



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 1, 2023**

### **Weekly Prayer**

Loving One, thank you for the gifts of prayer and praise. Thank you for community and opportunities to heal. Through my study this week, let my love and commitment for you grow. Keep me in love with you, and let that love illuminate my way of being in the world. May the love of Jesus define and refine me. Amen.

### **Monday, October 2**

#### **Scripture: John 15:1-5**

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. He removes any of my branches that don’t produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can’t produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can’t produce fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can’t do anything.

#### **Observation**

Israelites often saw themselves as part of a vineyard God tended (Psalm 80:8-18, Isaiah 5:1-7). A golden sculpture of a vine over the porch of the Jerusalem Temple reinforced the image. But when Jesus used that image, he made it more personal and more challenging. Only as his followers stayed connected to him like branches to a vine, Jesus said, would their lives bear the kind of fruit God sought.

#### **Application**

Jesus was definite: “A branch can’t produce fruit by itself but must remain in the vine.” In our high-achieving, Type A culture, do you ever find yourself tugged in the direction of thinking you can produce fruit by yourself? Are you plugged into your own power strip so that your good intentions and determination are all you need to lead a life pleasing to God? We’ll see this week that Jesus did call us to work with him. But given that, why do you believe he said you cannot do it by yourself?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you are the vine; I am a branch. Keep me so closely connected to you that I will be a branch that bears good fruit. Amen.

## **Tuesday, October 3**

### **Scripture: Matthew 7:12, 15-20**

Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep, but inside they are vicious wolves. You will know them by their fruit. Do people get bunches of grapes from thorny weeds, or do they get figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, and every rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit. And a rotten tree can’t produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, you will know them by their fruit.

### **Observation**

Jesus didn’t offer quick, easy surface change. He focused on the deep inner roots from which life springs. Like prophets before him, he warned about false prophets (Jeremiah 6:13-14; Ezekiel 22:28). They challenged Jesus’ followers, too (Acts 20:29). But Jesus’ main concern was not for us to play “gotcha” toward others, even false prophets. Jesus wanted us to know how to recognize them because following them can damage the roots of our life, and the kind of fruit we bear.

### **Application**

Jesus said we learn about a tree’s inner makeup from the fruit it bears—grape vines bear grapes; apple trees bear apples. In the end, the key spiritual reality is not how good we look publicly, but whether our way of life springs from our connection with God or not. We often apply these verses mainly to religious leaders who fail morally—but the principle works the other way too. Are there people you have learned to trust more as you have seen the fruit of their life and work? What kind of “fruit” do you find most persuasive? How closely does your inner life align with the public “face” you show at church? What makes inward reality more valuable than outward show in God’s sight?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, I’m willing to make every effort to become the person you call me to be—or at least I want to be willing to do that. Please add your power to my effort. Amen

## **Wednesday, October 4**

### **Scripture: 1 John 3:14-18**

We know that we have transferred from death to life, because we love the brothers and sisters. The person who does not love remains in death. Everyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that murderers don't have eternal life residing in them. This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. But if someone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but refuses to help—how can the love of God dwell in a person like that? Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth.

### **Observation**

The apostle John said no one filled with God's love could see a brother or sister in need and not try to help. John Wesley wrote of a time when he lived this out: "At Hannam, four miles from Bristol ... I made a collection in our congregation for the relief of the poor, [outside] Lawford's gate; who, having no work ... and no assistance from the parish wherein they lived, were reduced to the last extremity. I made another collection on Thursday and a third on Sunday, by which we were enabled to feed a hundred, sometimes a hundred and fifty, a day, of those whom we found to need it most."

### **Application**

John used strong words about those who saw their brothers and sisters in need and didn't care. He said such people hated their brothers and sisters, which made them murderers! How can we become more like Wesley, who instead of saying "Someone ought to help those hungry people" took simple, direct action and helped?

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord, you taught us that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Keep growing a heart within me that rejoices in the freedom and satisfaction of your kind of giving. Amen.

## **Thursday, October 5**

### **Scripture: James 2:14-26**

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.

Someone might claim, "You have faith and I have action." But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I'll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action. It's good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble

with fear. Are you so slow? Do you need to be shown that faith without actions has no value at all? What about Abraham, our father? Wasn't he shown to be righteous through his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? See, his faith was at work along with his actions. In fact, his faith was made complete by his faithful actions. So the scripture was fulfilled that says, *Abraham believed God, and God regarded him as righteous*. What is more, Abraham was called God's friend. So you see that a person is shown to be righteous through faithful actions and not through faith alone. In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute shown to be righteous when she received the messengers as her guests and then sent them on by another road? As the lifeless body is dead, so faith without actions is dead.

### **Observation**

Wesley had learned firsthand the folly of trying to earn God's favor through good works. But he found, as James had, that some other Christians thought "salvation by faith" meant good works are optional. Like James, Wesley knew that true faith produces actions that honor God and bless others.

### **Application**

Notice that James didn't talk about a good balance between faith and works as though we need a 50-50 mix of the two. We need 100% of both, and our works need to grow out of our faith, as a grateful response to God's gracious acceptance of us. What are some of the actions, the works, which you have seen grow in your life as you have responded to God's grace?

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord, you have accepted me as your child, and you have begun to reshape the way I live as I respond to your grace. Please continue your work in my life. May my faith be genuine, and may my works always bring you glory. Amen.

## **Friday, October 6**

### **Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46**

"Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

"Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'

“Then those who are righteous will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

“Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry and you didn’t give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn’t give me anything to drink. I was a stranger and you didn’t welcome me. I was naked and you didn’t give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’

“Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn’t do anything to help you?’ Then he will answer, ‘I assure you that when you haven’t done it for one of the least of these, you haven’t done it for me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life.”

### **Observation**

From history, we can see that John Wesley and his followers made a big impact for good, first in England and then in America. But it took many, many (often small) acts of grace and caring. In his sermon “The Reward of the Righteous,” Wesley urged his hearers, “While you are promoting this comprehensive charity, which contains feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, lodging the stranger; indeed all good works in one; let those animating words be written on your hearts, and sounding in your ears: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me.’”

### **Application**

What word or phrase speaks to you from scripture? Wesley called the Methodists to the kind of life Jesus calls his followers to live. What are the main ways you are involved in honoring God by serving others? Consider serving in one way you never have before. (If you need ideas, you’ll find many here for our Make a Difference Day: <https://www.messiahchurch.org/make-a-difference-days-2023>.)

### **Prayer**

O God, keep my eyes and my heart open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around me who need your touch through me. Amen.

### **Saturday, October 7**

#### **Scripture: Acts 13:36**

David served God’s purpose in his own generation, then he died and was buried with his ancestors. He experienced death’s decay,

**Observation**

Religion that honors God is a religion that has feet, and you are called to serve God's purposes in your generation. Just as David was considered great because he served God's purposes, if you want to make a positive difference in this world you must seek out God's purpose and plan for your life. But to do so you must get out of your comfort zone and be involved with your feet and hands.

**Application**

How have you gotten out of your comfort zone lately in serving others?

**Prayer**

Lord, give me eyes to see where I can offer help and hope. Give me a heart that loves so that I can use my feet to step out of my comfort zone and serve you by doing no harm, doing good and staying in love with you each and every day. Amen.