

## Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 9, 2024

### Weekly Prayer

God of all goodness, you have welcomed, forgiven, and healed me. You have sought me out from places where I have hidden. You surround me with your love, crowning me with your mercy and grace. Reveal yourself and guide me today, as I seek to follow you. Amen.

### Monday, June 10

#### Scripture: Song of Solomon 8:6-7

Set me as a seal over your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm,  
for love is as strong as death,  
passionate love unrelenting as the grave.  
Its darts are darts of fire—  
divine flame!  
Rushing waters can't quench love;  
rivers can't wash it away.  
If someone gave  
all his estate in exchange for love,  
he would be laughed to utter shame.

#### Observation

Of Song of Solomon 8:6-7, scholar John Goldingay wrote, "Love is as fierce as death, passion is as tough as *Sheol*. It's quite a comparison. When death gets hold of you, it doesn't let go.... Love is... like an archer who shoots burning arrows.... It's as if they shoot a supernatural flame. Literally, they are 'a flame of Yah' (a short form of the name Yahweh). It's the only time God is named in the Song of Songs."

#### Application

Most of Song of Solomon is Hebrew poetry, honest and bold, celebrating the love of a young man and a young woman. But in chapter 8, verse 6 it called love "divine flame," pointing to the truth that even our human capacity to love is derived from our Creator, the God of love. In what ways does the unconquerable power of human love, at its best, point beyond itself to the loving God who created you with that capacity?

#### Prayer

Loving God, be set as a seal over my heart today. Make your 'divine flame' come alive in me, that I might be a sign of your goodness in the world. Amen.

### Tuesday, June 11

#### Scripture: Matthew 22:37-40

He replied, "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.*"

#### Observation

Jewish rabbis debated: were all commandments equal or were some greater than others? Asked about that, Jesus chose two as the greatest. The first was Deuteronomy 6:4: "You must

love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.” He added Leviticus 19:18: “You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Jesus said the point of all “the Law and the Prophets” is to lead us to love God and neighbor more fully. God’s love is our faith’s central truth.

### **Application**

We talk about these verses with frequency at Messiah. We do so because we want to make Jesus’ words part of our everyday life *and* we know it is incredibly hard for us to love as Jesus commands. It takes intentional effort, realignment, and daily trust. What has stopped you or made it hard for you to love yourself or someone else persistently and constructively? How might you love more fully?

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, thank you for loving me just as I am, and too much to let me stay as I am. Help me to recognize the times in my life when I need to relentlessly extend your love to those around me. Amen.

## **Wednesday June 12**

### **Scripture: John 3:3-8**

Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it’s not possible to see God’s kingdom.” Nicodemus asked, “How is it possible for an adult to be born? It’s impossible to enter the mother’s womb for a second time and be born, isn’t it?” Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don’t be surprised that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ God’s Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. It’s the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

### **Observation**

John’s gospel was all about God-given life. Here, Jesus said to Nicodemus, ‘You must be born again.’ In the Greek it can be translated in a variety of ways: born again, born anew, or born from above. His words point us to this: God wants you to have life - full and abundant life.

### **Application**

God created us for life, but sometimes our *living* gets in the way of experiencing the fullness of what God intended. How do you experience the abundant life of Christ? What things distract or dissuade you from experiencing this abundance today?

### **Prayer**

God of life, thank you for the precious gift to be your child and live in your created world. Guide my thoughts as I reflect on your love and the life you have called me to. Amen.

## **Thursday, June 13**

### **Scripture: John 16:26-33**

In that day you will ask in my name. I’m not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and believed that I came from God. I left the Father and came into the world. I tell you again: I am leaving the world and returning to the Father.” His disciples said, “See! Now you speak plainly; you aren’t using figures of speech. Now we know that you know everything and you don’t need anyone to ask you. Because of this

we believe you have come from God.” Jesus replied, “Now you believe? Look! A time is coming—and is here!—when each of you will be scattered to your own homes and you will leave me alone. I’m not really alone, for the Father is with me. I’ve said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world.”

### **Observation**

Today’s passage is part of Jesus’ “farewell discourse” - teaching his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. Jesus knew what was coming, so the timing is worth noting: these are his final words, teachings and blessings. The disciples often struggled to understand Jesus’ teaching, but they were starting to understand two important points he was teaching them: access and hope.

### **Application**

I’ve heard it said that the phrase, “do not fear” is among the most common phrases throughout scripture. I’ve never counted their occurrences, but it doesn’t surprise me. Why? Because God knows that there is much to fear. We worry about those we love, we feel afraid of what the future holds. Life can often feel out of control, and our natural response is to be afraid. So we need the continual reminder to not be afraid. I love these words of Jesus today, “Be encouraged! I have conquered the world.” In all things, we are with Christ who loves, protects, and cares for us. Have no fear!

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, thank you for promising and reminding me that you are with me always. Help me to receive your words, that your encouragement and peace may fill my heart. Guide me today, that I live your truth. Amen.

### **Friday, June 14**

#### **Scripture: Acts 17:2-8**

As was Paul’s custom, he entered the synagogue and for three Sabbaths interacted with them on the basis of the scriptures. Through his interpretation of the scriptures, he demonstrated that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. He declared, “This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.” Some were convinced and joined Paul and Silas, including a larger number of Greek God-worshippers and quite a few prominent women. But the Jews became jealous and brought along some thugs who were hanging out in the marketplace. They formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They attacked Jason’s house, intending to bring Paul and Silas before the people. When they didn’t find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city officials. They were shouting, “These people who have been disturbing the peace throughout the empire have also come here. What is more, Jason has welcomed them into his home. Every one of them does what is contrary to Caesar’s decrees by naming someone else as king: Jesus.” This provoked the crowd and the city officials even more.

### **Observation**

Jesus’ life principles clearly changed the world now, not just later. When we follow Jesus, it is meant to change our hearts and how we live in the world today. Scholar William Barclay wrote, “[Paul’s enemies] charged the Christian missionaries with preaching political insurrection.... ‘Those,’ they said, ‘who are upsetting the civilized world have arrived’.... When Christianity really goes into action it must cause a revolution both in the life of the individual and in the life of society.” (William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 128.)

**Application**

Jesus was not just a friendly storyteller. He was counter-cultural—his teachings and actions regularly upset the *status quo*. The people in charge quickly saw him as a threat, even though his human status and power were lower than theirs. As you become a disciple, Jesus tends to upset the *status quo* of your life, too. In what ways has Jesus turned your world upside down... or, more accurately, right-side-up?

**Prayer**

Jesus, I don't want to maintain the *status quo*. I'm ready for you to be in charge, to upset my life in the best way possible. Help me be a part of creating a world that is fully right-side-up. Amen.

**Saturday June 15****Scripture: 1 John 4:14-21**

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. This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, "I love God" and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don't love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.

**Observation**

John's words are so familiar that we can easily miss the depth of his thought. "God IS love" (1 John 4:16) was very different from "God loves" (among many other qualities). Selfless, self-giving *agape* love is God's very essence.

**Application**

John said perfect love—that is, God's love—casts out fear. The faith in Jesus John wrote about was not abstract, sterile belief. It was a passionate, living, active trust that Jesus was no fairy tale, but was and is exactly who he said he is. This love of God is steadfast and unchanging, present to us through every circumstance. How is it that you experience God's love? How can you live with an active trust, rather than sterile or abstract belief?

**Prayer**

Loving God, you are my rock and my redeemer. When all else falters or changes, you are steadfast. Draw me nearer to you today, that I might experience more fully the essence of who you are: love. Amen.