

DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING



to the LINK
CHURCH

LINKING PEOPLE TO CHRIST. LINKING PEOPLE TOGETHER.

DAY 92

Judges.13-16• 2Corinthians. 2

Scripture Reading

Purity

Judges 16:20

TODAY'S FOCUS

Samson did not know that the Lord had left him.

Judges 16:20

The story of Samson in the book of Judges is full of intrigue. Looking at Samson's story can give us great insights into how his private life affected his public life as a leader of God's people.

Samson had a specific calling, to lead in the deliverance of Israel from the enemy Philistines. He was also to be a Nazirite, which meant he was not to touch alcohol, his hair was never to be cut, and he was not to do anything unclean. All of this meant he was specially set apart to serve the Lord. (See Judges 13:1-5.)

But Samson did not lead a pure life. He ate honey from the carcass of a lion, making him unclean. He slept with a prostitute. Then he fell in love with a Philistine woman, and she tried to learn the secret of his great strength. Eventually she wore him down, and he revealed that his hair had never been cut. When she cut his hair, "his strength left him." The Philistines then blinded him and made him a slave, for "the Lord had left him."

What we do in private makes an impact on all the areas of our life. We need to come clean before the Lord, asking for forgiveness and resolving to live in a way that shows we are God's people.

Is God at the center of your private life as well as your public life?

Prayer

***Father, nothing is hidden from you. Help us to learn from Samson's story that we need to be faithful to you. Give us a discerning heart to follow you in all areas of our life.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 93

Judg.17-18•Ps.89• 2 Co. 3

Scripture Reading

Great Is Your Faithfulness

Psalm 89

TODAY'S FOCUS

Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? ... Your faithfulness surrounds you.

Psalm 89:8

God's faithfulness can't be turned on and off. It can't be removed from him. Faithfulness is part of God's nature, as we saw yesterday, and our reading for today says that God's faithfulness "surrounds" him.

Psalm 89 states that God's love "stands firm for-ever," and God is mighty. These attributes together are closely connected with faithfulness. God's love compels him to be faithful toward us, and God's might enables him to overcome any obstacle that stands in the way of that faithfulness.

Today's psalm tells us that God expressed his powerful faithfulness in a covenant with King David. God swore an oath to David that his line would be established forever and his throne would be made firm through all generations (see 2 Samuel 7). God faithfully kept that promise in Jesus Christ and now, through him, God also keeps that promise to us.

Paul expressed God's invincible faithfulness in these words: "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). Nothing can tear us away from our Lord who stands faithful guard over our lives (John 10:28-29).

Prayer

***O God, we praise you for your faithfulness!
Thank you that your mercies are new every
morning. Great is your faithfulness to us in
Christ! In his name we pray.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 94

Judges.19-21•2Co. 4

Scripture Reading

Treasure in Clay Jars

2 Corinthians 4:7

TODAY'S FOCUS

We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 2 Corinthians 4:7 In ancient times there were no banks as we know them. So people would keep their valuables and treasure hidden, and they would keep it in everyday containers like clay jars, tucked away in a secret place or buried in the ground. Paul makes good use of the contrast between the clay and the treasure. The cheap, rough, material of a clay jar is totally different from the refined, precious jewels and coins it may contain. And Paul compares the treasure to the precious message of salvation that God calls us to share in Jesus' name, despite all our earthly weaknesses and sinfulness. How precious are the "wonderful words of life," the message of forgiveness through God's love and grace, the news of Jesus' victory over death, and the promise of our own resurrection! There is no truth so precious as the gospel of Christ! Often, however, we get discouraged in our own weakness. Even if we are not persecuted or imprisoned for our faith like Paul was, we can understand the feeling of being "hard pressed on every side." Until the day we are called into eternal glory, we must not lose heart. Till then, let this be our motto: "We also believe and therefore we speak." Let us not lapse into silence. The same grace that forgave our sin carries us on, through life, so that light may shine out of darkness.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you give us the precious words of life. As we follow you, teach us how to live each day in the boundless grace of God. In your name we pray. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 95

Ruth 1-2•Ps.53,61• 2 Co. 5

Scripture Reading

Covenant Love

Ruth 2:10-12

TODAY'S FOCUS

At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me a foreigner?” Ruth 2:10

The book of Ruth begins with great loss and ends with restoration, showing how God gives beauty for ashes. After the death of her husband and two sons while living in Moab, grief-stricken Naomi tells her two sons' Moabite widows, Ruth and Orpah, that she is returning to her Jewish birth-land Bethlehem. Both Ruth and Orpah tell Naomi they want to go with her. Naomi tries to convince both of her daughters-in-law to go back to their own people to find new husbands because she had nothing to offer them. With love and devotion, Ruth vows to make Naomi's people her people and Naomi's God, her God. It seemed as if the best choice for Ruth would have been to part with Naomi and stay in Moab to remarry for safety, security, and provision. In this passage, Ruth demonstrates hesed, a Hebrew word that means merciful, sacrificial, covenant love in actions beyond words and feelings.

God rewarded Ruth for her covenant love towards Naomi; He gave her favor, protection, and provision through Boaz. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Do not miss the opportunities God gives to extend covenant love to others, even when it sometimes requires sacrifice.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to realize that we do not lose when we love sacrificially. We need to love others in such a way that they see how much You love them, and we show how much we love You. Thank you for Your sacrificial love!

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 96

Ruth 3-4•Ps.64-65•2 Co. 6

Scripture Reading

Redemption

Ruth 3:7-13

TODAY'S FOCUS

As surely as the Lord lives, I will do it.

Ruth 3:13

The word redeem means “to buy back.” For Boaz this meant using his money to buy back a relative’s land, and having a child with Ruth to preserve the family name of that relative.

Like Ruth, Boaz is a person of noble character. As Ruth clung to Naomi out of respect for her mother-in-law and for the Lord, Boaz clung to the Word of God, recognizing that all honor and praise belong to the Lord. Like one who meditates on the Word of God, he was “like a tree planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1:3). Well-rooted and -watered, that tree would not wither. From what we have seen of Boaz, we note that his words and deeds are so well-rooted and -watered that by the time Ruth speaks to him at the threshing floor, he will become the redeemer Naomi and Ruth need.

Boaz could have passed up this opportunity, for there was another redeemer. But he didn't. He went out of his way to make his intentions clear with a vow: "As surely as the Lord lives, I will do it." Someone who loves the Word of God does not make a vow lightly (Deuteronomy 23:21-23).

The God of heaven and earth promised to send us “one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26)—Jesus Christ, the Word of God himself. And God has kept his promise. Through Jesus we are redeemed from the debt of sin, if we believe in him as our Savior. Do you?

Prayer

***For the costly price of our redemption
through Christ's sacrifice, we thank
you, Lord.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 97

1 Sam.1-2•Ps.66•2Co. 7

Scripture Reading

Hannah's Misery

1 Samuel 1:9-20

TODAY'S FOCUS

In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping -bitterly.

1 Samuel 1:10

Hannah had deep anguish in her heart. Why did Hannah suffer like this? First, she was unable to bear a child. Second, her husband's other wife -harassed her. Because of her distress, Hannah went to the house of the Lord to pray.

The Bible tells us of several women who faced difficulties because they could not conceive a child. Hannah stands out because she promised, in faith, that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate him to serve in the Lord's house "all the days of his life."

God gave Hannah a son, Samuel, in answer to her prayer. And Samuel became a servant of God who was set apart.

Even as a young boy, Samuel heard God's call to speak for him at a time when the Israelites no longer heard from God. Samuel became a -prophet of God and led the people faithfully. God guided Samuel in answer to his -mother's prayer.

The world is constantly facing many difficulties. In times of distress and anguish, we need to think about God's care and providence, and we need to submit to serving God faithfully. When Hannah sought God and prayed in faith, she was blessed with a child, and God's people were blessed with a faithful leader. When we pray, God provides.

Prayer

***Father God, hear our prayers. Lord, comfort and guide us to serve you in faith, and may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 98

1 Sam. 3-5 • Ps. 77 • 2 Co. 8

Scripture Reading

Costly Kindness

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

TODAY'S FOCUS

**You know the grace of our Lord Jesus ...
that though he was rich, yet for your sake
he became poor ...**

2 Corinthians 8:9

Our reading today talks about the cost of God's kindness to us. Jesus set aside all the riches and magnificence of heaven in order to come to us in our need. Our sin had cut us off from God and had left us completely lost in the world, "like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Seeing our need, Jesus gave up not only the splendor of heaven but, ultimately, his very life.

"I am the good shepherd," he explained.

“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Jesus willingly set aside all his rights and privileges so that, through him, we might gain access to all that was rightfully his (see Romans 8:17).

If we grow in kindness, then we too will respond in mercy and compassion even though there may be a cost involved.

Doing “random acts of kindness” when we’re in the mood isn’t enough. Kindness calls us to respond even when it might not be convenient or fit our schedule. Kindness calls us to respond even in situations where it might not come easily for us.

To become more like Jesus, we need to be intentional about making ourselves available to others, offering mercy, help, and care to the people whom God places in our lives even when it costs us.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, enable your kindness to take root and flourish in me. Make me more like Jesus, who, though he was rich, was willing to become poor for my sake. In his name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 99

1 Sam. 6-7 • Ps. 72 • 2 Co. 9

Scripture Reading

The King's Shalom

Psalm 72:1-7

TODAY'S FOCUS

Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.

Psalm 72:1

Psalm 72 is a hopeful prayer for the king who rules over God's people. Shalom is a key word in the original text, often translated as "prosperity" and "peace" (see verses 3 and 7). Shalom carries the idea that something broken has been made whole. When you are restored to health and wholeness after battling an illness that has badly weakened you, maybe even to the point of death, that is an example of shalom. Another example could include being restored to a meal around a table with loved ones after being cut off from family and friends for a long time, or after enduring a period of great loneliness.

This psalm dares to hope and pray for shalom to be restored throughout the earth. This happens in the context of righteousness (being right with God) and justice (living in right relationships with people).

Righteousness and justice go together like the two sides of a coin. The great hope and prayer is that God's shalom comes on the earth through the right king.

Trusting in Christ as King, we can live with a heart of wisdom, identifying places and situations where things are broken, and seeking to make them right.

The shalom of Christ the King comes as we repent, believe, and follow Christ as King. We receive his reign and pursue it in whatever ways his Spirit leads us.

Prayer

Gracious God, may Christ's rule come to us like showers watering the earth. May his shalom bring forgiveness and healing to our hearts and to the world. Amen.

NOTES

1 Sam. 8-10 • 2 Co. 10

Scripture Reading

Who Is He?

2 Corinthians 10:1-5

TODAY'S FOCUS

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

2 Corinthians 10:4

Life is full of battles. Two teams may battle it out on the football field. A person struggles to lose weight or to conquer an addiction. Businesses fight to stay afloat. Society combats racism and gender inequality. Armies engage in war. All of these battles engage particular weapons—an ace quarterback, a special diet, 12-step programs, civil rights, civil liberties, stealth weaponry. Christ's followers engage in battles too. As Christians, we must be careful with our choice of weapons. Paul here defends himself against false teachers who are publicly finding fault with him in order to boost their own reputations. Many of us are familiar with the weapons they used: belittling, bully-ing, gossip, false accusations. But instead of responding the same way, Paul uses the meekness and gentleness of Christ. He is not interested in defending himself; he desires to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." What is included in the arsenal we may use in God's kingdom? Our personal testimonies can be a powerful weapon against "every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." Prayer is our lifeline to communicating with God, giving thanks, and understanding his will for us. And in God's strength we use our gifts and talents in obedience to Christ. We can bring reconciliation, teach, show compassion, organize projects, serve to help others, and more—all with the love and grace that bring blessing to the world through Christ.

Prayer

***Inspire us, Lord, to be a blessing in
this world by bringing the love and
good news of your kingdom, for your
sake.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 101

1 Sam. 11-12•1Chr.1•2 Co. 11

Scripture Reading

Shipwreck

2 Corinthians 11:23-33

TODAY'S FOCUS

Three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move.

2 Corinthians 11:25-26

On September 2, 2015, news outlets around the world reported a horrible tragedy: the body of three-year-old Alan Kurdi had washed up on a beach near Bodrum, Turkey. Alan's family of Syrian refugees were trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to a Greek island when their inflatable boat capsized. This tragedy testified to the refugees' desperation: they chose to risk the harsh sea in a raft to escape the threats of terrorists in their homeland. The accident also reminds us of the long history of shipwrecks in that area. The Mediterranean Sea was a key part of the apostle Paul's missionary travels. He tells of being shipwrecked three times and being stranded on the open sea. In Paul's work of spreading the good news of Jesus, he was also sometimes beaten, pelted with stones, and thrown into prison. That happened because people in some places were hostile to the message of Christ. In addition, there were false teachers who twisted the message of Jesus for their own profit, fame, and power. Sadly, false and corrupt leaders are still doing similar things today.

As Paul (and Jesus) explained, challenges and dangers often go with sharing the good news because the devil is opposed to it. Satan doesn't want anyone to be saved. But in God's strength, the good news of Jesus keeps spreading.

Will you help to share it too?

Prayer

Lord, guide us to share your good news everywhere, and help us to deal faithfully with challenges that arise. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 102

1 Sam.13•1Chr.2-3•2 Co. 12

Scripture Reading

Strength and Weaknesses

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

TODAY'S FOCUS

When I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10

The Corinthian church thought about strength in much the same way we do today. They assumed that believers are to be strong and should show their strength in demonstrations of power. That assumption was encouraged by the teachings of false apostles who claimed superiority to Paul and who derided him for his apparent weaknesses. The foundation of Paul's apostleship was being attacked by members of the congregation who demanded signs and wonders. They claimed that anyone who wanted to provide leadership in the church needed first to prove their power.

We assume that strength and weakness are opposites. We think that first we are to be as strong as we can be on our own, and then we need to add God's strength. On a good day, we think we can do all that needs to be done. On a poor day, we may need some help from God.

But Paul suggests that the relationship between strength and weakness is much more complex. In fact, as he learned from the Lord, God's strength is revealed through our own weakness.

Paul had many reasons to boast, but he counted all those things as nothing for the sake of Christ's excellence and strength. Where is your strength found? Have you discovered the power of God's strength through weakness?

Prayer

Father, may your great strength show itself in our weakness as we let go and see your power at work. Help us trust you to do amazing things by your strength. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 103

1 Sam.14•1Chr.4•2Cor. 13

Scripture Reading

Restore, Encourage, Agree,
Be at Peace

2 Corinthians 13:5-14

TODAY'S FOCUS

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.

2 Corinthians 13:11

After a long and sometimes stern letter to the Corinthian church, Paul ends with four commands on how the believers should treat one another. Be restored, be encouraged, be of one mind, and be at peace. Paul calls for unity in the church.

Often we settle for living with broken relationships. We get frustrated with others and vow to keep them at arm's length. Sometimes we talk more about someone than to their face. God calls us to strive for full restoration with one another.

There may be times when full restoration is not possible. The other party may be unwilling to move toward restoration. In Romans 12:18 Paul writes, “As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” We are not told that we need to make others live at peace with us. The only behavior we can control is our own.

And we can make the effort to reconcile relationships rather than let them fall apart. We can make a call, drop a note, or make an effort to talk about the strain in the relationship. Even though others may not reciprocate, at least we will know we have tried.

But sometimes we will be surprised by a person's response. Making an effort to reconcile may bring unanticipated healing. It can be a moment in which everyone experiences God's grace.

Prayer

Lord, give us the courage to reach out in love to those who have hurt us. Grant restoration where that is possible. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 104

1 Sam.15-16 1Chr.5•Matt. 1

Scripture Reading

God Rejects Saul as King

1 Samuel 15:10-23

TODAY'S FOCUS

Samuel replied . . . “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.” 1 Samuel 15:22-23

The people of Israel suffered while Saul was their leader. Saul did not obey God's commands. Saul also set up a monument to honor himself for his victory in a war, raising himself above God.

When Samuel asked Saul, “Why did you not obey the Lord?” Saul lied, saying that everything he did was for God. Of course, Samuel already knew what Saul had done, and this was an opportunity to -repent.

But Saul's answer was ridiculous. He tried to cover up his greed with religious excuses. Saul claimed that he had saved out the best sheep and cattle in order to sacrifice them to God. But that was a lie. He also shifted blame to others, saying it was the soldiers who had saved out the best sheep and cattle.

So Samuel said, “Enough!” And he told Saul that because he had rejected the word of the Lord, God had now rejected him as king over Israel.

How about us today? Do we live our lives as we please? Do we lift ourselves up and ignore God's words? Do we make up religious excuses when we have done wrong? Do we blame others for our wrong-doing?

If we do these things, we need to repent and appeal to God for his mercy and grace. We do not want to face the suffering of being rejected by God.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for speaking the wonderful words of life. We need to hear them again and again. As we begin a new year, help us also to live by them. In Christ's name. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 105

1 Sam.17•1Chr.6•Matt. 2

1 Sam.18•1Chr.7•Matt. 3

Scripture Reading

Envy

1 Samuel 18:1-9

TODAY'S FOCUS

**A heart at peace gives life to the body, but
envy rots the bones.**

Proverbs 14:30

When you compare yourself to others and decide that you don't measure up, you can easily fall into envy. And that can make you rotten inside.

Envy is not the same as jealousy, in which a person has no tolerance for rivalry or unfaithfulness. In fact, I can be rightly jealous for my wife's love, just as God is rightly jealous for the faithfulness we owe him. But not all jealousy is right.

Envy comes in when we feel we have a right to something that someone else has—and we feel they shouldn't have it at all. Envy has led people to steal or kill to make sure the thing they wanted was not enjoyed by someone else.

Saul was envious of David. David was more successful, and he received more praise.

When that happened, Saul—who had his own successes—no longer heard the songs sung for him, but only the songs sung for David.

And it made him rot on the inside.

We all know some envious people. They have a hard time praising others and hearing praise for those they envy. In the end, it can hurt them more than anyone else, for it can rot the soul.

In contrast with envy, wisdom calls us to rejoice in the good that others do, and to praise God for the blessings and gifts he provides others.

Prayer

Lord, sometimes I fall into envy when I make comparisons. Help me to be joyful about the gifts you give to others, and to appreciate all you have given me. Guide me to serve you faithfully. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 107

1 Sam.19•Ps.9•Matt. 4

Scripture Reading

Where to Begin?

Matthew 4:12-22

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Come, follow me ... and I will send you out to fish for people.”

Matthew 4:19

Where would you begin? The Messiah was kicking off his mission to save the world. John the Baptist, who had prepared the way for Jesus (Matthew 3), was now in prison. It was up to the King himself.

Flip around the question “What would Jesus do?” What would you do if you had to save the world? What would your message be? Who would you hook up with first?

I don't think many of us would choose to start where Jesus did. If you wanted to start something big, Galilee was an unlikely launching pad. Why not Jerusalem? Or Rome? If you had to name the twelve tribes of Israel, Zebulun and Naphtali were two that you'd most likely forget. And what about Jesus' message? "Repent"? Couldn't he have been more positive? They say honey attracts more flies than vinegar. But then fish attract flies even quicker—but who takes fishermen seriously?

Jesus had a strategy, but we often miss it because we tend to focus only on the end result: his sacrifice to pay for our sin and give us new life. Yet his mission was also to find people far from God, to heal and equip them so they also would find, heal, and equip others in his name. He wasn't just making a statement. He was starting a movement. We can start making disciples for Jesus anywhere, anytime.

Prayer

***Master, thank you for finding me and paying my ransom. I want to be an active part of this movement you've begun. Show me how to connect with the lost for you.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 108

1 Sam.20-21Ps.34•Matt. 5

Scripture Reading

Seasoned for Service

Matthew 5:13-16

TODAY'S FOCUS

“You are the salt of the earth.”

Matthew 5:13

Should you and I watch Hollywood movies, read the latest best-selling novel, or listen to music that doesn't mention Jesus by name? Is a woman working in a dentist's office doing "secular" work while her pastor is doing more important "spiritual" work? Christians have long grappled with how we should engage in the culture of the world around us.

Today we're looking at the first of two metaphors Jesus uses to help us understand what our relationship with the world around us ought to look like. In ancient cultures, salt served many purposes. Since it was a preservative, it was often seen as a life-giving agent. For that reason, God instructed his people to season their offerings with salt (Leviticus 2:13). This was a sign of God's life-giving relationship with his people.

Jesus suggests that we are the life-giving agent in this broken world. God calls us to bring renewal into politics, science, art, education, and every other area of culture. When we live out our Christian faith in all of these spheres of life, we give our world a foretaste of the world to come. This is not a mere human effort. It is the outflowing of what God has begun in us, through Jesus. God kept his promise to preserve the world even though it meant going to the cross. Now he expects us to be agents of preservation and life. How will you do that today?

Prayer

Faithful God, you preserved this broken world at a cost we cannot imagine. Help us live out our faith so that the world may glimpse your life-giving power in us. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 109

1 Sam.22 Ps.17•Matt. 6

Scripture Reading

Don't Worry About It!

Matthew 6:25-34

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Do not worry about your life ..." Matthew 6:25 **Amen.**

Do you worry? Some of us worry about paying the monthly rent or mortgage. Some of us worry about the choices our children are making. Others of us are anxious about big decisions we must make about our future. With all the concerns in life, can Jesus really be serious when he tells us not to worry? While we will never know a life without concerns, Jesus assures us we can know a life without worry. He points out that worry any manner of pace-the- floor, can't-sleep-at-night fretting—is not helpful because it changes nothing. Worry doesn't add a single hour to life; it doesn't solve a single problem. And worry isn't helpful because life is more than our worries make it out to be! Followers of Jesus are called to live for so much more than the fleeting things we worry about. Jesus reminds us that worry isn't necessary for a child of God. Your heavenly Father knows precisely what you need, when you need it. And your heavenly Father is good. The same God who paints the flowers of the field and tends the birds of the air holds every part of your life in his nail-pierced hands. The same God who loved you so much that he went through the hell of Calvary for you, loves you too much to leave your life to chance. Don't worry! God is in control!

Prayer

Creator God, you hold the vastness of the universe and the intricacies of the smallest molecules in your hands. Help us to trust in your perfect care for us, so that we may be free to build our lives on you.

NOTES

DAY 110

1 Sam.23•Ps.31,54•Matt. 7

Scripture Reading

Shame and Grace

Psalm 31

TODAY'S FOCUS

Letme notbeputtoshame, LORD ...

Psalm 31:17

Shame. What a powerful emotion! Twice in one psalm David asks not to be put to shame. The request in verse 1 says, “Let me never be put to shame.”

Is shame always bad? Shame caused by contempt or deliberate humiliation or mockery is hurtful. Followers of Christ must resist inflicting such shame on others. Shame from our human foibles or minor mishaps may embarrass us, but a good laugh at ourselves is perhaps the best remedy. But when shame is the pain of genuine guilt, prompting us to repent and seek forgiveness, then shame is good. In fact, such shame is the grace of God. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict us of sin (John 16:8). That is a promise, not a threat. Convicting shame and converting grace, received together, are gifts of God.

The good news of Christ is that God meets our disgrace with his grace. And grace is nothing to be ashamed of! We agree with Paul in Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."

David asks in Psalm 31, “For the sake of your name lead and guide me.”

There is no shame in the Name!

Prayer

God of abounding grace, we say today with David, Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD. In you there is no shame. Into your hands [we] commit [our] spirit. Through Jesus Christ Amen!

NOTES

1 Sam. 24; 1Chr.8 • Ps.57-58 • Matt. 8

Unworthy of Honor

NOTES

DAY 112

1 Sam.25:26 Ps.63•Matt. 9

Scripture Reading

Making the Harvest a Priority

Matthew 9:35-38

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." -Matthew 9:37 At this time of year many people find themselves in the midst of a busy harvest season. The fields are bursting with grain. Farmers are eager to reap what they have sown and worked hard for. In our reading for today, Jesus tells us that this same spiritual condition exists around us, "The harvest is plentiful." He says something similar in John 4:35: "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." In other words, there are people all around us who are ready to come to Christ. They just need to be loved and invited. The trouble is that Christians have a hard time believing this. We often feel as if people are not really interested. But God has created us all with a "God-sized" hole in our hearts that can only be filled by him. Most people are surprisingly open to exploring faith issues. According to Jesus, the problem is not a lack of spiritual interest on the part of most people; it's a lack of kingdom harvesters. That's why he says, "Ask the Lord of the harvest . . . to send out workers into his harvest field." Imagine acres and acres of ripened fruit ready to be picked, and yet the workers are few. Will you help? Now is harvesttime. Will you join me in praying that God will raise up more kingdom harvesters? Will you consider becoming one?

Prayer

Lord of the harvest, stir within us a deep

desire to do your work in this world. Give us opportunities to share your story and the joy of helping others to know you. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 113

1 Sam. 27; 1Chr. 9 Ps. 141 • Matt. 10

Scripture Reading

Birds

Matthew 10:24-31

TODAY'S FOCUS

**"Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."
Matthew 10:31**

As we stroll along trails or in parks or any wooded areas, we often hear a symphony of chirping as birds flit about in the trees. God has blessed creation with a vast and colorful array of birds.

But then we might notice the remains of a young bird that did not survive. "What happened to it?" we might wonder as we continue on our way.

In today's verses Jesus reminds us that not one sparrow "will fall to the ground outside [our] Father's care." And yet how much more will God care for us who are "worth more than many sparrows"!

More literally this verse says, “Not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father.” Rather than implying that it is God’s will for these creatures to die, Jesus is teaching that even though bad things may happen and God does allow that still God is right there beside us. God is with us to comfort, refine, and reshape our lives for our good (Romans 8:28).

God himself took the worst that humankind could do, is crucify his Son on the cross and turned it to our salvation. Imagine what he can do in each of our lives!

What an amazing conclusion we come to when we think about the birds of the air and the God who cares for them.

Prayer

***Thank you, Lord, for caring for all
your creatures, great and small. Help
us to feel your compassionate care in
and through all the situations of our
lives. In Jesus' name
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 114

1 Sam. 28-29 • Ps. 109 • Matt. 11

Scripture Reading

Dancing and Mourning

Matthew 11:11-19

TODAY'S FOCUS

To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces **Matthew 11:16** Notsince the days of Elijah had such

powerful servants of God appeared on the stage of divine history. John the Baptist was a powerful voice for God in the wilderness, and Jesus became the ultimate friend of sinners, giving up his perfect life so that all who believe in him “shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). As colleagues in kingdom ministry, both John and Jesus called their hearers to repent and seek full life in God. Their ministry styles contrasted with that of other leaders who were not prepared to witness God at work.

The contrast in today's verses demonstrates the fickleness that would eventually lead to death for both John and Jesus. In their day, dirges accompanied mourners, while the music of flutes accompanied dancing. But like fickle children, the generation of God's people who witnessed this chapter of salvation history wanted neither John's call to repentance nor Jesus' message of grace. They rejected both messages, even though both witnessed to the same truth—Jesus is the Son of God!

This tragic rejection is rooted in humanity's fickle preoccupation with its own self-interest. Unfortunately that self-centeredness hasn't changed much throughout the centuries. Many still close their ears to both poles of the gospel—both its call to repentance and its call to grace-filled faith. What about you?

Prayer

Lord of all, take away our grief and replace it with the joy we can have in you. May our words and actions show that we have listened to your life-giving Word. In Jesus name. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 115

1 Sam. 30-31; 1Chr.10•Matt. 12

Scripture Reading

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

Matthew 12:1-8

TODAY'S FOCUS

**If you had known what these words mean,
"desire mercy, not sacrifice," you would not
have condemned the innocent. Matthew 12:7**

Although the Pharisees had condemned him for working on the Sabbath, Jesus reminded them that the temple priests also worked on the Sabbath, yet no one condemned them. The ceremonies the priests performed daily in the temple were so central to Israel's religious life that no one would even think of reproaching them for working on the Sabbath. The rituals they practiced and the sacrifices they offered were all intended for Israel's good! The smoke that rose daily from the altar of sacrifice reminded those who came to the temple that God's promise of forgiveness was for all who would simply seek him with a believing heart. Sacrifice was important. God had taught from the beginning that his forgiveness required the shedding of blood. That's why the shedding of Jesus' blood was so significant. He became the sacrifice "once for all" to save us from our sin (Hebrews 9:26). But the ritual of sacrifice was never first and foremost what God was after. It was the heart. God doesn't want hearts that have become numb by simply going through motions. He wants hearts that have been softened. He wants hearts that have turned away from self-centeredness and see the needs of others. In other words, he wants to see mercy in us.

Prayer

***Father, help me to extend your love to others. Open my eyes to the needs around me so that I can be a person whose life is marked by mercy.
In Jesus' name
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 116

2 Sam.1 Ps.140 • Matt.13

Scripture Reading

Scattering and Gathering

Matthew 13:1-9

TODAY'S FOCUS

Some seed fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil.

Matthew 13:5

Some regions stones are a constant reminder that top soil rests on a rocky foundation. Farmers especially notice that stones seem to boil up out of the earth. Every year they have to pick up stones before the spring planting, but it's not long before other stones take their place. There was rocky ground in Palestine, where Jesus taught in parables. Those stories related to people's daily lives. Jesus spoke of everyday life in the home and on the farm. But those simple stories had deep meaning. Jesus used those stories to help people see amazing things about new life in the kingdom of God. In today's verses, Jesus tells a story about scattering seed on different types of soil. But what was behind this story? Jesus explains that the seed is the Word of God, which is scattered everywhere. But the reception of that seed will differ as it falls into human hearts. When some people hear God's Word, they reject it. Others receive it, but their hearts are rocky. There isn't room for the seed to grow. The distractions of life choke out the sprouting seedlings. But others have truly receptive hearts, and the Word of God and his love grow deep within them, yielding a great harvest. Take a soil sample today from your own heart. What kind of soil are you? What kind of soil do you want to be?

Prayer

Father, you have cast the Word of life into our lives. May it take root and grow as we serve you and help to build up your kingdom in this world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 117

2 Sam. 2; 1Chr.11•Ps.142• Matt. 14

Scripture Reading

Life Under a New King

2 Samuel 2:1-7

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the people of Judah have anointed me king”

2 Samuel 2:7

Israel is at a precarious moment in their history. They have enemies on all sides. Their first king has just died. They face an internal struggle. Will they descend into chaos or become the nation God has called them to be, a light to the other nations?

At this crucial moment, David steps up. He prayerfully pursues God's leading and welcomes the anointing of the people as their king. Remember, God had chosen him earlier, telling Samuel to anoint him (1 Samuel 16). So now David's kingship becomes a reality, fulfilling that earlier promise. And David shows graciousness to those who have been loyal to Saul. Through David, God is going to unite a troubled nation and give them good leadership. God is bringing order out of chaos, new life out of a time of degeneration and death. The people of Israel must increasingly be dead to Saul and alive to David as king.

So too, when we trust in Jesus as Lord, we transfer our allegiance from our old degenerate life of selfishness and sin to begin a new life in Christ. We bring our lives under his rule and reign. We proclaim and begin to embody his kingdom.

What does it mean to be a Christian? One way to describe it is to say that we live under a new King. We are loyal to the loving King whom God the Father has given to the world, and we live in the hope and service of his kingdom.

Prayer

Loving God, break the power of sin in our lives. Help us to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to you through Jesus. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 118

2 Samuel 3 • 1 Chr. 12 • Matt. 15

DAY 118

2 Samuel 3 • 1 Chr. 12 • Matt. 15

Bold Faith

Matthew 15: 21-28

TODAY'S FOCUS

Many who read this passage think that Jesus called the Canaanite woman a dog. It is vital to understand the cultural context, including some customs and language of the time, to grasp the beauty of the passage. The Old Testament Jewish prophets declared that the Gentile city of Tyre was under God's judgment. The Canaanite woman had a lot of nerve to even be in the crowd, let alone, to ask something of Jesus.

As a woman, as a gentle, and as someone in Tyre, the Canaanite woman had so much against her. When she knelt before Jesus and begged for His help, He told her it was not right to take the children's (the Jew's) bread and toss it to the dogs (the Gentiles). What she said next was with both humility and great boldness: "Yes, it is Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." She was not being disrespectful. On the contrary, she was acknowledging Jesus as Master and Lord. By faith, she was saying she would humbly take the "crumbs" from Jesus the Savior, The Bread of Life, because she knew it was enough! Jesus at once healed her daughter because of the Canaanite woman's display of bold faith.

At times, we might get labeled as or feel unworthy. All have fallen short. But like the Canaanite woman, our belief in Jesus as Lord, Savior, and Deliverer makes us sons and daughters of the Master of the Universe! Not by any works that we can brag about, but because we have been redeemed through the grace and forgiveness of Jesus! Our Lord responds to bold faith!

Prayer

***Lord, we are thankful for Your unconditional love and invitation for us to come boldly to Your throne of grace for mercy and help in time of need. By faith, we stand humbly and confidently on Your promises, in the name of Jesus.
Amen.***

NOTES

2 Sam.4-5•Ps.139•Matt. 16

2 Sam.4-5•Ps.139•Matt. 16

Scripture Reading

After God's Own Heart

TODAY'S FOCUS

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

Psalm 139:1

We are a mystery to each other. Our doctor may know our bodies, charting our bone spurs, our cancer—suspicious cells, or the plaque buildup in our arteries. Our dentist may know our inept brushing habits or which teeth need to be capped. Our therapist may diagnose us manic depressive or obsessive compulsive. Our spouse of many years may be able to finish our sentences or read a look in our eye that says it's time to leave a party. These people know us or do they?

We've been studying the psalms because they help us know God. The Lord is our shepherd. He is our refuge. God is the King. Today we remember that God knows everything about us: he knows if we can do a push up, he knows if we can curl our tongue. Jesus said God has numbered the hairs of our head. He knows what we're doing this moment and whether we are interested or if our mind is wandering.

We tend to hide parts of ourselves. If people know about our anxiety or alcoholism, they might ditch us. Others might gather inside information for emotional blackmail or to mock us in front of others.

Many people use their knowledge about us to do something against us. God uses his knowledge for us. He knows we are sinners. And his response is not to mock or belittle or threaten, but to send a Savior.

Prayer

***Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious
thoughts. See if there is any
offensive way in me, and lead me in
the way everlasting.
In Jesus, Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 120

2 Sam.6 • 1Chr.13 • Ps.68 • Matt. 17

Scripture Reading

Loneliness

Psalm 68:1-10

TODAY'S FOCUS

God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing. Psalm 68:6 The lonely widows, orphans, prisoners, the homeless what can be done to ease their sense that no one cares? Ultimately, God in his love is our dwelling place. As “a father to the fatherless,” he adopts us as his children. He defends the widow, sets the lonely in families, frees prisoners, and puts a song in their mouths. When God led Israel through the desert wasteland of the Sinai Peninsula after freeing them from Egypt, he scattered their enemies and refreshed his weary people. And in his law he made special provisions for widows and orphans, for foreigners, visitors, and all who were poor. To be a part of the people of God, the church of Christ, heirs of the promise, recipients of salvation this is a great, great blessing. There are people who think of Christ’s church as boring and a waste of time. They go to worship once or twice and soon give up. But they miss the fellowship that they could enjoy the fellowship of all who share in God’s deep love and grace, made possible through Christ’s sufferings for all who believe. God’s caring people have a heart for those who are suffering. Are you following God’s example and caring with compassion for others today?

Prayer

Lord, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26). May I reach out with your love to people who are lonely. In Jesus Amen.

NOTES

1 Chronicles. 14-15 • Psalms. 132 • Matthew 18

Heart After God

1 Chronicles 14: 15:1 - 3, 13-16

David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the LORD to the place he had prepared for it.

1 Chronicles 15:3

David is known for being “a man after God’s heart.” Many people believe this to mean that David was a holy man. How could that be in light of David’s sins and failures?”

God chose David to succeed Saul as King of Israel because David wanted to know God's will and to do it. Saul did not. (1 Sam. 13:14). David sought what pleased God and he prioritized God in his life. We see in 1 Chronicles 14:10-16 how he sought God's will before he went into battles and he followed God's instructions to victory. He wanted God's will and followed God's plans. When God told him how to fight a battle, he did it God's way. Even when David displeased the Lord in the way that he brought the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem, he discovered the right way to do it, corrected his course, and followed God. (1Chronicles 15:13-16).

Sometimes as Christians we can become so excited about doing God's will that we get ahead of God. We make plans and execute them without seeking God throughout the process. It is tempting to receive God's initial instructions and run with them. Then, when the plan fails, we might be tempted to give up. David showed us that we ought to seek the Lord's will and guidance and follow his plan. We must continuously seek God's instruction, align our plan with his, and then execute it His way.

Father, thank You that You have been gracious to us. Help us to identify and repent from any rebellious ways and idol worship in our lives. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

NOTES

THE LINK
CHURCH

