

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of September 14, 2025

Weekly Prayer

Loving God,
Thank You for breathing life into me with purpose and love.
Today, I open my heart to Your truth—
not who the world says I should be,
but who You have uniquely created me to become.

Help me quiet the noise around me,
so I can hear Your voice within me.
Shape my steps, renew my mind,
and guide me to the gifts You've placed in me from the start.

Reveal the beauty of Your design in my life,
and give me the courage to walk boldly in it.
May I reflect Your image,
and bring light to the world in the way only I can.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Monday, September 15

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-3

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. He taught them, saying:

Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Observation

Jesus didn't preach the Sermon on the Mount just once and then move on. Scholar William Barclay noted that the Greek verb translated "taught" describes "repeated and habitual action, and the translation should be: 'This is what he used to teach them.'" * Matthew's gospel grouped Jesus' teachings into five great sermons (perhaps modeled after the five books of the Hebrew torah): 5:1-7:29; 9:35-11:1; 13:2-52; 18:1-35; and 24:1-25:46. Today's passage began the first of those sermons.

Application

Jesus' words may seem strange, since he regards as 'happy people' those who are usually regarded as unfortunate. This alerts us to the topsy-turvy nature of Jesus' teaching. 'Hopeless' (or 'poor in spirit') refers to those who continue to look to God for help in the midst of their present, needy state. What helps you keep looking to God during this time of political and social disruption?

Prayer

Jesus, somehow your "topsy-turvy" teaching seems particularly fitting for the topsy-turvy times I'm living through. Help me to grasp and hold onto the wonderful news you came to share.
Amen.

* William Barclay, Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1 Chapters 1–10 (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 87.

Tuesday, September 16

Scripture: Matthew 5:4-6

"Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

"Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

"Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

Observation

In his famous "Beatitudes" (from the Latin *beatus*, "blessed") Jesus named those who grieve, are humble and hunger and thirst for righteousness as receivers of "wonderful news." But if we look around, we don't necessarily see that. "Jesus is not suggesting that these are simply timeless truths about the way the world is.... If he was saying that, he was wrong. Mourners often go uncomforted, the meek don't inherit the earth, those who long for justice frequently take that longing to the grave." *

Application

To mourn is to care deeply, to be deeply concerned about the evil in the world and to know the meaning of suffering because of the sin, injustice, and perversion in society. One part of mourning is to be unable to look the other way when we see the wrongs in our world, no matter how much we wish we could. In what ways have recent events moved you to mourn, perhaps in ways you'd avoided before?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, these past weeks have challenged me to look beyond my own life, to ponder what there is in my world that should make me mourn. And that makes me hungrier and thirstier for your righteousness. Amen.

* Wright, N.T., Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15 (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 36). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Wednesday, September 17

Scripture: Matthew 5:7-9

"Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

"Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

"Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children.

Observation

These three statements focused on people with traits we often think rather well of, but that wasn't true in Jesus' day. Jesus takes people ordinarily thought to be unblessed and unblessable. The Sermon on the Mount has actually shifted our thinking on some of these categories today, such as 'the merciful,' or 'the pure in heart,' or 'the peacemakers,' but they were not thought to be blessed in Jesus' day. And, frankly, even today, when life's priorities are set, these categories stand pretty low.

Application

The theme of "mercy" in Matthew 5:7 ran through Matthew's picture of Jesus. He twice showed Jesus quoting Hosea 6:6 (Matthew 9:13, 12:7; and also, the focus of Matthew 23:23). Then, as now, too many "religious" people thought their faith called them mainly to condemn others they

viewed as “sinners.” How has your experience of Jesus’ mercy and love shaped (and maybe re-shaped) the way you view and treat other people?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, make me an instrument of your mercy and your peace. Give me a pure heart, the kind Psalm 24 said is able to stand in your holy sanctuary. Amen.

Thursday, September 18

Scripture: Matthew 5:10-12

“Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

“Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.

Observation

Jesus knew about being falsely accused (see, for example, the absurd charge he faced in Luke 11:14-18). All his “beatitudes” in his Sermon on the Mount challenged our ideas about what it means to be “blessed,” “happy,” or receiving “wonderful news.” But these can be particularly hard to process. The key, again, is that these are in Jesus’ kingdom. The presence of the heavenly kingdom turns the tables on normal expectations regarding what it means to flourish as human beings.

Application

Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “This is an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It’s about something that’s starting to happen, not about a general truth of life. It is gospel: good news, not good advice.” * In what ways have you allowed Jesus’ presence in your life to create an inner “climate” in which you find God’s joy and peace even in conditions that otherwise would produce anything but those responses?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you didn’t hate even when others hated you. You didn’t abandon your mission when facing their hate. Keep teaching me how to live out both your steadfast love and deep sense of mission. Amen.

*Wright, N.T., Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15 (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 36). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Friday, September 19

Scripture: Matthew 5:13

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet.

Observation

Most of us think of salt casually. It’s that white stuff in a shaker (unless we prefer the gourmet pink types, or even more exotic salts from special places). It’s not terribly expensive. Yet we miss it if it’s not there when we’re ready to dig into a baked potato or some other food when our taste buds expect salt. And, for most of us, it’s just a fact: salt makes most things taste better. But we need to remember that, in Jesus’ day, no one went to the market and bought a cheap container of Morton’s salt.

Application

In Jesus' day, there were no refrigerators. So, people used salt to preserve food as much as or more than to flavor it. Part of Jesus' message was that his followers, "the salt of the earth," should live in ways that "preserve" life's God-intended goodness. In what ways are you living out your faith in a fashion that helps to preserve our world's goodness and keep things from spoiling?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, in these turbulent times, guide my influence to work to preserve all the good in the world, in people. Help me to make this world "taste better" for all those who know me. Amen.

Saturday, September 20

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

Observation

Today, we can control and create light far more easily than people in Jesus' day could. Oh, they had oil lamps, candles, and torches—but no one then could even imagine a phrase like "light pollution." We can light empty parking lots more brightly at 2 am than the main street of Rome or Jerusalem was ever lit. Jesus used one of the Bible's most potent symbols to say his followers "are the light of the world." The Bible is enveloped by the imagery of light, both literally and figuratively. At the beginning of the biblical narrative, physical light springs forth as the first created thing (Gen 1:3–4). At the end of the story, the light of God obliterates all traces of darkness: 'And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light' (Rev 22:5). Between these two beacons, the imagery of light makes nearly two hundred appearances.

Application

Jesus' second image was a lamp in a dark home, or a city atop a hill, seen from miles away. On a dark night, especially if you are not sure of your way, there is something wonderfully reassuring about a light. Scholar William Barclay wrote, people "are to see our good deeds. In Greek, there are two words for good. There is the word *agathos*, which simply defines a thing as good in quality; there is *kalos*, which means that a thing is not only good, but that it is also winsome and beautiful and attractive. The word which is used here is *kalos*." * Are there settings or relationships where you feel like putting "a bowl" over your light, hiding God's presence in your life? Prayerfully choose one appealing way you'll shine your light in the weeks ahead.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, in this darkened, lonely, hurting world, make me more and more transparent so that your light can shine out of me like a beacon, spreading love, grace, and peace. Amen.

* William Barclay, Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1 Chapters 1–10 (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 125.