



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 28, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Gracious God, speak to me today and open my heart to receive your wisdom and guidance. Give me the courage to live as you teach. Make me generous, faithful, and loving in all I say and do. Amen.

Monday, July 29

Scripture: Luke 15:11-19

Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the inheritance.' Then the father divided his estate between them. Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.

"When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, but I'm starving to death! I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands." "'

Observation

The parable of the Prodigal Son is the third parable Luke tells us about someone or something that has been lost and then found. In this story, we hear of a younger son who takes his inheritance (early) and leaves the family home. Far from home, he struggles. He doesn't have enough resources, nor a community to support him. Eventually, he resolves to return home and beg for mercy.

Application

It's said that asking for one's inheritance early was a huge sign of disrespect. The younger son wasn't asking only for some independence and help to achieve it; his actions said, "I'd rather you be dead, than stay with you." Imagine then, how much courage it must have taken for the younger son to ask forgiveness? It seems to me that the father must have

shown previously his capacity for mercy. Otherwise, how would the son even muster the courage? We too, have been shown that God has a great capacity for mercy. How might this give you courage in righting a wrong?

Prayer

Dear God, there are times when I, like the prodigal son, have gone far from home. But you, like a loving parent, are merciful and compassionate toward me. Thank you. May your mercy give me courage to live anew. Amen.

Tuesday, July 30

Scripture: Luke 15:20-24

So he got up and went to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

Observation

"While he was still a long way off..." these words always have a way of stirring up emotion within me. The father doesn't wait for the son to grovel. He doesn't even wait for the son to make it up to the house. No, *while he was still a long way off*, the father was moved with compassion. He takes off running and rejoices at the sight of his son. An answer to prayers, I am certain.

Application

God seeks you while you are *still a long way off*. God does not wait for you to grovel; God does not put you through tests to prove yourself. God rejoices at the sight of you. How does being loved in this kind of incredible way change your life?

Prayer

God, you see me and know me. Even when I am still a long way off, you are running toward me in love, pulling me into your arms. Give me courage to seek you, to ask forgiveness, and to return home. Help me trust that you are waiting for me with open arms. Amen.

Wednesday, July 31

Scripture: Luke 15:25-32

"Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. The servant replied, 'Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.' Then the older son was furious and didn't want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. He answered his father, 'Look, I've served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you've never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.' Then his father said, 'Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.'"

Observation

This parable closes with the response from the faithful, older son. While many of us know what it is to need forgiveness, I imagine we also know what it is to be the "good" faithful son who stayed behind. He is skeptical of his brother's actions and hurt by his father. We see how he feels unimportant and forgotten.

Application

Where is my party? Have you felt this? Like you've done *everything* right, and still the attention, the celebration, goes to someone else? It's okay to wrestle with this. One way the father responds, is by reminding the older son: "everything I have is yours." He may not have known a big party, but he has known belonging, security, and love every day of his life. His whole life has been a celebration of faithfulness. They likely have a close relationship, as well, and this is a gift of its own. The party for the younger son is not meant to say he is *more* important. If ever you begin to feel this self-doubt, remember how God loves you and is with you always. You receive God's goodness and gifts every day. And how wonderful is it that this younger son finally receives what you have known to be true all along?

Prayer

God, sometimes your extravagant love and grace confuses me. Sometimes I worry there isn't "enough" to go around, or that you don't see me fully. Comfort my doubts and worries, assure me of your presence. Help me to celebrate the ways you love and care for all people, amen.

Thursday, August 1

Scripture: Luke 10:25-38

A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?"

Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?"

He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."

But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, 'Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.' What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?"

Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Observation

Jesus uses parables to teach on many occasions. Here we read another "sneaky" question from the Pharisees, which Jesus answers with a story. This time, he shows us what it is to truly love our neighbor.

Application

The Samaritan in Jesus' story put the injured man on "his own donkey" (i.e., he walked), took him to an inn, cared for him, paid two days wages, and offered to pay more if needed on his return. How did that story reflect God's vast generosity to us? How can knowing God's been generous to you make you more generous to your neighbors?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, give me the grace and tenderness I need for today. Grant that as often as I receive your loving mercy, I share it with others. Amen.

Friday, August 2

Scripture: Luke 10:38-41

While Jesus and his disciples were traveling, Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message. By contrast, Martha was preoccupied with getting everything ready for their meal. So Martha came to him and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me."

The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.

Observation

This well-known passage about Mary & Martha has practically become a parable for our times. We compare these two women, and the ways they follow Jesus. One who serves, another who studies and listens. The reality is that both are important. We need to enjoy and take in the presence of Christ among us, so we can grow in faith. And it is through our service that others are able to learn and sit in the presence of Jesus.

Application

Do you notice yourself "defaulting" as Mary or Martha? How might it be to practice flexing another muscle in your faith journey? Try to take on another role today, and see how Christ speaks to you anew.

Prayer

Jesus, you call me to listen and to serve, but above all – you call me to follow. Help order my days that all I say, think, and do, gives glory to you. Amen.

Saturday, August 3

Scripture: Luke 11:1-11

Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Jesus told them, "When you pray, say:

'Father, uphold the holiness of your name.
Bring in your kingdom.
Give us the bread we need for today.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who has wronged us.
And don't lead us into temptation.'"

He also said to them, "Imagine that one of you has a friend and you go to that friend in the middle of the night. Imagine saying, 'Friend, loan me three loaves of bread because a

friend of mine on a journey has arrived and I have nothing to set before him.' Imagine further that he answers from within the house, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up to give you anything.' I assure you, even if he wouldn't get up and help because of his friendship, he will get up and give his friend whatever he needs because of his friend's brashness. And I tell you: Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. To everyone who knocks, the door is opened.

"Which father among you would give a snake to your child if the child asked for a fish?"

Observation

Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray, highlighting what is most important: seeking God's kingdom, receiving daily bread, and asking forgiveness. But then, he highlights the importance of going to God in prayer. We needn't be afraid to be honest with God.

Application

What are you praying for today? If God gives you the Holy Spirit, will you thank God for that or complain that you didn't receive the specific thing you asked for?

Prayer

God, uphold the holiness of your name. Bring in your kingdom. Give me the bread I need for today. Forgive my sins, and help me to forgive others. Amen.