



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 6, 2023

Weekly Prayer

God of new beginnings, as you meet me where I am today, I give thanks that you are not content to leave me here. Thank you for your grace that has drawn me to this time today where I can wrestle with your Word and grow in faith. Amen.

Monday, August 7

Scripture: Acts 16:1-12

Paul reached Derbe, and then Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy. He was the son of a believing Jewish woman and a Greek father. The brothers and sisters in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take Timothy with him, so he circumcised him. This was because of the Jews who lived in those areas, for they all knew Timothy's father was Greek. As Paul and his companions traveled through the cities, they instructed Gentile believers to keep the regulations put in place by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and every day their numbers flourished.

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the regions of Phrygia and Galatia because the Holy Spirit kept them from speaking the word in the province of Asia. When they approached the province of Mysia, they tried to enter the province of Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus wouldn't let them. Passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas instead. A vision of a man from Macedonia came to Paul during the night. He stood urging Paul, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹Immediately after he saw the vision, we prepared to leave for the province of Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

We sailed from Troas straight for Samothrace and came to Neapolis the following day. ¹²From there we went to Philippi, a city of Macedonia's first district and a Roman colony. We stayed in that city several days.

Observation

This story shows us how the apostle Paul went about doing God's will. He didn't sit passively waiting for God to guide him supernaturally but moved from town to town as he had planned. He always "stayed tuned," however. God guided him in a special way to new territory for the Christian mission: the Aegean peninsula and the populous cities of Greece.

Application

Until this time, Paul's work had been limited to Asia Minor. Now God blocked him from two places he planned to go (the text does not say how) and sent a dream of a man calling Paul to preach in Macedonia where he meets this week's hero of our faith, Lydia. How can you stay alert for the unusual times when God guides you directly? Have you ever had such an experience?

Prayer

Lord, I offer my life to you. Help me to walk in your way. Make me the person you want me to be so that others can come to know your grace, power, and love. Amen.

Tuesday, August 8

Scripture: Acts 16:13-15, 40

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the riverbank, where we thought there might be a place for prayer. We sat down and began to talk with the women who had gathered. One of those women was Lydia, a Gentile God-worshipper from the city of Thyatira, a dealer in purple cloth. As she listened, the Lord enabled her to embrace Paul's message. Once she and her household were baptized, she urged, "Now that you have decided that I am a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house." And she persuaded us.

Paul and Silas left the prison and made their way to Lydia's house where they encouraged the brothers and sisters. Then they left Philippi.

Observation

As a dealer in purple cloth, Lydia had access to powerful and prestigious people. She herself was most likely wealthy but not necessarily of high social status. As Paul and Silas spoke, the Lord opened Lydia's heart and she listened eagerly to what they said. Then she and her household were baptized. In doing this, she took a heroic leap of faith that jeopardized all her worldly riches by starting the first Christian church on Greek soil.

Application

Lydia was blessed with access to financial and social resources but instead of using them for herself, she used them to establish a house church, a center of Christian worship and outreach in Philippi; Lydia was the leader. What gifts are you blessed with that can help build up the community /kin(g)dom of God?

Prayer

God, help me to open my heart and listen eagerly to your voice in my life and then give me the wisdom to recognize my gifts and put them to use to build up your kin(g)dom. Amen.

Wednesday, August 9

Scripture: Acts 16:25-40

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison's foundations. The doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose. When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted loudly, "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!" The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He led them outside and asked, "Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your entire household." They spoke the Lord's word to him and everyone else in his house. Right then, in the middle of the night, the jailer welcomed them and washed their wounds. He and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his home and gave them a meal. He was overjoyed because he and everyone in his household had come to believe in God. The next morning the legal authorities sent the police to the jailer with the order "Release those people." So the jailer reported this to Paul, informing him, "The authorities sent word that you both are to be released. You can leave now. Go in peace." Paul told the police, "Even though we are Roman citizens, they beat us publicly without first finding us guilty of a crime, and they threw us into prison. And now they want to send us away secretly? No way! They themselves will have to come and escort us out." The police reported this to the legal authorities, who were alarmed to learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. They came and consoled Paul and Silas, escorting them out of prison and begging them to leave the city. Paul and Silas left the prison and made their way to Lydia's house where they encouraged the brothers and sisters. Then they left Philippi.

Observation

Earthquakes were not common in this region. This narrative implies that instead of an area-wide natural disaster, God heard the hymns and prayers of Paul and Silas and used this quake (this act of God) to open the prison door and loosen their chains.

Application

Can you recall a time in your life when you felt like there was no way out of a dire or heartbreaking situation but somehow God made a way forward? Perhaps hindsight and reflection can help you see how God was with you through tough times and helped to lead you through.

Prayer

God, sometimes I need you to shake things up in my life so I can let go of the things that are holding me down, freeing me up to move forward with you. Amen.

Thursday, August 10

Scripture: Philippians 1:1-11

From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. To all those in Philippi who are God's people in Christ Jesus, along with your supervisors and servants. May the grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers. I'm thankful for all of you every time I pray, and it's always a prayer full of joy. I'm glad because of the way you have been my partners in the ministry of the gospel from the time you first believed it until now. I'm sure about this: the one who started a good work in you will stay with you to complete the job by the day of Christ Jesus. I have good reason to think this way about all of you because I keep you in my heart. You are all my partners in God's grace, both during my time in prison and in the defense and support of the gospel. God is my witness that I feel affection for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. This is my prayer: that your love might become even more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of insight. I pray this so that you will be able to decide what really matters and so you will be sincere and blameless on the day of Christ. I pray that you will then be filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes from Jesus Christ, in order to give glory and praise to God.

Observation

In this passage, we see that Paul's experience of Christ shapes his perspective on life. He knows that God's grace is available to him in the midst of difficulty. Christ suffered without mercy or help, so Paul might have the grace of God. Paul has come to love the people of Philippi so much that he's willing to suffer for their good.

Application

How has your experience with Christ helped to shape your perspective on life? Are you able to follow Paul's example in how you relate to those in your life?

Prayer

Gracious God, today I reflect and give thanks for my partners in ministry and in life. Amen.

Friday, August 11

Scripture: Philippians 1:12-30

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have actually advanced the gospel. The whole Praetorian Guard and everyone else knows that I'm in prison for Christ. Most of the brothers and sisters have had more confidence through the Lord to speak the word boldly and bravely because of my jail time. Some certainly preach Christ with jealous and competitive motives, but others preach with good motives. They are motivated by love, because they know that I'm put here to give a defense of the gospel; the others preach Christ because of their selfish ambition. They are insincere, hoping to cause me more pain while I'm in prison. What do I think about this? Just this: since Christ is proclaimed in every possible way, whether from dishonest or true

motives, I'm glad and I'll continue to be glad. I'm glad because I know that this will result in my release through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is my expectation and hope that I won't be put to shame in anything. Rather, I hope with daring courage that Christ's greatness will be seen in my body, now as always, whether I live or die. Because for me, living serves Christ and dying is even better. If I continue to live in this world, I get results from my work. But I don't know what I prefer. I'm torn between the two because I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is far better. However, it's more important for me to stay in this world for your sake. I'm sure of this: I will stay alive and remain with all of you to help your progress and the joy of your faith, and to increase your pride in Christ Jesus through my presence when I visit you again.

Most important, live together in a manner worthy of Christ's gospel. Do this, whether I come and see you or I'm absent and hear about you. Do this so that you stand firm, united in one spirit and mind as you struggle together to remain faithful to the gospel. That way, you won't be afraid of anything your enemies do. Your faithfulness and courage are a sign of their coming destruction and your salvation, which is from God. God has generously granted you the privilege, not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for Christ's sake. You are having the same struggle that you saw me face and now hear that I'm still facing.

Observation

Although Paul's imprisonment may have seemed like the end of his ministry opportunities, God actually used it to further the gospel. Not only was he able to reach Roman guards, but his incarceration also inspired others to preach boldly, whether from good motives or bad.

Application

Do you ever look at your circumstances and see no possible way the Lord can bring something good from them? What benefit could come from illness, unemployment, a broken family, or other difficulties? While we can't always understand what God is doing, we can always trust God to bring something good out of our situations. I know that I can look back on times in my life that at the time seemed hopeless, but now I can see how God was able to use that situation and wring something good out of it. How about you?

Prayer

God, I trust that you are with me even when I cannot see or hear you. In those times, give me the ability to put my trust in your faithfulness and goodness. Amen.

Saturday, August 12

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching

out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

Though he was in the form of God,
he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.

But he emptied himself
by taking the form of a slave
and by becoming like human beings.

When he found himself in the form of a human,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

Therefore, God highly honored him
and gave him a name above all names,
so that at the name of Jesus everyone
in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Observation

Paul's experience of the blessings given through Christ grows when he sees the church following Christ's example by working for others rather than working for themselves. So what is the right model for our relationships with one another? According to Paul, the key is to "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

Application

Christians are not to be without passion for the cause of Christ, but "ambition" for the things of God is quite different from "selfish ambition." In what way is it different? The person passionate for the gospel actually values others above themselves. They think of others as better than they are, more important. And their goal is not to look "to your own interests," but instead to look "to the interests of others."

Prayer

Almighty God, I praise you for your great faithfulness and for your great plan for my life. May I have a Christ-like mindset so that I do nothing out of selfish ambition, but value others above myself. Amen.