

DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING

 THE LINK
CHURCH

DAY 153

Proverbs 28-29 • Psalm 60 • Romans 16

Scripture Reading

Crushing Grace

TODAY'S FOCUS

The God of peace will soon crush Satan
under your feet.
Romans 16:20

No one likes a bully. But the ancient meaning of bully was “a fine chap.” The infernal bully Satan was originally “a fine chap.” One of the highest-ranked angels, he grasped for more power and toppled his pedestal. Unfortunately for humanity, he landed in a garden where he continued his career as a bully: “one who is cruel to others who are weaker.”

Job was a victim of Satan's attacks (Job 1-2). King David fell to Satan's trickery (1 Chronicles 21:1). We are all his targets. Peter, warned by Jesus that Satan wanted to sift him like wheat (Luke 22:31), warns us: "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Hardly the work of "a fine chap."

Praise God that when Eve pointed her accusing finger at the serpent, God told him that her offspring, Jesus Christ, would crush his head. Though Satan is a bully, Paul encourages believers by saying, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." As Peter, after falling away and being restored again, promises, "The God of all grace ... will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1 Peter 5:10). Or as the Lord told Paul when he begged to be relieved of a "thorn" that bothered him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Prayer

God of abounding grace, we thank you today for your powerful, crushing grace. Keep us alert to our enemy and alive to your Spirit. Through Jesus Christ,

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 154

Proverbs 30-31 • Psalm 33 • Ephesians 1:16

Scripture Reading

Thanksgiving and Prayer

TODAY'S FOCUS

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.
Ephesians 1:16

A letter needs a certain tone in order to be encouraging. Paul expresses his thanksgiving for the readers of his letter, and because you are a reader, his thanksgiving is also for you. Think about that—thanksgiving for you!

It is often not easy to accept such a message. A self-critical spirit can prevent us from hearing it. Many people are so displeased with their own personalities, actions, and circumstances that accepting appreciation and gratitude is difficult. How refreshing it is when someone is thankful for us and we are able to receive that message thankfully.

Equally encouraging is someone who remembers us in prayer. When times and circumstances are difficult, we are helped by knowing that someone is praying for us. There is so much power in experiencing community and in recognizing that we are not alone in the routine and stressful moments of our lives.

As is often the case, there is another side to this. If we are encouraged by someone's thanksgiving and prayers, then we will also desire to pray for others. Encouragement builds spiritual character both in the giver and in the receiver. Giving and receiving encouragement will gladden our hearts. Participating in other people's lives meaningfully is at the core of living together as God's people in this world.

Prayer

Dear Lord, teach us to be encouragers for others and to draw strength from the encouragement you give us through your Word. In your Son's name we pray.

Amen.



NOTES

DAY 155

Ecclesiastes 1-3 • Psalms 45 • Ephesians 2:8-9

Scripture Reading

The Difference Between Root and Fruit

TODAY'S FOCUS

It is by grace you have been saved ... not by works, so that no one can boast.
— Ephesians 2:8-9

The English politician William Wilberforce is best known for his efforts to end slavery in the British Empire. It was a decades-long struggle, but abolition was finally accomplished.

Wilberforce not only had great determination; he was able to discern spiritual truth. He was perplexed that many who considered themselves Christian supported the slave trade, which he believed was in opposition to Christian faith. In response he wrote *A Practical View of Christianity* to show the danger of making good behavior the basis for salvation.

Can you imagine a politician today calling for social reform by making direct appeals to Christian doctrine? That's what Wilberforce did. He rightly pointed out that good works do not create new life in Jesus; they demonstrate it.

People who consider themselves “good” but do not abide in Christ are placing more trust in their own work than in God’s. But the only possible result is nominal Christianity—surface-level goodness without internal renewal. That’s why Jesus called the Pharisees, who were undoubtedly very good people, “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27).

Obedience is the fruit, not the root, of being accepted by God. Work hard at being good, but always remember that your good works “show the incomparable riches of his grace.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the gift of worship that keeps us in tune with you. Strengthen us in knowing you are always with us, and may we honor your name always.

Amen.

NOTES

[illegible]

DAY 156

Ecclesiasties 4-6 • Psalm 18 • Ephesians 3

Scripture Reading

Imagine and More!

TODAY'S FOCUS

To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine ...
Ephesians 3:20-21

Being able to use our imagination is a wonderful thing. I have often thought that our ability to imagine is one of the things that best shows we are created in God's image.

Though imagination can be used as an escape from our present reality, it can also enrich our minds to think about what could be.

Our imagination is closely related to hope and faith. Hebrews 11:1 states, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Paul emphasizes that God is greater and can do more —immeasurably more—than all we can begin to imagine. Imagine that! There are no limits to what God can do. In fact, God can do far more than we might ask of him. God is good, and God is great!

As Paul wrote these words of praise, he again refers to the Lord's "power that is at work within us." This is a core message of Ephesians. God's power within us works through faith and obedience. And our faith and obedience show the world how God's power is at work within us. That power is to God's glory and is expressed "in the church and in Christ Jesus." That power is for "all generations," even "forever and ever."

Taken all together, what an amazing display of divine grace this is. Imagine!

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the power of imagination, for faith and hope, for your amazing grace. Thank you for doing "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine!"

Amen.

NOTES

Ecclesiastes 7-9 • Ephesians 4

“A Gift With A Purpose”

... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Are you using your spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ? Have you volunteered to serve in a ministry? Imagine a church where every member was serving with the gifts God gave them.

NOTES

DAY 158

Ecclesiastes 10-12 • Psalm 135 • Ephesians 5

Scripture Reading

Lost in God

TODAY'S FOCUS

The words of the wise are ... like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd.
__ Ecclesiastes 12:11

Eastern religion teaches that the goal of life is to lose your personal identity in the ocean of being. Now, there's an irony. True religion is supposed to point the way home to God. But some believe that getting lost is the aim of spirituality: forget that you exist, that the world exists, that good and evil exist...just shed these illusions and dissolve yourself in the divine ocean like a grain of salt.

Many people today want to “get high” on God, in a big crowd, and with big music, in an experience as mesmerizing as the effects of a powerful drug. While true worship should never be dull or monotonous, it's meaningless to pursue feelings of ecstasy. God calls us to be devoted to his Word and to follow the example of Jesus, taking up the cross of kingdom service. Being found in Christ is what perfects human life.

When we are found in Christ, we come to terms with his death as well as our own. Christ's wisdom grounds us like embedded nails, helping us to make peace with our frailties even when we are young and we feel immortal. In Christ, we also find life to the fullest— with freedom from fear, shame, and soul-crushing perplexities. Life becomes a meaningful adventure, a race, a journey filled with awareness of God's love for us all.

Don't get lost in religion. Get grounded in Christ.

Prayer

*Lord, may we pursue you with all of our heart, mind soul and strength. May we be anchored in Christ and find fulfillment in you alone.
Amen.*

NOTES

DAY 159

Ephesians 5 • Songs 1-4

Scripture Reading

Paper or Pole

Ephesians 6:10-18

TODAY'S FOCUS

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.
__ Ephesians 6:12-13

Have you ever been outside on a very windy day? It is very difficult to stand when the wind is strong and pushing against you. The way for us to not get blown away by the wind is to be strong, heavy, and solidly standing our ground.

In the same way that we fight against the wind on a windy day, we must be prepared for spiritual warfare. As described in Ephesians 6:10-18, we have to:

- 1) be aware of the origin of the attack and lean forward on mission to live for God no matter what,
- 2) know and apply the truth so that we do not fall for Satan's lies,
- 3) live in right relationship with God,
- 4) walk with firm steps of peace, knowing that God is with us and can calm every storm of fear and anxiety that arises,
- 5) stand in faith knowing who we are in Christ,
- 6) use the word of God as the authority in every situation, and
- 7) be in constant prayer-- praising God, getting wisdom from God, giving everything to God, and interceding for others.

If we allow issues, problems or difficult relationships to be our focus, we will easily succumb to the pressures all around us and choose comfort and ease. Instead of becoming like Christ, we will become like the world around us, which is like walking in the direction that the wind is blowing and away from God (Matthew 7:13-14). The only way to stay close to God and to fight against the winds of life is to remain in fellowship with God by wearing the full armor of God.

On a windy day, everything lightweight, such as paper, follows the direction of the wind. However, everything that is strong, such as a solid metal pole, withstands the wind. Are we like a piece of paper flying in the wind or a flag pole standing tall and unmovable as the winds of life are constantly blowing?

Prayer

Father, help us to wear our complete spiritual armor so that we can be victorious in each spiritual battle that we face. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

NOTES

Songs 5-8 • Philippians 1:14

It Is Not All About You

TODAY'S FOCUS

-- Philippians 1:14

You may have heard people say that trials make us stronger, or that we get closer to God through trials. Though both statements are true, they focus on how trials benefit us. However, many times we fail to recognize that many times our trials are not just about us.

If you were put in prison because you were preaching the gospel, how would you feel? Would you be frustrated, angry with God, or focused on how to get out of prison? Paul amazes us with his attitude. While he was in prison he was focused on his mission rather than the difficulties and pain he was enduring.

Paul shared with the Christians in Philippi how Christ was glorified through his imprisonment; therefore, he rejoiced. He told the Philippians about two groups of people who were proclaiming the gospel in response to his imprisonment. One group talked about Paul's ministry as a competitor. They made statements that implied that Paul deserved to be in prison for preaching a senseless gospel. Another group of people was encouraged by Paul's fierceness and fearlessness for Christ so they shared the gospel with great joy.

Do we consider like Paul that those who oppose us and make our lives difficult because of our godly lifestyle or beliefs are actually helping to proclaim the gospel of Jesus? Their mistreatment of us may

cause people to look at us and see God's character revealed in how we continue to love and serve those who hurt us.

Father, help us to see that when we suffer while representing You, we are actually encouraging other believers and helping unbelievers to see the power of the gospel.

***In Jesus' name.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 161

1 Kings 12 • 2 Chronicles 10-11 • Philippians 2

DAY 161

1 Kings 12 • 2 Chronicles 10-11 • Philippians 2

Disappointment Obedience

I Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 11

TODAY'S FOCUS

But this word of the LORD came to
Shemaiah the man of God:

“Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, ‘This is what the LORD says: Do not go up to fight against your fellow Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.’ ” So they obeyed the words of the LORD and turned back from marching against Jeroboam.

2 Chronicles 11:2-4

Have you ever received a difficult word from the Lord? How did you handle it?

Rehoboam made a bad decision as he began his rule as King of Israel. He received bad advice, made the wrong decision, and it split the kingdom in half. However, if we look a little closer, we can see that God was up to something.

When the people from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin tried to reverse the effects of Rehoboam's bad decision by fighting to keep all of the tribes together under King Rehoboam, God told the people through the prophet Shemaiah to go home because this division was His will. That word from the prophet Shemaiah must have been hard to receive, but they obeyed it.

Sometimes when we see something wrong, we think we have to fight on God's behalf. We can become distracted by our self-righteousness and go headlong trying to correct a situation. However, we must stay close to God because God might be at work in it to fulfill His promise. He may be ready to pronounce judgment and transform the situation without our help. We need to

be like King Rehoboam and the people of Israel, having a mindset to hear and obey the voice of God even when we are disappointed by the outcome.

Our decisions and their impact are not simple or singular, which is the reason we must seek after God and follow His leading moment by moment. God desires our constant obedience.

Prayer

Father, help us as we make decisions to continue to listen so that we can hear You and change course when we choose a direction that is against Your will. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 162

1 Kings 13-14 • 2 Chronicles 12
Philippians 3

DAY 162

1 Kings 13-14 • 2 Chronicles 12
Philippians 3

Checking Our Perspective

Philippians 3:1-14

TODAY'S FOCUS

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.
__ Philippians 3:7

We live in a culture of achievement. Depending upon who surrounds us, we can be tempted to think we are a compilation of all the things we have accomplished. This can either cause us to feel proud or worthless.

Paul used his life to show that though he had an impressive background and list of accomplishments they were not more important than knowing and living for Christ. His point was not that he wished he had a different past but rather that his past would not secure his future. His eternal future was not about what he had in the physical world but about knowing and living for Christ.

Sometimes we get it twisted. We are either so focused on accomplishing our personal goals that we put almost no focus on eternity or we look intently toward the next life (eternity) that we do not use all the gifts, talents, and abilities we have in this life to accomplish God's purposes. The problem is when we live within the extremes of these two perspectives.

Wherever we are or whatever we do, people should see something distinctly different about us. After being around us, would people get the impression that our relationship with God is the most important thing in our lives? When we read Philippians 3 in light of Philippians 2, we see that Paul put his confidence in Christ, not himself. He

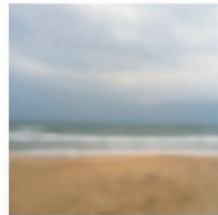
needed to give his life for the benefit of others.

Are we seeking to achieve great things for God's glory or our own glory? Are we making sacrifices for the benefit of others?

Prayer

Father, help us to have the right perspective of using all You have given us for Your glory knowing that our eternal life has been secured by Jesus' blood, not our achievements. In Jesus' name.

Amen.



NOTES

DAY 163

1 Kings 15 • 2 Chronicles 13-14
Philippians 4

DAY 163

1 Kings 15 • 2 Chronicles 13-14
Philippians 4

Believing God for Miracles

Philippians 4:6-8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. __ Philippians 4:8

King Abijah of Judah was at war with King Jeroboam of Israel. In a bold move, King Abijah gave a great speech contrasting the Northern Kingdom with the Southern Kingdom of Israel (Judah). King Abijah declared that the Lord God was their leader and the priests and Levites were all on his side. He warned King Jeroboam that he would not win because the Lord was not with him. Despite this warning, King Jeroboam attacked Judah anyway.

In Philippians 4:6-8, Paul instructs the believers to not be anxious but instead to be thankful, prayerful, and to think on excellent or praiseworthy things. That was exactly what King Abijah did as he prepared for battle with King Jeroboam. King Abijah remembered that God was with him. When

Like King Abijah we need to look at our situation in the light of our God and call on Him to help us, being fully assured that He will give us success. Winning battles involves doing our part as we trust God to do His part.

Father, help us to pray about everything and speak to our situation about Your faithfulness to us while asking and trusting You for miracles. In Jesus' name.

NOTES

DAY 164

1 Kings 16 • 2 Chronicles 15-16
Colossians 1

Scripture Reading

A Prayer to Pray

Colossians 1:1-12

TODAY'S FOCUS

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people – Colossians 1:3-4

Sometimes people tell us, "I am praying for you." Do you ever wonder what they are praying? Have you ever committed to praying for someone and contemplated what would be a good prayer to pray for them?

In Colossians 1, Paul told the Christians that he and his companions always thanked God for them when he prayed because of how they were growing spiritually, which was demonstrated by their love for all of God's people. Since the 2nd of the greatest commandments is to love others the way we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31), it was significant that these Christians demonstrated that their lives had changed by how they loved each other.

Paul then told them specifically what he was praying for. This passage contains a great example of a prayer to pray for others. In this prayer, Paul asked God to fill them with Holy Spirit given wisdom and understanding resulting in a life that fully pleases the Lord and bears fruit in every good work that they do. He prays that they will grow in the knowledge of God and have great strength and patience for every difficult and hard situation. (Colossians 1:9-12)

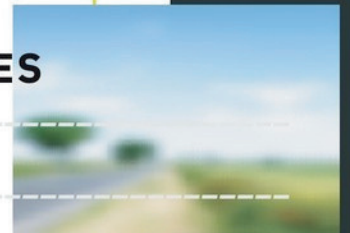
This prayer is very comprehensive because it covers every area of what it means to grow spiritually. Is there anyone you have told that you will pray for them? This is a great scripture to pray for yourself and others.

Prayer

***Father, we pray for every person reading this devotional. Fill them with the knowledge of Your will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Holy Spirit gives, so that they will live a worthy life that pleases you in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of You, being strengthened with all power according to Your glorious might so that they will have great endurance and patience, and give joyful thanks to You.
In Jesus' name.***

Amen.

NOTES



DAY 165

1 Kings 17-19 • Colossians 2

Scripture Reading

Rest, Refreshment and Fellowship

1 Kings 17:1-9; 1 Kings 19:1-18

TODAY'S FOCUS

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there." __ 1 King 17:2-4

Have you ever been tired and overwhelmed in serving the Lord? Have you ever felt like giving up? If so, you are not alone.

The prophet Elijah was a mighty man of God who served the Lord faithfully. When he declared a future event would occur, it happened (1 Kings 17:1). People revered and feared him because they knew the Lord was with him.

God continuously provided for Elijah. When there was a drought, God sent a raven to bring him bread and meat in the morning and evening and a brook to provide water for him. When the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to a widow to provide food for him. While he was running from Jezebel, the Lord sent an angel to provide bread and water for him.

Even though God supplied all of Elijah's meals and performed miracles through him, Elijah was still overwhelmed. The Lord questioned Elijah twice while he was running away. Elijah replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." Elijah

did all of his ministry work alone, however, he was not the only prophet of the Lord. He needed rest but he also needed fellowship with others who served the Lord. Often when we are overwhelmed in ministry and feel weary from serving the Lord, we need rest,

Prayer

Father, help us to continuously engage in self-care. Help us when we feel overwhelmed in ministry to take care of ourselves by making sure that we have rest, refreshment, and fellowship with people who love and serve You. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

NOTES



DAY 166

1 Kings 20-21 • 2 Chronicles 17
Colossians 3

Scripture Reading

Witness in Work and Retirement

TODAY'S FOCUS

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters ...
—Colossians 3:23

As we grow older, physical limitations and health struggles can limit our working ambitions. Still, many of us are willing and able to work into our sixties or seventies—or even beyond. We may find we have to keep working to pay bills and put food on the table, but we many also want to keep earning money so we can be generous to others.

The Bible gives no specific age for retirement—it doesn't even mention the concept. The apostle Paul envisions a life of service to God: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord."

In the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) God says, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day ... you shall not do any work... [For God] rested on the seventh day.”

Perhaps the biblical principle of rest can help us live wisely into retirement. In the Bible, rest from labor gives us time to worship and praise God, learn from his Word, do good for others, and develop the gifts we have been given—all to God's glory. When we grow older, our blessing and witness may diminish in the workplace, but it can grow among family, friends, church, and the larger communities in which we live.

No matter what stage of life you are in, how can you be a blessing today by working and serving with all your heart?

Prayer

Lord, we praise you for the talents we have and the provisions you give. Thank you for work and for days off. Show us how we can be a blessing to others today.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 167

1 Kings 22 • 2 Chronicles 18-19 • Colossians 4:6

Scripture Reading

Grace-filled Christian Witness

TODAY'S FOCUS

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
Colossians 4:6

God's grace in Jesus Christ changes everything! With sins forgiven and the Holy Spirit at work in us, God transforms and renews us day by day. His grace changes our lives. In fact, as God works in us continually, we show and tell the good news of full life in Christ in ways that we may not be aware of.

The apostle Paul told Christians, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Think of some of the Christians you appreciate. In what ways have they been wise in the way they speak and act, both with other Christians and with people who don't know Jesus? Can you think of times when they made the most of an opportunity to represent God well with their words and actions? Why not tell them you appreciate that? Together you can praise God for it. It will encourage both of you in your everyday living for Jesus.

More importantly, how can you be like that too? Do you represent God well in what you say and do? How can you show grace and wisdom?

Let's consider how God has worked through us. It will spark praise and inspire us to continue in grace-filled Christian witness.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for your loving grace and for the ways I've learned about you through Christians who show and tell your grace well. Let my conversations be wise and full of grace.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 168

2 Kings 1-3 • Psalms 82 • 1 Timothy 1

DAY 168

2 Kings 1-3 • Psalms 82 • 1 Timothy 1

Patience, Forbearance

I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience
1 Timothy 1:16

The best example of patience in the Bible is God himself. A number of times, God is described as being “slow to anger” (see Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8). This phrase captures what true patience is. Patient people do more than just wait. They actively restrain their rightful anger and frustration. For a higher purpose, they put up with things that they know are wrong.

How wonderful that God's love rests on his own capacity for goodness, and not our own!

Dear Lord, thank you for being patient with us. Forgive us for all we do wrong, and help us to be living testimonies of your mercy. In Jesus' name,

Amen.

DAY 169

DAY 169

2 Kings 4-5 • Psalms 83 • 1 Timothy 2

Pray for Those in Authority

I urge . . . that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Along with the Lord's Prayer, many other Bible texts give us helpful insights for prayer in our everyday lives.

But the advice to pray for rulers, both good and bad, wasn't new. More than 600 years earlier, the prophet Jeremiah urged the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah to pray for the "peace and prosperity" of Babylon, where they were taken as captives (Jeremiah 29:7).

Prayer

Amen.

DAY 170

2 Kings 6-7 • 2 Chronicles 20:1-30 • Timothy 3

DAY 170

2 Kings 6-7 • 2 Chronicles 20:1-30 • Timothy 3

Praising God Demonstrates Our Faith

Praising God Demonstrates Our Faith

2 Chronicles 20:1-30

TODAY'S FOCUS

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.
2 Chronicles 20:17

There will be times when we face overwhelming situations and the odds will be stacked up against us. It is in those times that we reveal who or what we trust for help.

King Jehoshaphat was minding his own business when three kings came together to wage war against him. After discovering their plans, he immediately proclaimed a fast for all of Judah. The entire kingdom (men, their wives, children, and little ones) followed his leadership by gathering at the temple of the Lord to seek God's help.

Jehoshaphat prayed an eloquent prayer recalling God's promises. He concluded his prayer with his admission of helpless dependence on God. God's response was quick and encouraging. He told them through the prophet Jahaziel to go to the place of battle, but they would not have to fight. Jehoshaphat demonstrated his trust in God by sending the praise team ahead of the army. He understood that God operates in the midst of our praises and that He would fight their enemies for them.

How often have we started our battles by praising and worshipping God? How often have we chosen to remain fearful and rely on our abilities and skills for success?

God desires the praises of His people and for us to trust His power and plan of salvation. Praising God as we go into battle requires faith. Faith is acting like God is telling the truth despite the appearance of the situation (Hebrews 11:1).

Prayer

Father, help us to constantly seek You first, to remember Your promises, to believe Your Word. Help us to keep Your praises continuously on our lips. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 171

2 Kings 8-9 • 2 Chronicles 21 • 1 Timothy 4

Scripture Reading

Paul to Timothy: Follow Your Gifting

TODAY'S FOCUS

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the...elders laid their hands on you. 1 Timothy 4:14

As Paul mentors young Pastor Timothy, he shares advice about the orderly running of a congregation. Timothy receives helpful instruction about worship behavior and establishing leadership within the church. Paul offers some personal advice as well: Do not neglect the gift you received from the Holy Spirit.

Paul knew Timothy was gifted, and he urged Timothy to cultivate his gift. We are not told specifically what it was. It could have been preaching, prophecy, healing, or any number of things. Timothy received this gift when the elders laid their hands on him and commissioned him for ministry.

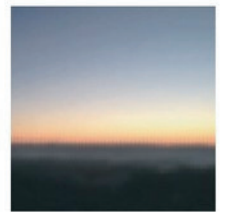
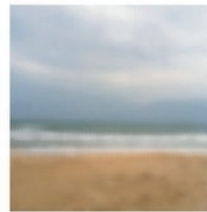
We have all been equipped by God with gifts for service in ministry. Every one of us is on a mission field and prepared by God to face that calling. Sometimes our gifts fall into disuse because we are busy or distracted. Maybe some gifts are set aside for a season in favor of others. Timothy was very busy establishing his congregation, so Paul reminded Timothy that the gift God had given him was not to be neglected.

Paul's advice still rings true: "Do not neglect your gift." Whatever gifting God has equipped you with is for a purpose. Step into new ways you can use your gifts to serve God's kingdom. What gifts has God given you that can be used to bless others?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the way you have gifted each one of us. Forgive us for the ways we may have neglected your blessings, and help us to further your kingdom. In Jesus' name,

Amen.



NOTES

DAY 172

DAY 172

2 Kings 10 • 2 Chronicles 22-23 • 1 Timothy 5

Scripture Reading

How Do We Begin?

TODAY'S FOCUS

If anyone does not provide for his relatives ...
he has denied the faith and is worse than an
unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8

There is no excuse for inaction when it comes to assisting the needy (1 John 3:17). But where shall we begin? The needs are so overwhelming and the injustices so appalling. You may have heard horror stories about food rotting in warehouses in certain countries while people not far away were starving to death.

The task of providing bread to the hungry is daunting. The authority of sovereign states must be recognized, the obstacles to delivery and distribution must be dealt with, and the barriers that stem from sheer human wickedness must be overcome. No wonder the apostle Paul tells us that thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities all need to be reconciled to God (see Colossians 1:16, 20).

So how shall we begin? We must think globally but act locally. Paul suggests we begin at home. The personal must precede the impersonal; the immediate must precede the remote. We cannot tackle global issues and the failings of corporate systems unless we come to grips with those near us who need our generosity. This calls for extreme humility.

But we cannot stop there. While fighting hunger on a global scale is a huge mission, God will hold us accountable not for the victory but for how faithfully we have fought. To do less is to deny our faith in the Lord, who is indeed reconciling all things to himself.

Prayer

Lord, we pray for all who grapple with issues that cause and prolong poverty and hunger. May we serve faithfully wherever we see the opportunity. Help us,

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 173

2 Kings 11-12 • 2 Chronicles 24 • 1 Timothy 6

Scripture Reading

Contentment

TODAY'S FOCUS

Godliness with contentment is great gain ...
If we have food and clothing, we will be
content with that. 1 Timothy 6:6-8

Do you ever sigh with contentment after a good meal? It's a great feeling. In some cultures people have a saying that goes like this: "Full stomach, happy heart." But how long are we content? Soon after the meal we become hungry again. And even if our stomach is full, our hungry eyes may desire more.

In 1 Timothy, Paul is showing amazing virtue when he declares he is content to have food and clothing only. In other words, he is content with enough to live on from day to day, trusting that God will provide for each day. Paul's contentment did not rely on gathering up possessions. He realized that stuff doesn't last, and it can be taken from us at any moment. Paul's relationship with God was the source of his contentment.

Some people seem to think godliness is a means to financial gain, and thus contentment. They think that if God loves you, he will always bless you physically. They say if you claim a financial blessing in the name of the Lord, it will be yours. That is wrong. God does not promise we will be full of anything but the Holy Spirit.

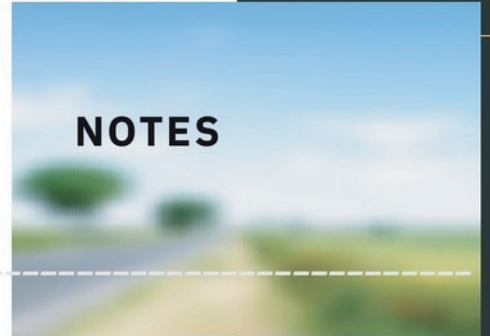
Being a Christian does not mean you deserve many fine things. It means Christ has called you out of darkness into the fullness of life. But fullness of life is not measured in goods; it is valued in immeasurable grace. Be content with that; it is life's greatest treasure.

Prayer

With you, Lord, we have all things. May we give thanks and be content with the treasures of grace that you give us so freely.

Amen.

NOTES



DAY 174

Joel 1-3 • 2 Timothy 1

Scripture Reading

The Day of the Lord

TODAY'S FOCUS

The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful.
Who can endure it? Joel 2:11

In September 2008, Hurricane Ike was gaining strength over the Gulf of Mexico and tracking straight for the coast of Texas. It had been more than a century since America's deadliest hurricane hit Galveston back in 1900, killing more than 6,000 people, but stories of that terrible storm remained in the minds of the residents. Police issued an evacuation order, and more than a million people fled before Ike reached land.

Curiously, some stayed behind, even though officials warned that they faced “certain death.” A newspaper article from a day or so before Ike hit Texas reported that those who would not evacuate were told to write their names on their arms in black marker so that their bodies could be identified later. Why wouldn’t they leave?

Today's Bible reading sounds a similar alarm. It warns people about a deadly, approaching storm that is called "the day of the Lord." Only God's grace can protect us from this storm, and that grace is freely offered by God in Jesus. On the cross, Jesus suffered all the punishment of God's wrath against sin; he did that in our place so that we would not be destroyed. Without faith in Jesus, people will face certain death when the final "day of the Lord" comes (2 Peter 3:10-14).

Have you listened to the Bible's warning
and found refuge in Jesus?

Prayer

Lord, your Word commands a response from all who hear it. Thank you for sending Jesus into the world to die in my place. Use me to lead someone to faith in him.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 175

Jonah 1-4 • 2 Timothy 2

DAY 175

Jonah 1-4 • 2 Timothy 2

Scripture Reading

To “Chosen People” Syndrome

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Go to the great city Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” Jonah 1:2

Do you have “chosen people” syndrome? Symptoms include keeping quiet about your faith, little concern for people who don’t know Jesus, and a notion that God cares only about believers. Jonah had a classic case of this syndrome. God sent him to Nineveh—a violent, immoral city—but he wanted nothing to do with those people!

Jonah's response was deliberate disobedience. He boarded a ship headed in the opposite direction to escape God's call. Soon storm clouds formed, winds blew, and rain pelted down. While Jonah slept below deck, the sailors prayed to their (false) gods. They at least understood that they needed help, while Jonah did not.

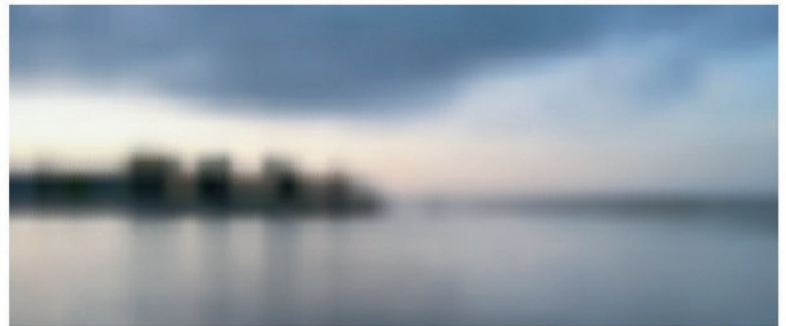
After learning (from the Lord) that Jonah was responsible for the storm, the sailors demanded an answer from him. Then finally Jonah shared his faith: "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." God later confirmed this truth by quieting the storm after they threw Jonah overboard. In spite of Jonah, God made sure that he became known to these sailors.

Do you share God's desire? Are you concerned for people who do not know Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth? God has placed you in your community, your workplace, your school to be his witness. Will you tell others the good news of God's love?

Prayer

***Lord, we are often reluctant to share
your good news with others. Change us
and guide us to share your compassion
for the world.***

Amen.



NOTES

DAY 176

2 Kings 13-14; 2 Chronicles 25
2Timothy 3

Scripture Reading

God Saves

TODAY'S FOCUS

When the body touched Elisha's bones,
the man came to life and stood up on his
feet. 2 Kings 13:21

Elisha was old, having served as prophet of the Lord for over fifty years, and he was now dying. Even King Jehoash recognized that the real power behind the throne of Israel had not been in its kings, but in the prophet through whom God had sustained his people. Jehoash had put his trust in Israel's military strength, but all along it had been God who watched over the land and protected his people. In this last encounter, Elisha tried to help the king understand that God is the one to trust. Elisha's name, meaning "God saves," had pointed to that his entire life.

Even after death, Elisha's body pointed to God's power when another body that was shoved into Elisha's grave was restored to life. As prophets go, Elisha was one of the best and greatest, but even his ministry was unable to halt Israel's descent into faithlessness. His work was able to bring only a few bright spots into this troubled time in Israel's history.

Israel needed a prophet who could give life on both sides of the grave, a prophet for whom the grave was not a final resting place. God's people needed not just a victory over death but victory over the grave itself.

We need that Prophet as well, the one whose name also means “God saves.” Centuries later an angel told a carpenter named Joseph, “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Prayer

Come, O come, Immanuel, and save your people. Come, Lord Jesus, and save us from our sins.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 177

Amos 1-3 • Psalm 80 • 2 Timothy 4

Scripture Reading

Is Your God a Kitten or a Lion?

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem." Amos 1:2

Kittens are tame and playful; lions terrify us. Many of us prefer to imagine God as tame and not too demanding. The idea of God as a lion—fierce and overpowering—is not how we prefer to think of God.

Israel pictured God as more of a kitten than a lion: soft on sin and indifferent to injustice. As a result, the wealthy mistreated the poor. The justice system favored the rich. The wicked thrived while the righteous suffered. And Israel acted as though God didn't care.

Amos warns Israel that God is on the prowl, and, like a lion, he will roar in judgment against sin. At first, Amos speaks about judgment on the nations around Israel (see Amos 1:3-2:5), and the people of Israel would have nodded in approval about this punishment for their enemies. But then Amos warns Israel that they too are the target of God's judgment. God the Lion was going to punish his people for their sin and injustice.

In time, God roared in judgment. At the cross, God roared in judgment against all our sin. Yet God came not only as a Lion but also as a Lamb. God sent Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb to carry our sin. In Christ, we see God's hatred for sin and his love for sinners.

Let's give thanks to him today!

Prayer

O God, you hate our sin. Forgive us when we fall short. Thank you for providing the Lamb who takes away our sin! Help us to hate our sin and grow in your grace.

Amen.

NOTES

Amos 4-6 • Psalm 86 • Titus 1

Justice Like A River

Ultimately, on the day of the Lord, the Judge of all humankind will usher in complete justice. And for those who have repented and turned to Christ, all oppression and poverty will cease. On that day, justice will roll down like a mighty river.

NOTES

DAY 179

Amos 7-9 • Psalm 104 • Titus 2

DAY 179

Amos 7-9 • Psalm 104 • Titus 2

Ripe for Picking

“The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.” Amos 8:2

Israel's actions didn't match its faith, so God warned Amos in a vision that Israel would be judged. Usually a basket of fruit was a symbol of life's blessings: good food, celebration, fulfilled promises, and hope for the future. Who can resist fresh peaches or blueberries?

Israel had forgotten that they were to reflect God's compassion and care for others. We need to remember that too. We are saved in order to do good, to follow Jesus' example of showing love and compassion everywhere.

Lord, it is easy for us to profess our faith in you, but then also to ignore people in need around us. Forgive our hypocrisy, and help us to show the grace you have shown us..

NOTES

Isaiah 1-3 • Titus 3

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