

CrossRoads Week of Prayer
January 7, 2023
Gratitude

Scripture Reading – Psalm 107:1-2

My wife has a project for her classroom every year. The project is to grow a plant. The children get all excited about this project. Even though it's a group project they all work together with their individual plant. The students do the reading and researching applicable to the subject. They learn about soils and seeds...yet there are a few more lessons they will learn during the process.

One of the first lessons they learn is patience. After planting the seed in the soil, the children rush in every morning to see if their plant has sprouted. "You must give your seed time to take root in the soil before it sprouts above the soil. Be patient" Mrs. Rasheed encourages them.

Another lesson the students learn is care. After the young seedling begins to sprout, the children want to pick up their plant and show it to others. They are not aware that handling the seedling improperly could damage the plant and hinder its growth potential. Mrs. Rasheed gently reminds her students "Be careful." Another lesson learned.


But the greatest lesson the students learn comes after the students' plants are grown and able to be taken home. Yes! The students have a feeling of accomplishment because of the work they have done with the project. They exercised patience and learned how to care for something that has depended on them to survive. Yet, on the day they take their plants home, they learn a lesson that isn't a part of the project...GRATITUDE. One by one the students speak words of gratitude to Mrs. Rasheed for introducing them to this science project and teaching them the value of work, patience, and care.

God, our Father, has introduced us to a new project. His Church. It's a project that we perform together and individually. We must read and study His word to discover the truths of how He expects us to grow in Him. We must learn patience in our daily experiences with others, remembering that love is patient.

The greatest lesson we learn in this project is gratitude. Gratitude is a spiritual practice that helps us notice and appreciate God's work in our lives. One way to show gratitude to God is to remember Him. Think of how you feel when somebody remembers your birthday. Remembering God means He is on your mind throughout the day. He is a part of your thoughts, words, and deeds. Remembering Him also means sharing with others. One of the most profound ways to express your gratitude to God is by serving others in His name. As we serve others, we are serving God and showing our gratitude for His work in our lives.

Prayer Focus: Lord, Grant me the privilege to practice Gratitude to You as I share with others.





CrossRoads Week of Prayer
January 6, 2023
Peace

Scripture Reading – John 14:27

In the late 1960's you would see individuals dressed in peculiar clothing of all colors and styles. The most common was bell-bottomed trousers, bright and colorful tops, with a shingle vest. These people were referred to "Hippies." They used a popular expression as they greeted or departed the presence of others. The expression was "Peace." The peace Hippies spoke of was peace from war.

The Bible reminds believers that we are a peculiar people. Not because of the clothing we wear, or the speech that we use. We are peculiar because we are not troubled or frightened by the troubles of the world. We have a special gift that Christ left to us. His Peace.

When Christ was about to leave the world, His last will was already determined. His soul He committed to His Father; His body He left in the care of Joseph of Arimathea; His clothes He gave to the soldiers; His mother He left to the care of John: but what should He leave His disciples? After all they had left all to follow Him. Jesus left His disciples a gift, far more precious than silver or gold. He left them with the gift of His peace.

Peace is necessary for reconciliation between siblings, family members, friends, and especially, church members. Peace with one another means tranquility of mind arising from a sense of our justification before God. Peace is given because we will be exposed to many troubles. Peace is a real blessing: The smiles of the world can't give it, nor the fortunes of the world afford it. That also means the frowns can't remove it, nor the lack of money remove it.

Peace is a blessing that will never fail us. Christ does not want us to live troubled from evils past or present, nor be afraid of any evil to come. This gift of peace is given to all of Jesus' disciples. That includes us*.

Prayer Focus: Lord, give me Your peace in my mind, body, soul and spirit and heal me from everything causing stress, grief, and sorrow in my life.





CrossRoads Week of Prayer
January 5, 2023
Strength

Scripture Reading – Psalm 73:1-3; 21-26

A new study began in the late 1990's that suggested we should learn our strengths. Basically, the study revealed every person has a set of strengths. When we emphasize our strengths we achieve, instead of trying to strengthen our weaknesses. The philosophy of learning our strengths has pervaded the global network of colleges and places of employment.

Asaph was the son of Berechiah the Levite and one of the prominent singers and musicians. Asaph was appointed by king David as "the chief" minister before the ark of the Lord in Jerusalem and is referred to as "the seer." So, Asaph had it made. He had strong ancestors, strong music skills, and a great job, making music to the Lord. Tremendous strengths, right?

But instead of focusing on the many strengths he possessed, Asaph focused on the successes of others, and this focus was his weakness. Asaph speaks words affirming the greatness and the goodness of God. He also recognizes those who trust in God are blessed beyond measure. However, Asaph confesses that his words are not in alignment with his true focus. He admits that in his weakness, he almost lost his footing.

It is common for us to acknowledge the greatness of God. We often share testimonies of His provisions to us in destitute times, His awesome power in times of trials, and His peace in times of inner turmoil and confusion. We have to admit that God is really, really good to His people at all times. He is faithful to us even when we are not faithful to Him.

Many times, our focus on the goodness of God is LOST when we focus on the corruption around us. Politicians, lawyers, leaders of all occupations, seem to prosper despite the knowledge of their actions going viral.

We can regain our focus in the presence of the Lord. In His presence we gain a greater perspective that He is in charge, we are not. And in His presence, He stands ready to provide the strength we need to live for Him regardless to what we witness from others. In His presence we gain strength by knowing earthly gains do not compare to the joy of having a relationship with the Almighty. Those who are **near God** find joy and safety and we are reassured that God is keeping us secure. He is our **Refuge**, our "shelter from danger." Nearness to God always helps believers maintain a balanced perspective on material things and on the wicked.

Prayer Focus: Lord, Grant me the Strength to be Content and Peaceful as I focus on Your will.





CrossRoads Week of Prayer
January 4, 2023
Giving

Scripture Reading - Luke 6:38-42

While teaching a stewardship class to his church, Pastor Fred instructed the congregation to tithe as an act of Stewardship. "People need to learn to give 10% or more of their income to God" Pastor Fred said.

Bob raised his hand in objection and said, "I don't agree with that--in this day and age with the high prices of everything, there's no way that a Christian can afford to give 10% to God nor should it be given first. People should take care of their own needs and give from what is left." Bob, a tremendous influence in the church, caused many to walk away from Pastor Fred's class dismayed and doubting God's promise. Bob was their teacher.

As Jesus was teaching important aspects of being His disciple, one of the topics was giving. Giving was a major topic in Jewish history. Pharisees taught giving, Scribes taught giving, and other teachers taught people what and how to give. Yet Jesus is "the" teacher that astonished the people because He "taught with authority." Jesus taught generous giving from the heart is faith and obedience.

After teaching on giving, Jesus introduces an illustration about the blind leading the blind. It is obvious that if a person is blind, they will lead another into a pit. Jesus was really teaching, that a person becomes like the one who is teaching them.

Giving financially is a form of worship, a response to God's boundless grace and generosity. Giving acknowledges and demonstrates that all we have, as individual members of HisBody, comes from God.


Giving says "I am not afraid of lacking anything because God is my source, and I trust Him."

We are stewards, not owners. Each of us was created for stewardship by God, to rule with authority, to govern resources, and to be a servant accountable to the owner which is God. Giving is an invitation to greater blessings. You can't beat God's giving.

Who is your teacher? Do you trust your own logic rather than God? Are you a person of faith or a person of fear? We are called to be people who walk by faith and not by sight. We face high inflation rates and prices are escalating daily but when you give to God, your faith is strengthened and you know He will provide your every need.

Prayer Focus: Lord, Grant me a heart of Greater Generosity and increase my Determination to give to my church.





CrossRoads Week of Prayer
January 3, 2023
Planning

Scripture Reading - James 4:13-16

Planning is a natural instinct in all of us. We plan what to wear for the coming day. We plan what to eat in the coming week. We plan leisure time, social activities, and even worship times. We are taught that planning allows us to put our dreams and goals on paper ensuring that we take proper steps about our future and stay on our path to success. This may be true for the secular, but not for God's people.

God is not against our day-to-day planning, but He wants us to make those plans with Him in mind. When we plan without including God, we are leaning towards boasting in our own accomplishments. Like a self-made businessperson who boasts on the ability to travel at will or make money by their design, planning without God focuses on human achievement.

Believers know the key to avoid boasting is to maintain a godly perspective. Instead of making big plans on the human level, one must expand their view to include God in the picture. Our plans are always tentative because we don't know what will happen tomorrow. Believers know that our plans are not His plans. In place of vain boasting we should say, If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that. These are not merely words to be used like some charm but a realistic attitude that affects all of one's behavior.

Self-centered bragging must be replaced by God-honoring trust. The cure for boasting is belief.


Belief in the wisdom of Solomon...that man makes plans, but God gives the right answer. That means after planning, consult with God through prayer for His wisdom, how to move, and when to move. Yes, we can and should make plans, but we must know it is the Lord who directs our steps.

God wants us to include Him in our every thought, our every move, and every plan. He wants us to include Him because of His great Love for us. Committing our plans to God is the only way Christians will succeed at anything. We should always remember in the forefront of our planning that God knows the plans He has for us. Plans for a future filled with hope.

Above all we should plan to live a life pleasing to God. A life that includes prayer, studying His word, loving our neighbors, and performing all the good deeds He has planned for us before time began.

Prayer Focus: Lord, Grant me the wisdom and humility to Include You in all my life's activities.





CrossRoads Week of Prayer
January 2, 2023
Beginnings

Scripture Reading - Isaiah 43:15-19

Beginning a New Year is always exciting. We think of all the new things we want to accomplish, all the wonderful experiences to enjoy, and most of all, the hopes for our families and friends. Basically, it is difficult to have a 'beginning' without reflecting on the good and not so good experiences of the past.

God is reflecting on His past accomplishments. For the children of Israel to see the Red Sea open and create a dry path for them to walk upon was a great accomplishment for God. And then, for their enemies to be eliminated when the same waters came crashing in on them as they pursued the multitude was a display of His might. Yet God tells them to forget about all that because He is about something new.

God is not saying we should forget His wonderful works He has done in our lives. What we are admonishing us to do is earnestly look for the new work, the new beginnings He is creating. As you face abandonment, look and realize God promises to provide a pathway of resources from His divine abundance just for you. Sometimes in our Christian journey we feel lost and without direction, but God reminds us to look and realize He is rivers of refreshing for your soul.

God doesn't want us to focus on the difficulty of our trials, but rather, God wants us to focus on the newness of life after He brings us through the trials. We are His chosen people whom He created and formed to praise Him for the new beginnings He presents to us.

God wants us know that He is with us. He is creating a new beginning for every door that has been shut in our faces. He is creating a new beginning of success for every failure we've experienced. YES! God is doing something new in our lives beginning the moment we place our trust in Him and Him alone.

Prayer Focus: Lord, Grant me a Greater Spiritual Walk and Greater Spiritual Vision.





CrossRoads Week of Prayer
January 1, 2023
Closeness

Scripture Reading - John 15:1-7

Pruning is a task that's best performed by an experienced person. The experienced pruner has an "eye" for where to prune and where not to prune. The ultimate goal of any pruning practice is to increase the health and aesthetics without giving the tree or shrub the look of having been pruned. As with any job, you need to have the right equipment and tools.

In teaching His disciples, Jesus makes it very clear that He is the vine, the source, the priority of the garden. His Father does two things;
1) removes the branches producing no fruit, and,
2) prunes the branch that are producing fruit so that they may produce more.

Jesus was God's choice vine on which he lavished care and attention. The fruit which God desires is loving obedience, righteousness, and justice. So Jesus uses a metaphor reminding us that "every person who professes to be My disciple (a 'branch') is not necessarily a true follower." A branch

that bears no fruit is obviously dead. Therefore, like Judas, it is cut off.

Fruitfulness is the result of the Son's life being reproduced in a disciple. The disciple's part is to remain. What does it mean to remain? It can mean, first, to accept Jesus as Savior. Second, it can mean to continue or persevere in believing. Third, it can also mean believing, loving obedience. Without faith, no life of God will come to anyone. Without the life of God, no real fruit can be produced: Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

As Jesus' disciple's we constantly seek the closeness with Him that results in abundant fruit. The "burned" branches refer to professing Christians who, like Judas, are not genuinely saved and therefore are judged. Like a dead branch, a person without Christ is spiritually dead.

Pruning is essential for maintaining productive and healthy Christians. The Father has the right equipment and techniques necessary for getting the job done. Let us praise God for the pruning performed in our lives and be thankful for the fruitful lives which brings us the closeness of Christ.

Prayer Focus: Lord, Grant me Closeness to You and allow me to submit to the Pruning Process so I may produce a Fruitful Life for Christ.

