

DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING

to THE LINK
CHURCH

DAY 32

Exodus. 30-32 • Acts 8

Scripture Reading

Empowering Spirit

Exodus 31:1-11

TODAY'S FOCUS

See, I have chosen Bezalel and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills.”

Exodus 31:2-3

Do you know who Bezalelis? When reading the instructions for building the tabernacle, it's easy to miss him. Indeed, it's easy to skim through these detailed chapters to get to more "interesting" stories. But these chapters remind us of two very important things.

First, building the tabernacle, fitting the priestly robes, and fashioning the ark of the covenant reminded Israel of God's holiness. These things should also remind us of God's holiness, and that God calls His people to devote their best to Him.

Second, these accounts remind us of the work of the Holy Spirit. God chose Bezalel, the great-grandson of Caleb, to supervise these projects (see 1 Chronicles 2:19-20). God also empowered Bezalel by filling him with the Spirit of God, who blessed him with wisdom and all kinds of skills. Bezalel then led a group of artisans to carry out their work, using the very best materials the people could bring (see Exodus 25:1-9). If we skim over these “construction” passages too quickly, we miss something about the Holy Spirit. God has called and gifted each of us with many different talents to be used for his glory. Keep your calling in mind today as you go about your work, whatever it is, to give Him glory.

Prayer

***Creator God, you have made us for your glory.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we can
glorify you in our tasks today and always.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 33

Exodus. 33-34 • Psalms. 16 • Acts 9

Scripture Reading

Under New Management

Acts 9:1-19

TODAY'S FOCUS

"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles"

Acts 9:15

Many people measure their worth by their work. They clock in long hours at the office, at the factory or job site, or at home raising children. But what does our work say about who we are?

Saul had to reassess his work in light of Jesus' plan for his life. Saul had been out to get rid of Christians. As a devout Jew, he felt they were a threat to the true religion of God's people. He wanted to destroy anyone who followed the new religion founded by Jesus. Saul believed it was his mission to stamp out this competition.

God redirected Saul to become the chosen instrument of the Lord Jesus. Saul would suffer greatly as he championed this new message. But in spite of that, Saul proclaimed himself a disciple for Jesus, working under new management.

Saul was called to bring the message of forgiveness and grace to the very people he had hated. The first words of Ananias to Saul are significant: "Brother Saul, the Lord ... has sent me so that you may be filled with the Holy Spirit." Through Ananias, Saul was commissioned for new work.

It took a crisis on the road to point Saul in a new direction for his life work. As you think about this, evaluate the relationship between your work and identity, and reassess how your life work brings praise to God.

Prayer

Jesus, you care about the kind of person I am and how my work benefits others in your kingdom. Help me to enter into your rest as I work for your kingdom to come. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 34

Exodus. 35-36 • Acts 10

Scripture Reading

Clean--by God's Decision

Acts 10:1-16

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." — Acts 10:15

Most of the divisions, conflicts, and wars we have in our societies come from our prejudices against people who are different from us. Without exception, we all have prejudices against certain people or groups. Though we have given our lives to Christ, most of us keep prejudices we inherit from our culture.

What comes to mind, for example, when we hear the words French, Arab, Muslim, Black, Latino, White, Asian, Jew, Indian, Catholic, Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal, Republican, Democrat, conservative, or liberal? Unconsciously our minds associate such words with strong feelings and thoughts that can be negative.

Peter had biases against all people who were not Jewish. Peter's religious prejudices were so strong that even the fire of Pentecost didn't destroy them. God used a special vision to open Peter's spiritual eyes. Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, Peter was called to accept all people as loved by God. Peter received this vision so that he could welcome Cornelius into the fellowship of believers.

What are my prejudices? Who are the people I consider as low, inferior to me? Who are the people I cannot tolerate because of their race, culture, or social level? Who are the people I do not want in my neighborhood, at work, or at church? The Spirit of God calls me to repent of my prejudices today. What about you?

Prayer

Dear Lord, forgive my prejudices toward people of other races, countries, and religions. Please help me to live in peace with everyone around me. In Jesus, Amen.

NOTES

Exodus. 37-38 • Psalms. 19 • Acts 11

Adding to the Church Body

Less than 5 percent of Christian churches in North America today are growing through evangelism. Many churches are growing, but most of the growth is in transfers from one church to another. A "rotation of the saints" doesn't add to the number of believers. Statistics show there isn't one county in the United States in which the overall percentage of Christians is growing. The new church in Antioch was healthy, filled with people of real and deep faith. Its members were radically generous. They were encouragers. Something amazing was happening, with a great number of people being "brought to" the Lord. The word in Greek here is "prostithemi", often translated in Acts as "added to." It's one of Luke's favorite terms for church growth. The Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper often used this word to define missiology. When a church grows by adding people who are new to the kingdom of God, that is church growth. Our word prosthetics also comes from this term. Though to us that usually means "replacement limbs," we wouldn't want to think of new believers as replacement members or parts. But the idea of "additional limbs" can help us focus on adding people to God's kingdom. Would you pray that your church may be one in which God adds to the number of believers?

***Father, we know that only your Holy Spirit
can cause people to believe. Please add
to our church through new believers and
help us all to serve you faithfully.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 36

Exodus. 39-40 • Psalms. 15 • Acts 12

Scripture Reading

A Prayer Answered

Acts 12:1-17

TODAY'S FOCUS

"You're out of your mind," they told her "It must be his angel." Acts 12:15

The Bible encourages us to pray without ceasing. So we pray in the morning, at noon, and at night. We pray and pray and pray... But sometimes, as with anything we do regularly prayer can become a routine. Our prayers can become pious religious rites with little meaning and impact. The first community of believers was not much different from us in that way. When the local Roman ruler, Herod, put Peter in prison, the church organized a prayer vigil on his behalf. During the night, an angel of the Lord helped Peter escape, and he soon knocked at the door where the believers were praying. At first, they couldn't believe it was him. How could it be possible? God doesn't answer prayers so quickly! But, as those early believers learned, God really does do amazing things. Do we really believe that God answers prayer? Of course, He does, we say. But do we pray expectantly? Or have we become so disappointed with prayer that it has become a routine, almost hopeless exercise? We need to ask whether James 4:3 applies: "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives." Expectant prayer breaks out of the confining box of self-centered motives and desires to pursue the wide horizons of God's will.

Prayer

Lord, please teach me to pray in line with your will. Teach me to expect answers that reflect your will and to be humble enough to receive them by faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 37

Leviticus.1-3•Acts 13

DAY 37

Leviticus.1-3•Acts 13

The Voice of God

The Voice of God

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The Voice of God

The Voice of God

The Voice of God

**Thanks for your Word, O Lord.
Hear your voice so that we may
live in the light of your grace. Help us
to love your words and live by them. In
Jesus' name, Amen.**

**Thanks for your Word, O Lord.
Hear your voice so that we may
live in the light of your grace. Help us
to love your words and live by them. In
Jesus' name, Amen.**

Leviticus. 4-6 • Acts 14

No Fast-Food Discipleship

TODAY'S FOCUS

Our fast-paced society wants quick results with minimal effort. For example, you slide your plastic card into a teller machine, punch a couple of keys, and out slides your money.

We carry this mindset into God's work as well. We share our testimony, and we expect unbelievers to start crying about their sins and giving their lives to the Lord right away. How many world-changing endeavors have stopped prematurely because of the lack of immediate results?

Paul and Barnabas at first received a good response from both the Jews and Gentiles who lived in Iconium. But soon they were confronted with opposition from those who did not like the gospel. Instead of cutting and running, Paul and Barnabas chose to spend "considerable time there," speaking with boldness for the Lord. And the Lord confirmed their message with miraculous signs and wonders. Perseverance and patience are key elements for effective discipleship and ministry. Are we patient with our children who have strayed from the Lord? Are we patient with our neighbors, coworkers, or classmates who are slow to understand their need for salvation? We can hinder miracles of grace in our lives and ministries if we lack perseverance and patience.

Lord, give us perseverance and patience so that we may withstand opposition when necessary. Help us also as we wait for your working in people's lives. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 39

Leviticus.7-9•Acts 15

DAY 39

Leviticus.7-9•Acts 15

Successful Worship

Successful Worship

Successful Worship

Successful Worship

Successful Worship

Successful Worship

Successful Worship

Successful Worship

Successful Worship

Grant your servants peace, O Lord, for we have seen your salvation. Strengthen us to serve you faithfully and patiently; and please, come, Lord Jesus. Please come again. Amen.

Grant your servants peace, O Lord, for we have seen your salvation. Strengthen us to serve you faithfully and patiently; and please, come, Lord Jesus. Please come again. Amen.

DAY 40

Leviticus.10-12•Acts 16

Scripture Reading

"I'm Good!"

Acts 16:16-34

Prayer

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Acts 16:30

"I'm good." We use this expression a lot these days. I trip over a curb. Someone asks if I need help. "No, thanks," I reply, limping away; "I'm good." I may be a little bruised, but I'm OK enough to walk and keep going. The jailer in today's story was in a real dilemma. An earth-quake had set his prisoners free, and he knew that it would be his life or theirs. (In those days, jailers were usually killed if their prisoners escaped.) This was certainly not an "I'm good" moment. So he asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" Was this a theology question now? In this crisis, was the jailer calling a "time out" to talk about faith? Though he was probably more concerned about avoiding a death sentence, the jailer heard from Paul and Silas about the Lord Jesus and he believed. Something happens when you discover that you can't make your life "good." Whether in a jailer's crisis or in slow motion over time, it eventually brings a total surrender to the One who really can make things good. There will come a day when every stumble I've ever made will be available for public display. I wonder how long that list will be. But just when everyone looks, Someone else will hold up nail-scarred hands on my behalf —and he'll say, "It's OK; he's good."

***Lord, we're not good. But you are. Your nail-scarred hands and death on the cross finished the work needed for our salvation. Thank you!
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 41

Leviticus.15-17•Acts 18

DAY 41

Leviticus.15-17•Acts 18

Scripture Reading

The Delight of Discovery

Acts 18:24-28

TODAY'S FOCUS

They invited [Apollos] to their home and explained the way of God more adequately.
Acts 18:26

Apollos was a great preacher. He was bright and eloquent. His messages were accurate and dynamic. But Priscilla and Aquila knew something Apollos didn't know, so they invited him to their home and "explained the way of God more adequately." Apollos may have been tempted to ignore his hosts. Great speakers are not always good listeners. But Apollos realized that these people had greater insight. So he listened and learned. Learning is one of the great thrills of the Christian life. You not only gain fresh insights into the Bible, but you also enjoy a deeper awareness of the majesty and love of Jesus Christ through his Spirit. No one is too talented or advanced to keep learning. As long as you are willing to listen to other Christians, God will lead you to new discoveries. Sometimes in a group discussion or in a personal conversation, we hear powerful truths we did not grasp before, and we rejoice at the discovery. At other times, God uses specially gifted communicators. Apollos, with his outstanding talent and learning, "was a great help to those who by grace had believed." Getting to know God better is always a delight, whether it happens through a powerful and persuasive communicator or through ordinary Christians.

Prayer

Lord, I want to know you better. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for the people you use in my life to teach me the way of God. Help me enrich others too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 42

Leviticus. 18-19 • Psalms. 13 • Acts 19

DAY 42

Leviticus. 18-19 • Psalms. 13 • Acts 19

Scripture Reading

Scripture Reading

Psalm 13

TODAY'S FOCUS

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me. Psalm 13:5-6 In his book, How Can It Be All Right When Everything Is All Wrong? Lewis Smedes tells about a visit to a dying friend. When leaving the hospital room, he heard his friend say, "It's going to be all right." It was his friend's way of saying, "I'm trusting in God. He knows what he is doing." But sometimes trusting God is easier said than done. When your health is failing, or you lose someone you love, or your job is on the line, or something happens to your child, it's not always easy to say, "But I trust in your unfailing love." When life becomes a valley, it can be a challenge to "sing the LORD's praise." And yet the only way to live is by trusting the Lord. You can't trust your health or your investments because they can fail you at any time. You can't bank on your government because its power is quite limited. The only one we can really trust is the Lord. He never fails us. Some years ago a friend gave me a lesson in trust. She had been told that she had only six months to live. I expected her to be devastated. Instead, she read Psalm 13:5-6 to me. It was God's grace that enabled her to say, "I will sing the LORD's praise, for He has been good to me." Ask the Lord for His grace to trust Him in this coming year.

Prayer

Lord, our God, please give us the grace we need to trust you. You know exactly what we need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 43

Leviticus 20-22 • Acts 20

Scripture Reading

The Lord's Day

Acts 20:7-12

TODAY'S FOCUS

“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and kept on talking until midnight.” Acts 20:7

Jesus' resurrection was so central for the early believers that many decided to come together to celebrate their risen Lord on the first day of each week.

Why Sunday instead of Saturday, the Sabbath? Because it was the on first day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead (see Mark 16:2). What day could possibly be more suited to worship and celebration than the day Jesus was raised?

Sunday quickly became known as the Lord's Day." And the New Testament clearly shows that soon after Jesus' resurrection the believers began setting aside Sunday as a day of special celebration. In today's reading, for instance, we learn how the church came together on the first day of the week to break bread and listen to Paul preach. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 16:2, we're told it was the first day of the week when believers were asked to bring their money offerings to the Lord. For the church still today, Sunday is most often recognized as the day of gathering, the day of worship, the day of celebration, and the day of feasting. A significant way to practice the Sabbath discipline of rejoicing is by gathering with fellow believers each Lord's Day to rejoice in Jesus' resurrection!

Prayer

Father, as I gather with fellow believers to worship this coming Lord's Day, help me to rejoice in the tremendous news that Jesus has been raised from the dead and now reigns as Lord of lords!. Amen.

NOTES

Leviticus 23-24 • Psalms 24 • Acts 21 •

Leviticus 23-24 • Psalms 24 • Acts 21 •

Scripture Reading

The True Owner

Psalm 24

TODAY'S FOCUS

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it.

Psalm 24:1

We were born into someone else's kingdom. We did not choose our skin color, hometown, IQ, or body type. We did not choose our economic condition, our neighborhood, or the century we live in. We were born into someone else's kingdom.

Why then do we often live with the illusion of being in control? We assume we can find our own way. We learn in kindergarten to “make good choices.” So we go through grade school, picking out our own backpacks and designer clothes, video games and bicycles. We grow older and pick a college. Some of us choose a spouse and decide how many children to have. We find a career and decide whether to try a new one. We act like we’re in control.

Into our illusion come the life-giving words of Psalm 24. The oil fields of Venezuela, uranium mines of Russia, and Great Barrier Reef of Australia belong to the One whose kingdom we live in. Psalm 24 takes us back to Genesis 1. The earth is God's handiwork; it belongs to the Lord. To breathe air, to eat lettuce, or to ride a bike is to live in the world that expresses God's power.

For centuries Jewish folks have used this psalm as a mealtime prayer. We would do well to recite it when we visit a shopping mall, look at the ocean, or watch the evening news. Everything belongs to God, even us!

Prayer

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Thank you for this world, “and everything in it.” Amen.

NOTES

Leviticus 25 • Psalms 25-26 • Acts 22

Scripture Reading

Jubilee Celebration

Leviticus 25:8-22

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land... It shall be a jubilee for you” Leviticus 25:10

We don't know if the Year of Jubilee was ever actually celebrated by Israel. There's no record of it later in the Bible. But it was supposed to be the capstone year of seven series of seven years each. It was a Super-Sabbath Year celebrating that the land belonged to the covenant Lord.

In ancient Israel tracts of land were parceled out to tribes, clans, and families, but the land was still God's. Each person had his or her place in the land. Jubilee assured that this right could not be denied. A bad harvest could drive an Israelite into debt. Payment might demand that the debtors sell their land or even sell themselves into slavery. But Jubilee set things right. Jubilee restored slaves to their families. It restored farmers to their family parcels. It restored the poor to a place in society. It restored the hard-worn land to productivity. All the children of Israel had inherited a place in God's land, even though they may have lost their place in Israel's economic system. They continued to have a right to their hereditary plot of land, which could sustain them and their family.

When Jesus came, he preached Jubilee (see Luke 4:18-19). He came to restore all who suffered. He came to create a place within the family of God.

Prayer

Lord, we need a place with you and within your church. Help us to restore those who have lost, or have become lost. May we bring the good news of Jubilee to others. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 46

Leviticus 26-27 • Acts 23

Scripture Reading

God Walks With His People

Leviticus 26:3-17

TODAY'S FOCUS

"I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people."

Leviticus 26:12

Leviticus is not an easy book to read. It is full of rules that apply to the Israelites in the Old Testament. God set up those rules to make for Himself a new people that would bless all other peoples, through a Savior.

God had brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, but they had not yet entered the promised land. God promised to bless them, and they were responsible to keep His commands. God promised to make their life fruitful, to live among them, and to walk with them; He would be their God, and they would be His people. But if they walked away from God and rejected His commands, He would punish them. Throughout Israel's long history the people often wandered from God, and the Lord had to keep shepherding them back onto safe pathways. Sometimes he had to punish them for their wickedness and rebellion, but he always maintained a remnant of faithful followers. And eventually from those people God provided the Savior, Jesus. He fulfilled the Old Testament law for the sake of God's people and then paid the price for the punishment of sin. God promises to bless us today as well, and He calls us to be faithful. God walks with us too; He is our God, and we are His people. And today, through Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit to help us walk faithfully with God. Let's thank God today for Jesus and the Spirit, who help us to live by the Word of the Lord. "great love" when a forgiven sinner shows it.

Prayer

Lord, we need a place with you and within your church. Help us to restore those who have lost, or have become lost. May we bring the good news of Jubilee to others. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 47

Numbers 1-2 • Acts 24

Scripture Reading

Belonging to God

Numbers 1:1-4

TODAY'S FOCUS

The Lord spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. — Numbers 1:1

The book of Numbers begins with a reference to the Israelites' coming out of Egypt, where they had been slaves for many years (see Exodus 1-14). Thirteen months had passed since then, and many miles of wilderness lay ahead before they would enter the land God had promised to their ancestor Abraham (Genesis 13:14-18). The people had been camped at Sinai for more than a year. And soon God would get them moving again toward the promised land. How would they survive in the wilderness journey ahead? They needed to remember that God had delivered them out of slavery, and that they were God's people. God had rescued them, and He would not abandon them in the wilderness. God had delivered them and would bring them to the land he had promised. When life is difficult, we must remember that God has delivered us too. By sending His Son, Jesus Christ, God has freed us from our slavery to sin and death. Jesus died to pay the price for our sin. Through Him, we are saved and given new life to enjoy with God forever. We may experience troubles in life. At times, life can even seem like a desert, but God reminds us that we belong to Him because of His salvation in Christ. He has delivered us from sin and death; He will not abandon us in the wilderness. If you find yourself in the wilderness, put your hope in God, who will carry you through.. .

Prayer

*Lord God, walk with us in the wilderness experiences of life and remind us that because of Jesus we are yours.
Amen.*

NOTES

DAY 48

Numbers 3-4 • Acts 25

Scripture Reading

Festus: Puzzled by Paul

Acts 25:1-22

TODAY'S FOCUS

"They had some points of dispute with [Paul] about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. I was at a loss how to investigate" Acts 25:19-20

Two years have passed since Paul came to the palace prison in Caesarea. Festus is now the governor instead of Felix. Felix thought he would be doing Paul's accusers a favor by leaving Paul in prison, but they want more. Two years is a long time to wait for a decision from the court. Two years is also a long time to hold on to anger, but Paul's accusers still want Paul to be killed. Festus is puzzled about how to proceed with investigating the charges and the claim that Jesus is alive. He realizes he has been asked to decide a religious question about Jewish customs and practices, so he asks Paul if he wants to stand trial at Jerusalem. Rather than return to Jerusalem, Paul, as a Roman citizen, makes an appeal for his case to be heard by the emperor, Caesar. Paul's demand for an audience with Caesar was not motivated by a desire for personal justice. Later, those who held him captive said that if he had not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free (Acts 26:32). But Paul appealed to Caesar because the gospel had business in Rome. Paul would speak the claims of Christ before the greatest power structures of his day!

Few of us may have the opportunity to speak the gospel in the world's great halls of power. But it's good for us to remember that the gospel speaks to the culture of every country and the government of every nation. Christians do not need be embarrassed to speak of Christ and His claim on society. After all, everyone in government receives authority ultimately from Christ Himself.

Leading up to this, Paul says, "If I am guilty of anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die." He is willing to die, but He has to be heard. He continues to follow the plan of God in order to be heard in Rome.

The twists and turns of Paul's life are clarified by this truth: He is headed to Rome to testify about Jesus before the highest court in the world. Festus may be puzzled, but Paul is certain. Jesus is alive, and others need to know this good news.

Prayer

Master, Creator, make me a servant of your peace. Help me continue to pray and seek for your will to be done on earth, in me, as it is in heaven. In your name, O Lord, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 49

Numbers 5-6 • Psalms 22 • Acts 26

Scripture Reading

Joy Under Stress

Acts 26:19-29

Prayer

Dear God, create in me the desire to draw near to you. Whatever my circumstances, whatever my excuses, send the Holy Spirit into my heart to live for you. Amen.

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Short time or long I pray to God that all who are listening may become what I am" Acts 26:29

Paul's message to King Agrippa is his own personal testimony about his meeting with Jesus. In a brief moment on the Damascus road, Paul's life was turned around. God transformed him from a persecutor of the church to a missionary to the Gentiles. But Paul's argument isn't based only on personal experience. He understood that the mission of Jesus was also foretold by the united witness of the Old Testament prophets. Hearing Paul's message, King Agrippa challenged Paul with a simple, direct question: "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Agrippa was really sidestepping Paul's argument. If Agrippa believed the prophets and the prophets pointed to Christ, then Agrippa had no choice but to face the fact that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. What about you? If you are a seeker of truth, I pray that Paul's words will lead you to Jesus. If you think you have the truth, but it is not in Jesus, I pray that you will soon see Him as your Savior. If you profess to be a Christian but your life is far from God's expectations, use this time to come closer to Him. We do not have the luxury of postponing our spiritual quest for God. Life is too short to postpone cultivating a conscientious, committed connection to Christ. That relationship is our greatest joy!

NOTES

DAY 50

Numbers 7 • Psalms 23 • Acts 27

DAY 50

Numbers 7 • Psalms 23 • Acts 27

Scripture Reading

The Shepherd

Psalm 23

TODAY'S FOCUS

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. Psalm 23:1

We've seen idyllic pictures of a shepherd and his sheep. He sits on a knoll in a lush meadow, a bird chirps in a tree, a gentle stream flows by, the sun shines, and here and there some sheep calmly graze and rest. But such a picture can be misleading. Most of the great sheep countries of the world are semi-desert. The ground around Bethlehem, for example, is brown and sunburned. It is neither easy nor common to find green pastures and running water. Instead there are ravines and treacherously narrow mountain passes. And everywhere lurks the danger of a wolf or a lion. We are like sheep in a thirsty land, so our need for a strong, devoted shepherd is great. Being called sheep is not flattering. Sheep are helpless, timid animals. They have neither cunning nor speed. Without the shepherd they are at the mercy of every enemy. We are like sheep, this isn't flattering, but it's accurate. We might think we're strong and cunning, and if armed with technology, we might put up an impressive fight. Still, we are powerless.

Every doctor who helps with healing knows she is only postponing the inevitable, and we all know the sin that lurks at our door. Only the shepherd is stronger than the roaring lion that seeks to devour us. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd"(John 10:11). Follow him.

Prayer

***Lord Jesus, we are no match for sin and the devil. But with you as our guide, we are strong; in your power we are more than conquerors. Strengthen us today, we pray.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 51

Numbers 8-9 Acts 28

DAY 51

Numbers 8-9 Acts 28

Scripture Reading

The Light of the World

Numbers 8:1-4

TODAY'S FOCUS

TheLordsaid“.. ‘When you set up the lamps, see that all seven light the area in front of the lampstand.’”

- Numbers 8:1-2

The tabernacle in the wilderness was a unique place with interesting furniture. One piece of furniture was the lampstand described in our passage. It was made of hammered gold, with seven branches for its lamps, shaped like almond buds and blossoms. The lampstand stood in the Holy Place and lit up the space in front of it, especially the table that had twelve loaves of bread on it, which represented the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 25:23-40; Leviticus 24:1-9).

Why does the book of Numbers single out this piece of furniture in the tabernacle? It reminded Israel that God's favor was shining on them, even though they were in a wilderness. God was giving them His light. The people needed this reminder in the deadly, dark wilderness and so do we. When we find ourselves in what feels like a wilderness, it's easy to lose hope. But then God says, "My light is on you." For us today, that light is Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12). In Christ, God reminds us that he has not abandoned us and that His love is for us.

We are also called to shine the light of Christ into the wilderness experiences of others. We need to do this individually and as churches. Jesus' light shining through us gives hope to others. Whose life do you need to shine into?

Prayer

Jesus, you are the light of the world, and you call us to shine your light everywhere. May we bring hope to others through your gospel of grace and forgiveness. Amen.

NOTES

Numbers 10-11 • Ps. 27 • Mark 1

Never Afraid?

TODAY'S FOCUS

The only way to overcome our fears is to turn to God and to remember that God is the stronghold of our lives. And we do well to repeat these words from Hebrews 13:6: “We say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.’” We can also reread and repeat the words of Psalm 27: “The LORD is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear?” When we ask for God’s help and look to his Word, we can trust that the Lord will be our stronghold. of others’ sins and our own. Do you see God’s grace in your life today?

NOTES

Numbers 12-13 • Psalms 90 • Mark 2

Faith in Action

Mark 2:1-5

TODAY'S FOCUS

Jesus and his disciples often saw things differently.

On one occasion, when the disciples were eager to get away from the crowds that followed them everywhere, Jesus saw the people looking for him, and out of compassion for them he began to teach. On another occasion, when people were bringing children to Jesus, the disciples saw it as interference and pushed the children away. But Jesus saw in children the essential qualities of faith in the kingdom of God, and he said to them, "Come!" (See Mark 6:34; 10:13-16.)

In our reading for today we learn about four men whose friend was paralyzed. They wanted to bring their friend to Jesus for healing. But the house where Jesus was teaching was so crowded that they could not get in. So they climbed to the top of the house, made a big hole in the roof, and lowered their friend to Jesus.

We don't know what the home owner thought when he saw the gaping hole in his house, but we do know what Jesus thought of the friends' bold efforts. "Jesus saw their faith," says Mark. Their faith was evident when they brought their friend to Jesus. He saw their faith by their actions.

Does Jesus see our faith by our actions?
Does he see the kind of faith that moves us
to overcome obstacles to bring others into
contact with him?

Prayer

Lord, give us faith that shows itself clearly by our actions. Help us to see people the way you do. And guide us to take action to bring others to you. In your name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 54

Numbers14-16•Mark 3

Scripture Reading

Confident Joshua

Numbers 14:1-10

TODAY'S FOCUS

The Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them. — Numbers 14:9

After a long trek through the wilderness, the Israelites were within view of the promised land. Twelve spies were chosen to scout out the land. They returned describing a land of green pastures and rich soil and produce. But ten of them said that conquering the land would be impossible, for they had also seen giants and fortified cities (Number 13:26-33).

The people whined and complained. But two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, reminded everyone that God had promised that land to them, so God would make it theirs if they trusted Him. But the people wouldn't listen and instead talked of killing Joshua and Caleb. So God decided that because of their grumbling and complaining, a different, more trusting generation would inherit the land. Forty years later, God helped Israel claim the land under their new leader, Joshua. Joshua, whose name means "God saves," grew to experience God's saving power in many ways for his people.

Sometimes we can be afraid of what lies ahead. People and circumstances loom like giants, and problems seem impossible to solve. But we have a choice. We can stay afraid, or we can trust God to walk with us. We can do that because we belong to another whose name means “God saves”—Jesus. He was given that name because he would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Do you trust in the one who saves?.

Prayer

***Jesus, when we face enormous problems
and scary opponents, help us to call on
you, the one who saves.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 55

Numbers 17-18 • Psalms 29 • Mark 4

Scripture Reading

Who Is This?

Mark 4:35-41

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” — Mark 4:41

While the chaos of a storm threatened the disciples, Jesus slept soundly on a cushion. The disciples were just starting to get to know Jesus, and they wanted him to help. They may have thought he could help with a bucket, but they did not expect him to quiet the overwhelming wind and waves. With a strong command Jesus overcame the death-threatening storm, rendering the tempest “completely calm.” This certainly relieved the disciples, but it also stunned them into trying to figure out who Jesus was.

Their vital question, “Who is this?” is also ours. We may have expectations for what we’d like Jesus to do and to be, but isn’t it better that we listen to what Jesus says and watch what he does in order to learn about him? The sea and the wind are uncontrollable forces for us, but not for Jesus. And like

Noah and his family (Genesis 6-9), the disciples survive the deadly water by the hand of God.

Do we realize how many aspects of life are beyond our control? Wouldn't we like Jesus to help us deal with them? He is actually in complete control over them, and that could either scare us or comfort us. The more we get to know Jesus, the more his authority over all things should bring us comfort, because we also know that He loves us.

Prayer

***Dear God, I am learning just how amazing Jesus' authority in this world is. May I learn more and more about Jesus' authority over all things, and how He can and does save me.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 56

Numbers 19-20 • Psalms 28 • Mark 5

Scripture Reading

To You, God, I Call

Psalm 28

TODAY'S FOCUS

Toyou, Lord, I call; you are my
Rock. Psalm 28:1

Many of the references to God as “my Rock” in the Psalms are prayed in the context of personal lament. That means the prayers are being offered in times of personal suffering and struggle. Somehow the very act of crying out to God is an act of trust, and calling God “my Rock” is a deep affirmation that the God to whom we call out is dependable and responsive.

The prayer of Psalm 28 goes on to plead with God not to be silent. This may be a reference to the gods of other nations surrounding David at that time. Those gods were unable to hear, see, or speak. They were deaf and silent, unresponsive and uncaring, represented only by the carved idols they used in worship. So David may well be saying to God, “Don’t be like that! Be who you are! Continue to be the God you have revealed yourself to be! See what evil people are doing, and intervene! And then, several verses later, he sings with confidence, “Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.”

When we find that our circumstances are overwhelming, or it seems everything is falling to pieces, we can call out to God, our Rock, and find that he hears and protects and helps.”

Prayer

***Our hearts are filled with gratitude, O God. We call out to you, and you answer us. Be our shepherd and guide us forever, we pray.
Amen.***

NOTES

DAY 57

Numbers 21-23 • Mark 6-7

Scripture Reading

Taking a Break

Mark 6:30-32

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Mark 6:31

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for understanding how needy we are and for providing a day of rest for us. May we find a way to quiet ourselves in your presence today as we prepare to follow you this week. Amen.

NOTES

Most children are quick to let you know that their favorite subject at school is recess. And adults may find that the daily grind of going to work or preparing meals, or both, can be tiring. We all need a break from time to time. Jesus had sent his disciples out on their first mission trip (Mark 6:7-13). No doubt they were tired when they returned, yet excited to share with him what had happened. But there was no time. More needy people kept coming.

Jesus had a solution: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Following Jesus is not an easy task. It calls us to self sacrifice, humility, and even suffering. There will be times for us to "leave it all behind" as we serve God, but there are also times when we need to step back and take time alone with Jesus.

A group retreat or a day of solitude can be a great time to hear him say, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

God graciously gives us a weekly reminder on the traditional Christian day of worship, Sunday, to come with him for some rest. Make it a great day as you begin this new week.

DAY 58

Numbers 24-27 • Mark 7

DAY 58

Numbers 24-27 • Mark 7

Inner Renovation

Mark 7:1-8

TODAY'S FOCUS

“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” Mark 7:8

One issue Jesus had with the religious leaders of his day was the way they used strict religious rules to try to manage people's behavior. The Pharisees claimed that the disciples, with their unclean hands, were offending God. Jesus replied with a quote from Isaiah to show the religious leaders that even though they had clean hands, they had unclean hearts. God is far more concerned with the condition of our hearts than with outward appearances.

Later in this chapter Jesus lists some of the shameful things that can live within us: “From within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.” (Mark 7:21-22).

If our only method of dealing with the mess inside is to fall back on rules and regulations, we might manage to look clean on the outside but we'll remain unchanged inside. The only successful way to overcome the brokenness inside is to come to the Lord and ask for a change of heart.

The good news of Jesus is that this inner renovation of the heart is possible through him. Once we admit our inner failures and come clean before God, we discover that forgiveness is available. We are free to let go of human traditions and hang on to the commands of God.

Prayer

Lord, I know my own life is not immune to the shameful things Jesus lists here. Please cleanse my heart and renew my spirit by your grace through Him. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 59

Numbers 28-29 • Mark 8

Scripture Reading

Who Is He?

Mark 8:27-30

TODAY'S FOCUS

“You are the Christ.”

Mark 8:29

Many people today talk about “spirituality” and like to be regarded as “spiritual” persons. But if you mention that you believe in Jesus Christ as the Bible reveals him, it often happens that their friendly attitude changes and religious discussion stops. That’s not what they’re referring to when they think of being “spiritual.”

Why? Let me put it bluntly: lots of people know in the back of their minds that when it comes to Jesus, it's all or nothing. Either Jesus is the Christ, as the Bible teaches and Peter testified, or, as some have said throughout the centuries, Jesus was just a great prophet better than most but merely one among others.

When you hear people talking about Jesus, listen carefully. Are essential teachings about him left out? People may talk about him admiringly as the most loving person that ever lived and an unending source of inspiration. But they may also avoid mentioning his divinity, his cross and Saviorhood, his resurrection, and his coming again to judge the living and the dead. Peter put it straight: "You are the Christ." In those words the whole story of Jesus reaches its climax, and all other truths group around it.

Are you groping in the fog of a “spirituality” that is basically Christ-less? Or is Jesus the Christ, your Savior?

Prayer

Lord, help us all to see and to say with certainty that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. And may we also know him as our personal Savior. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 60

Numbers 30-31 • Mark 9

Scripture Reading

Keeping Our Word

Numbers 30

TODAY'S FOCUS

“When a man makes a vow to the Lord he must not break his word.” Numbers 30:2

When a witness is ready to testify in court, they raise their hand and say, “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me God.” The witness is calling God to be a witness to the truth of the testimony. The basic principle taught in Numbers 30 is that vows must be kept. Our word must stand. Truth telling is an essential characteristic of Christians. Twisting the truth or telling lies has no place among us. The reason for this is that we’re called to reflect God. “God is not human, that He should lie, nor a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19). When our word can’t be trusted, we look like the devil, the father of lies (John 8:44). Jesus asserted the importance of truth telling when He said, “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37). He was saying that we should be so marked by the truth that we should not need a vow to back up our word. Sometimes a vow will be required of us. But let’s have our word be enough. May our word be consistent with our actions.

Prayer

Father, the temptation to lie or twist the truth is strong. Help us to be people of our word so that we reflect you. Amen.

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