffin before God, one more person who desperately and gratefully needs God's grace and mercy? Second, are you open to inviting and welcoming into God's kingdom the ragamuffins of all

kinds who live around you, even if at first you might feel a bit uncomfortable in their company?

**Prayer**

Lord God, you are an actively loving, seeking God. Thank you for calling me to be one of your human partners in the work of going into the highways and back alleys, so that your heavenly banquet may be full. Amen.