



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of November 26, 2023

Weekly Prayer

God, you are my source of life, belonging, and love. You offer me an unlimited supply of grace, hope, joy, and all that I need in my life. Thank you for your provisions, blessings, and care. May my whole life echo my gratitude and steadfast love and faith in you. In Christ I pray, Amen.

Monday, November 27

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12 NRSVUE

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Observation

In this most famous sermon, Jesus is speaking to the gathered crowds. To them, he offers God’s blessing. Blessed are you when you are hopeless, when you mourn, when you’re humble, and when you thirst for righteousness. Here, you will experience God.

Application

I imagine the gathered crowd was as diverse as our gathered congregation. Young and old, wealthy and poor, confident and nervous. All of them gathered with *something* upon their hearts, each of them longing to belong and to be loved. Jesus’ words are powerful because he names things about us that often make us feel *separated* from love and

belonging. And instead, Jesus says: it is right in the middle of this, that God is present to you. Not when you overcome them, and not in spite of them, but *because* of your grief and hunger: right now you are a blessing. God rejoices in *you*, just as you are. And God promises to be near to you, right now. What are the longings of your heart today? How would you fill in this blank: Blessed are the _____, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for your steadfast faithfulness. Thank you for loving me fully, and for bringing healing to my heart and life. Bless me today, in all that I am, that my life might be an echo of your grace. Amen.

Tuesday, November 28

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12 CEB

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.

“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.

“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.

“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

Today we read the Beatitudes again, this time in the Common English Bible translation.

While traditionally, we hear these verses translated as “blessed,” this translation chooses “happy.” Read the passage and notice how you hear and feel these words differently.

Happy are people who are hopeless. Happy are people who make peace. Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous.

Application

Perhaps one of the most challenging parts of this passage is that Jesus calls blessed and happy those people and places in our lives that seem anything but. To be called happy while grieving or harassed seems out of reach. But Jesus promises peace upon us -- that no matter our situation, we are wrapped in God’s care. This passage is not only

prescriptive, telling us how to live. It is *descriptive*, telling us who and whose we are right now (rather than some other time in the future). How might you choose happiness today, even amid all of life's struggles? How might being named and claimed as God's own bring peace to your heart?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, you are happy to call me yours, today and always. I trust in your promises and ask you to help me see myself and others as you see me. Amen.

Wednesday, November 29

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:7-9

Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. As it is written, *He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever.*

Observation

All that we are, and all that we have, comes from God. This passage invites us into relationship with God, each other, and our community. It challenges us to move from a place of scarcity to generosity, trusting in God to provide.

Application

Fresh from Thanksgiving, as we begin to turn toward Christmas, we're in a season of gratitude and giving. This passage is a good reminder that having a heart of generosity is one way we share God's love with our neighbors. They will know we are Christians by our love, indeed.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for the blessings in my life. For my friends and family, for my home and hobbies, for my church family and your created world. Help me to be generous and thankful for all you have given. Tune my heart to your grace, that my life embodies your goodness and grace. Amen.

Thursday, November 30

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:11-15

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us. Your ministry of this service to God's people isn't only fully meeting their needs but it is also multiplying in many expressions of

thanksgiving to God. They will give honor to God for your obedience to your confession of Christ's gospel. They will do this because this service provides evidence of your obedience, and because of your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone. They will also pray for you, and they will care deeply for you because of the outstanding grace that God has given to you. Thank God for his gift that words can't describe!

Observation

Paul is encouraging the people of Corinth to be grateful and generous, recognizing that life is more than "getting by," but that we are called to live in a way that builds up the kingdom of God. We're called to live with *open hearts*, that create spaces of belonging for all people. Paul knows that sometimes we need reminders that even small acts of generosity change lives.

Application

My Mother-in-law died just a couple days before Thanksgiving in 2014. That year, Thanksgiving felt less about giving thanks and more about surviving our grief. But then, a distant cousin knocked on our door, unannounced. With him was an entire Thanksgiving feast: turkey and stuffing, potatoes and pies. Even though it had been years since they had spent time together, he delivered this meal to his family. The real gift, of course, was the delivery of hope and love. His generosity changed the course of our grief. Instead of feeling alone, we felt blessed. Just as Jesus promised in Matthew 5: "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*" Our blessing, our comfort, came to us because of another's generosity.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for daily opportunities to be generous and thankful. Make me aware of the people and places you call me to serve and keep my heart open to loving as you love. And thank you for the people who have shown your generosity and love to me. Amen.

Friday, December 1

Scripture: Colossians 3:15-17

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Observation

What do you think of when you hear the word *rule*? What about *rich*? Contrary to examples of power and riches in our world, God invites us to be powerful in peaceful community. To be rich in God's word, covered by God's wisdom. This passage reminds us that worship is a way of life, not an hour of our week. We belong first to God, and all that we are, everything that we do, is to be in response to our belonging.

Application

I love this passage, and it is one that brings immediate comfort. It encourages me to slow down, to rest in God, and to notice my surroundings. While much of life encourages us to “go, go, go” - these words invite me into another way. How might this season be different if we grounded ourselves first in Christ’s peace? In God’s wisdom through scripture? Might we be more patient while waiting in line? Or less frazzled at the end of a long day? How might our living be an act of worship?

Prayer

Dearest Jesus, as the hymnist wrote: *then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee. How great thou art.* Thank you for your outpouring of gifts in my life, and the ways you wrap me in your peace and presence. Keep me focused on you today, that my life be made rich by your grace. Amen.

Saturday, December 2

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Observation

This is from the closing chapter of the letter to Philippians, and it includes closing remarks and blessings for their days. Much of this closing chapter includes reminders to be joyful and mindful of God’s ongoing presence in our lives. We have been blessed by God in many ways and have daily access to God who upholds and encourages us.

Application

Like the Beatitudes which began our week, these verses encourage us to be joyful in all things. Rejoice always. Don’t wait to rejoice until everything is perfect. Don’t wait to go before God until you’ve got it all figured out. Instead: rejoice now. Pray now. Praise now. And trust that God is with you in midst of it all. As the Psalmist promises us, in Psalm 139: *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand shall hold me fast.”*

Prayer

Good and loving God, you are with me always and everywhere. As we prepare to enter the Advent season, keep me mindful of your ongoing promise to be Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” Give me confidence to turn to you in prayer, to be generous with my words

and actions, to be joyful in my living. Make all that I am, and everything I do, an act of worship and gratitude to you. Amen.