



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of February 25, 2024**

### **Weekly Prayer**

I come before you today, O God, seeking what you can provide. I confess that there are places in my life and in the world longing for life, waiting for your healing touch. Open my heart and mind that you may be at work in me and through me, in Christ's name. Amen.

### **Monday, February 26**

#### **Scripture: Luke 24:1-12**

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

#### **Observation**

The gospels forthrightly reported that none of the disciples, including Peter, were waiting eagerly for Jesus to rise from the dead. Even when "the women" reported that two men in gleaming clothing had asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" their report "struck the apostles as nonsense." Peter saw the empty tomb, but only wondered what had happened.

#### **Application**

Author Phillip Yancey, in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, said the resurrection accounts point toward the gospels' honesty: "Accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb sound

breathless and fragmentary....the early reports seem wispy, mysterious, confused. Surely conspirators could have done a neater job of depicting what they would later claim to be the hinge event of history." What makes the essential honesty of the gospel narratives of Jesus' resurrection so vital to your faith (1 Corinthians 15:14-19)?

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord, when Peter first found the tomb empty, what had happened there went stunningly beyond his imagination. Open my heart and mind to trust in the unimaginably good news of the empty tomb. Amen.

## **Tuesday, February 27**

### **Scripture: Mark 16:1-7**

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. (And it was a very large stone!) Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you."

### **Observation**

It seems likely that as Jesus' enemies condemned and crucified him, Peter thought his denial of Jesus would haunt him the rest of his life. Thankfully, unlike Judas (Matthew 27:3-5), he did not succumb irreversibly to despair. But Mark's story (and John 21:3, which we'll read tomorrow) do strongly suggest that Peter wasn't sure that he would ever be welcome as one of Jesus' disciples after his triple denial of his master.

### **Application**

In Mark 16:7, the messenger told Mary Magdalene and the other women, "Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee." Peter three times had made a point of publicly denying that he even knew Jesus. Yet Jesus made sure his name was specifically included in the invitation to his disciples. What does this tell you about Jesus' grace toward Peter? Can you trust Jesus to treat you the same way when you fail?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, so as not to let Peter's shame exclude him from your company, you invited him by name. Thank you for offering the same kind of personal, "nothing is too bad to forgive," grace to me. Amen.

## **Wednesday, February 28**

### **Scripture: John 21:1-7**

Later, Jesus himself appeared again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter told them, "I'm going fishing." They said, "We'll go with you." They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus.

Jesus called to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No."

He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn't haul in the net. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water.

### **Observation**

John 21 told about Peter and six other disciples back at the Sea of Galilee. (John did not explain why they chose to go fishing, but Bible students have ventured a variety of guesses.) Despite their past fishing experience, they were not successful on their own. (Perhaps they were rusty after following Jesus for three years.) Yet when Jesus guided them, they hauled in a huge catch.

### **Application**

In his gospel's prologue, John wrote, "The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world.... but the world didn't recognize the light" (John 1:9-10). In verse 4 of chapter 21, he wrote, "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus." When Peter did recognize his Lord, he couldn't wait for the boat to reach shore, but jumped into the water. What helps you recognize Jesus when his presence touches your life? Are you as eager to draw near to Jesus as Peter was?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you promised to be with me "every day until the end of this present age" (Matthew 28:20). Help me keep my heart open, attuned to your comforting, guiding presence. Amen.

## **Thursday, February 29**

### **Scripture: John 21:8-14**

The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren't far from shore, only about one hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn't torn, even with so many fish. Jesus said to

them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

### **Observation**

John, a master of evocative images, must have meant this scene of Jesus building a fire in part to remind readers that Peter's faith "crashed" around a fire in Caiaphas' court (John 18:15-18, 25-27). It also showed that Jesus was no ghost—he was truly, physically alive. He built a fire and cooked breakfast! (See also Luke 24:36-43.)

### **Application**

John 6:11 said, "Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish." In John 21 we read, "Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish." Imagine the memories this action must have triggered for Peter and the others. Think back on your own walk with Jesus. What remembered high points strengthen you for today's journey?

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord, long before you prepared this meal, the psalmist wrote, "You set a table for me" (Psalm 23:5). As I eat my meals today, remind me of the deeper ways you feed my soul as well as my body. Amen.

## **Friday, March 1**

### **Scripture: John 21:15-19**

When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don't want to go." He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me."

### **Observation**

Three times Peter denied knowing Jesus. His heart must have been aching, eager to reconnect. Jesus, a master psychologist, didn't want that failure to haunt Peter forever. Three times, he allowed Peter to affirm his love, deeper and more solid because Jesus forgave him after he failed. Then Jesus told him that he would yet have the chance to live

out his pledge in John 13:37 (“I’ll give up my life for you”). With the cost of following clearly in view, Jesus repeated the same simple, sweeping call: “Follow me.”

### **Application**

Scholar N. T. Wright said, “The three questions correspond to Peter’s three denials. Three for completeness, yes, but three also for reminder. The smell of the charcoal fire lingers. Peter’s night of agony—and Jesus’ own night of agony—returns. But because of the latter, the former can be dealt with.” What failures might haunt your relationship with Jesus? Imagine yourself on that beach with him, by that fire. Hear Jesus ask you, “\_\_\_\_\_, do you love me?” Answer, three times, and hear Jesus deal with any barriers that separate you.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, “Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee, or brought low for thee.” (excerpt from John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer). Please help me live into these words. Amen.

## **Saturday, March 2**

### **Scripture: Acts 2:1-24, 37-41**

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. They were surprised and amazed, saying, “Look, aren’t all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” Others jeered at them, saying, “They’re full of new wine!” Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, “Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! These people aren’t drunk, as you suspect; after all, it’s only nine o’clock in the morning! Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
Your young will see visions.  
Your elders will dream dreams.*

*Even upon my servants, men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.  
The sun will be changed into darkness,  
and the moon will be changed into blood,  
before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.  
And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.<sup>[a]</sup>*

“Fellow Israelites, listen to these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man whose credentials God proved to you through miracles, wonders, and signs, which God performed through him among you. You yourselves know this. In accordance with God’s established plan and foreknowledge, he was betrayed. You, with the help of wicked men, had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. God raised him up! God freed him from death’s dreadful grip, since it was impossible for death to hang on to him.

When the crowd heard this, they were deeply troubled. They said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter replied, “Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away—as many as the Lord our God invites.” With many other words he testified to them and encouraged them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day.

### **Observation**

Did Jesus’ restoration of Peter make a difference? Oh, yes! Pentecost was the Hebrew harvest festival and came 50 days after Passover. On this day of Pentecost, just 50 days after the Passover when Jesus died on the cross, God sent the Holy Spirit in a powerful way. Some skeptics claimed the Spirit-filled Christians must have started drinking early. Peter, who just 50 days earlier had feared to call Jesus his Lord even to a servant girl, now forcefully told them this wasn’t inebriation. It was God pouring out the Spirit, as promised in Joel 2:28. The Spirit used Peter’s bold preaching of Jesus as Savior to touch so many hearts that it changed the disciples from a tiny, almost irrelevant group to a movement of thousands.

### **Application**

Peter quoted some scary-sounding images from Joel: “wonders in the heavens,” “blood and fire and smoke.” He ended the quotation at the key point: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How can that message make earth’s problems less scary to you? Peter said, “This Jesus, God raised up. We are all witnesses to that fact” (verse 32). The Jerusalem authorities and Roman rulers hated that message. They might have easily proved Peter and the early Christians wrong by just producing Jesus’ dead body. But Peter

knew they couldn't do that because it wasn't there. How does "this Jesus, God raised up" provide hope to your outlook on life and death?

**Prayer**

Lord Jesus, through the Spirit's power, the same Peter who denied even knowing you at Passover boldly preached your victory 50 days later at Pentecost. Send your power into my life, stirring me to live boldly for you. Amen.