

DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING



THE LINK
CHURCH

DAY 122

1 Chr. 16 • Ps. 106 • Matt. 19

Scripture Reading

Praise Comes from Memory

Psalm 106

TODAY'S FOCUS

Then they believed his promises and sang his praise. But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his plan to unfold. Psalm 106:12-13

The quality, duration, and intensity of our praise and worship directly correlate to our memory and interpretation of our experiences. If we see ourselves as the master of our destiny, we leave very little room for praise and worship of God. How can we praise a God we don't really need? In Psalm 106, the Psalmist begins with a statement of praise and then a prayer for personal help. The Psalmist then pivots to recounting the things God has done in the past for his ancestors from the time they left Egypt to his faithfulness in the wilderness.

Psalm 106 lists the works of God. He delivered the Israelites from Egypt through the Red Sea, saved them from their adversaries, punished them for their rebellion against Moses and Aaron, prevented the disobedient elders to enter the Promised Land, punished them for sacrificing their children to false gods, and delivered them into the hands of their enemies to rule over them. In the midst of all this, the Psalmist declares the mercy and love of God.

Throughout Psalm 106, we see God's people rightfully deserved punishment for their rebellion as they discarded God and served idols. Nevertheless, when they humbled themselves and prayed, He delivered them.

As we think about our lives, we will probably see a direct correlation between times of rebellion and the judgment of God. It is through acknowledgment of the holiness and power of God that we can see God's goodness and grace when he chooses not to destroy us or give us the full discipline we deserve. How many times have we deserved punishment but God only gave us a fraction of what we deserved?

Prayer

Gracious God, we sin against you all too often. But your grace and mercy abound in our lives, so we don't need to be afraid. And for that we give thanks.

Amen.

NOTES

2 Sam. 7; 1 • Chr. 17 • Ps. 2 • Matt. 20

2 Sam. 7; 1 • Chr. 17 • Ps. 2 • Matt. 20

Scripture Reading

Not Listening Again?

Matthew 20:17-19

TODAY'S FOCUS

He took the Twelve aside and said ... “On the third day [the Son of Man] will be raised to life!” —Matthew 20:17-19

On the journey to Jerusalem Jesus predicts that his death will take place there. It will include betrayal and condemnation by the religious leaders of his people. Those who should be welcoming him as the promised Messiah will instead sentence him to suffering and death, handing him over to mocking, flogging, and crucifixion by the Romans.

Then Jesus also predicted that he would rise again! But it seems that after hearing the predictions about Jesus' suffering and death, the disciples somehow tuned out. It's as if they missed hearing the promise that "on the third day" he would be "raised to life!" When the time came and Jesus died on a cross, the disciples were a despondent group of followers wondering what had happened. They scattered in fear, leaving the burial and preparations to others. (See Matthew 26:56; 27:45-28:10.) There was no expectation of Jesus' coming to life again!

Are we any different? We hear dire economic warnings or a doctor's frightening diagnosis, and we forget Jesus' words: "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). We experience ridicule or rejection and forget that God's Word warns that we may be called to share in Christ's sufferings (John 15:18-20; Romans 8:17). Facing them, let's remember Jesus was raised to life. We serve a risen Savior!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for the assurance that you are with us, whatever we face. Give us peace of mind that you are in control of your world. We pray, confident of your care. Amen.

Amen.

NOTES

2 Sam. 8-9 • 1 Chr. 18-19 • Matt.21

Matthew 21:1-11

Things haven't changed much, have they? People are still willing to rally around the banner of Christ if it goes along with their own interests. We also desire to maintain a good Christian confession while trying to avoid the cross. But Jesus, the King who rode on a donkey, calls us to examine our walk with him as we come to the cross. Dig deep and ask, "Am I just going along for the ride? If I have to decide between God and my job, my reputation, or something else in my life—will I also change my tune?" King Jesus rode to the cross in total obedience to his Father. His grace and peace come by way of the cross. Will you receive him?

Amen.

NOTES

2 Sam. 10 • 1 Chr. 20 • Ps. 20 • Matt. 22

Scripture Reading

The Witness Of Questions

Matthew 22:34-46

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“What do you think about the Messiah?
Whose son is he?”**

—Matthew 22:42

Jesus liked to ask questions. Sometimes he answered a question with another question. In today's verses Jesus answers a question with amazing insight; then he asks some questions that silence his opponents. In doing so, he shows that he, the Messiah, is more than "the son of David." He's also the Son of God.

As good teachers know, learning is a process, and good answers arise from good questions. Good students know too that good questions prompt you to learn better than if good answers are simply given to you. Jesus was a master teacher, asking good questions so that people would come to the right conclusions.

Questions also communicate care. When we ask someone a question, we show that we respect them enough to let them develop an answer. Asking and listening show others the love of Jesus. There are many questions we can ask, from “How was your day?” to “Why do you feel that way?” Likewise, we can care spiritually by asking, “How have you seen God at work in your life?” or “What do you think about Jesus?”

What questions have people asked because they cared about you? What spiritual questions helped point you to God?

Christians are sometimes afraid to witness for God because they fear they don't have all the right answers. But often the key to showing God's love is to ask questions with care.

Prayer

O God, make our witness rich with healthy, caring questions for the people around us. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 126

2 Sam. 11-12 • Ps.51 • Matt. 23

Scripture Reading

Practice What You Preach

Matthew 23:1-12

TODAY'S FOCUS

“You must be careful to do everything [the Pharisees] tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.” — Matthew 23:3

The Pharisees met Jesus. The Pharisees were religious leaders who wanted people to keep the law of Moses. So they built up all kinds of rules around the basic law, and they burdened the people with them. In the process, many of the leaders got so distracted by the rules that they forgot the heart of the law (love God; love your neighbor), and they did not practice what they preached.

In Matthew 23:1-12, Jesus let the Pharisees know what he didn't like about them. Jesus agreed with a lot of what the Pharisees taught. Jesus was a faithful Jew, so he thought the Pharisees had good things to say about what it meant to love God and to serve God. But Jesus showed that the Pharisees cared more about the appearance of loving God than about actually loving God.

Following Jesus does not mean throwing out all religious traditions. Jesus knew that faith is meant to be practiced in community. We cannot be Christians by ourselves; we live within the guidelines of a community of other Christians.

But following Jesus also does not mean following the law just for the sake of the law. Jesus always called his disciples to put people first and traditions second. *they do.* Jesus calls us to love people today too, following his excellent example.

Jesus challenged the Pharisees for making the them to show love to people, as the law was intended to help

Prayer

God, thank you for giving us your law of love. By your Spirit, help us to love you and others.

Amen.

NOTES

[illegible]

2 Sam. 13-14 • Matt. 24

Matthew 24: 3-14

Even so, we are also still drawn into mission opportunities internationally, “to the ends of the earth.” What an exciting time! What are you willing to do to join Jesus in his global mission?

NOTES

2 Sam. 15-16 • Ps. 32 • Matt. 25

2 Sam. 15-16 • Ps. 32 • Matt. 25

Covering Grace

NOTES

DAY 129

2 Sam. 17 • Ps. 71 • Matt. 26

Scripture Reading

Turning An Excuse Into
An Incentive

Matthew 26:6-1

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The poor you will always have with you ..."
Matthew 26:11 —

When some people quote these words of Jesus? "The poor you will always have with you"? they say it in a way that suggests we don't have to be too concerned about helping poor people, since there will never be an end to poverty. That kind of thinking makes it easy to lose a sense of urgency about social justice and caring for others in need. To avoid that kind of thinking, we need to dig a little deeper into the words of Jesus. When he says, "The poor you will always have with you," he is quoting from the Old Testament. The original setting of these words is in Deuteronomy 15:11, and the full reading in that context is enlightening. God says to the Israelites, "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land." Earlier in that chapter God makes clear as the people are poised to enter the promised land, "There should be no poor among you," for in the land God was giving them they would be richly blessed (Deuteronomy 15:4). The presence of poor people among us is the very thing that should compel us to ease their suffering. In so much of the world the divide between the rich and the needy is increasing. Each of us needs to ask, "How can the Lord use me to help?"

Prayer

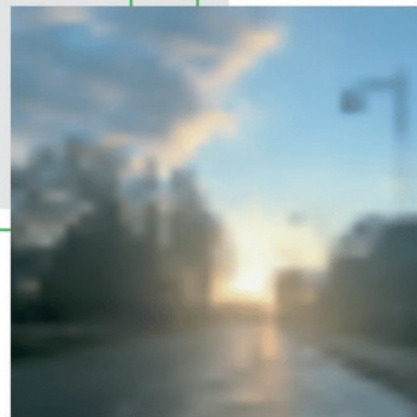
Forgive us, Lord, for not being concerned enough about the poor. Help us to share your gifts with others. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for becoming poor for our sake.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 130

2 Sam. 18 • Ps. 56



Scripture Reading

Anxious Waiting

2 Samuel 18:24-33

TODAY'S FOCUS

As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. . . . The king said, "If he is alone, he must have good news."

— 2 Samuel 18:24-25

King David was waiting for news that he hoped would never come. David was on the run as his own son threatened to take over the kingdom. Even so, he seemed to care more about his rebellious son than about the kingdom and all who were loyal to him. David's earlier instructions to his army and his only question of the messengers concerned the young man Absalom.

David pinned his hopes on the smallest of signs, just as we might while awaiting news we would dread. Each time a runner was sighted, David tried to believe it was a good sign. But in his anxiety, David could not hear the good news the messengers brought. He heard only the news that he hoped would not come. Absalom did not survive, and David wept.

It can be hard to hear good news when we are concerned about other news, whether we are waiting at a doctor's office, or looking up exam results, or answering a late-night phone call. In our anxiety, it can be hard to hear that God has delivered us. But the message the runners brought to David included good news as well as sad news. God had preserved the kingdom of David, and through Jesus, born in the line of David, God has delivered us.

In Jesus we learn that God is with us even when bad news comes our way.

Prayer

Lord, guard our hearts and minds so that we may have peace in you even while waiting for news we might not want to hear. In Jesus.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 131

2 Sam 19-20 • Ps. 55

Scripture Reading

Wings For Times Of Trouble

Psalm 55

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.”

—Psalm 55:6

God knows that the journey of life is not always easy. His Word is full of stories and laments of people who suffered pain and sorrow.

This psalm speaks honestly about the challenges of life. How often must we also deal with struggles? How often do we feel powerless when faced with situations that seem to have no happy result? How often do we wish to turn to someone who can help us in a situation that seems impossible to resolve? Or, as our verse implies, how often do we just want to fly away?

The psalms speak to all the emotions of the believer's heart. These are not always happy emotions: people who follow Christ still feel the pressures of life in this world. In fact, the psalms help us honestly express our faith. We can pray the psalms, recite the psalms, and sing the psalms. We can cry out to God, using their words. They offer a voice of praise, but also of lament. The Bible, God's Word to us, is versatile for any occasion.

As pilgrims, we will experience both highs and lows in our lives. The psalms can give us the vocabulary necessary to speak to God in every situation. Our heavenly Father wants to hear from us always, even at our worst. He's big enough to hear anything we have to say. Have you "cast your cares on the LORD" today? "He will sustain you."

Prayer

Lord, you give your Word and Spirit to lead and comfort us. Fill me again today so that I can live faithfully. I can live only by your blessing

Amen.

NOTES

2 Sam. 21-23 • 1 Thes. 1

2 Sam. 21-23 • 1 Thes. 1

Scripture Reading

Working and Waiting

1 Thessalonians 1

TODAY'S FOCUS

We ... remember ... your work produced by
faith ... and [how you] wait for his Son.

1 Thessalonians 1:3,10

Paul commends the Thessalonians for many things. He celebrates the endurance their hope has inspired and its great value as the church faces persecution. Paul continues with thanks for fruitful work produced by faith in the Lord, and for faithfulness as the Thessalonian Christians await Jesus' return. We would all like to have such things said about us.

Curiously, though, the Thessalonians later lost sight of the relationship between working and waiting. By the time Paul wrote to the Thessalonians again, Christ's second coming loomed so large in the practice of their faith that they had developed tunnel vision. They weren't doing the work for which they were called. So Paul felt the need to confront their laziness. (See 2 Thess. 3:11.)

We may also be tempted at times to think that waiting and working are unrelated. But Paul makes clear that working goes together with waiting, like a hand in a glove. “Now we ask you ... to respect those who work hard among you ... and we urge you ... [to] warn those who are idle” (1 Thess. 5:12, 14). Idleness called for correction from Paul. Hard work called for approval.

The dynamic between waiting and working involves grace-filled anticipation in the Lord as well as confidence that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Philippians 1:6).

Prayer

Lord, may our hearts and hands be busy waiting for you and doing our work for you. Give a boost to our waiting and purpose to our working. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 133

2 Sam. 24 • 1 Chr. 21 • Ps. 30 • 1 Th. 2

Scripture Reading

Trust In God's Timing

1 Samuel 24:1-13

TODAY'S FOCUS

The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master . . . for he is the anointed of the LORD. —1 Samuel 24:6

When King Saul failed to obey and honor the Lord, Samuel explained that God would give the kingship to “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). That man, David, soon entered the ranks of Saul’s army and became a powerful warrior. Saul felt threatened by this, so he launched an effort to pursue David and kill him. David escaped into the wilderness, living for years as a fugitive.

Now, God also tested David in a way like Saul, giving the young warrior a chance to take a shortcut around God's leading and timing. While hunting for David, Saul ended up entering the same cave in which David was hiding. But Saul didn't know David was there. David's men urged him to kill Saul while he had the chance. But David refused, knowing it would be wrong to kill one who had been anointed by God to lead his people. He knew it wouldn't be right to try to seize the kingship in that way. Eventually David became king over Israel, but by God's timing, not his (2 Samuel 5:1-5).

Has it ever seemed that God was taking way too long to release you from trouble? It's easy to grow frustrated when we think God should deliver us more quickly. Yet God's timing is always for our good. The problem isn't that God is taking too long; the problem is that we can't see what only God can see. Our waiting shows our trust in him.

When have you had to wait for God's timing in your story?

Do you see God's grace in your life today?

Prayer

Protect us, almighty God, from the designs of people who would harm us. Save us also from our own deceptive ways, for the sake of Jesus.

Amen.

NOTES

1 Chr. 22-24 • Luke 14

1 Chr. 22-24 • Luke 14

Strong Hearts

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy ... when our Lord Jesus comes.

—1 Thessalonians 3:13 —

What does it mean when you hear that someone's "heart is in the right place"? Usually it means you can count on that person to do what's right, in line with living God's way.

When Paul writes about our hearts, he's talking about the core of our being, our real character, our true self. And he longs for believers to have a heart that is "blameless and holy" before God. That is a tall order!

How do we get a heart like that?

Not with delicate surgery in a hospital. We need hearts changed by the Spirit of God. We need moral, ethical change. We need thoughts that think about God first, and others second. We need help to do what we should do, but instead we often skip over and forget.

Paul's letter offers a way to get that help. We can read the Bible, learn what God expects, and look for his Spirit to guide us. A person praying for us, as Paul did, can also help. A caring visit by someone like Timothy—to remind us of grace and forgiveness—would be encouraging also.

We can find encouragement in the fact that we can ask God each day to “strengthen [our] hearts.” God is not a cruel teacher who throws a mysterious final exam at us. He is our Father, who loves us and wants us to have full life, now and forever.

*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and
renew a steadfast spirit within me. Restore
to me the joy of your salvation and grant
me a willing spirit, to sustain.
(Psalm 51:10-12). .*

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 135

1 Chr. 25-27 • 1 Th. 4

Scripture Reading

Hopeful Grieving
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

TODAY'S FOCUS

Do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

—1 Thessalonians 4:13

Can you identify with the sorrow outlined in this verse? The believers in Thessalonica were eager for the return of the Lord, and Paul wanted them to understand that if any fellow believers had already died, that didn't mean they would miss out on the blessing of eternal life with Christ.

Paul wrote this to assure believers that they did not have to grieve without hope, as other people do.

All who believe in Christ can trust that others who have “fallen asleep in him” are now with Christ and that God will bring them with Christ when he comes again.

After describing amazing things that will happen as Jesus comes back to earth, Paul concludes, “And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

There is hope in every grief. There is hope for the suffering church in Thessalonica, and there is hope for us in our different sorrows.

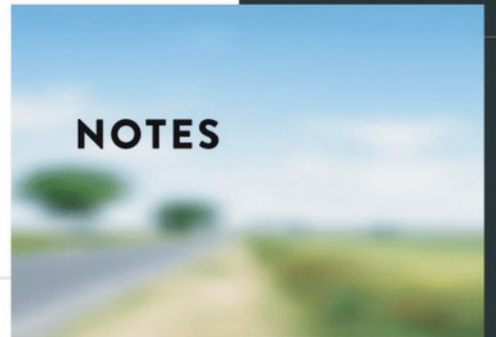
Jesus came to earth to show us that God is with us and will always be with us. Death cannot wiggle in between Jesus and us; death can never separate us from God! (See Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 15.)

Prayer

Father God, thank you for the comfort of Romans 8, that neither death nor life nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord..

Amen.

NOTES



1 Kings 1 • 1 Chronicles 28
Psalm 91 • 1 Thessalonians 5

Safe and Sound

Psalm 91

I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
— Psalm 91:2

If you know how big and scary and difficult the world is, this psalm is for you. These are words of comfort: God is our shelter; God will cover us with His feathers spread wide, and under God's wings we will find refuge.

Birds do that by instinct; they see a threat and spread their wings, forming a canopy of protection. Their offspring run for cover and huddle there until the danger passes.

Reflecting on the relationship between God and ourselves, the psalmist says God will protect us in a way like that. We can find refuge under His wings. Surely God will shield and protect us. But it also happens that sometimes a threat doesn't pass us by, and we don't feel protected at all.

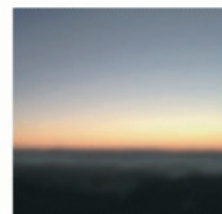
The promise is not that pain and tragedy will magically flow around us, but that ultimately nothing can separate us from the reach of our God's arms, from His love.

We live “in the shelter of the Most High”; we rest and find comfort “in the shadow of the Almighty.” We do not fear because the all-powerful God of heaven and earth is here with us, walking alongside and in front of us and behind us, as a mother hen who will never abandon her young.

We're safe in God's care, and He is always with us.

*Lord God, protect and shelter us, we pray.
Gather us under your wings and shield us.
Be our refuge in every storm of life.
In Jesus' name.*

Amen.



DAY 137

1 King 2 • 1 Chronicles 29

Psalms 95 • 2 Thessalonians 1

DAY 137

1 King 2 • 1 Chronicles 29

Psalm. 95 • 2 Thessalonians 1

Scripture Reading

The Kingdom, the Power & the Glory

1 Chronicles 29:10-13

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.” — 1 Chronicles 29:11

From the earliest days of the church, Christians have ended the Lord's Prayer with the words, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." But those words are not in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew or Luke, so we don't find them with the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples.

However, we do find something very similar in a prayer of King David from the Old Testament. Our passage today from 1 Chronicles 29 includes the lines “Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory. . . . Yours, Lord, is the kingdom. . . .” And we can easily see that these words make a fitting closing to the prayer Jesus taught.

What's more, it was a standard practice to end prayers with a doxology—a declaration of highest praise. So, like other Christians throughout the centuries, we can declare this doxology with confidence and joy when we come to the end of the Lord's Prayer.

These words remind us of the majesty, power, and glory of God, our Savior. They resonate in our hearts and assure us that God loves us, provides for us, and sustains the world he has made. They also point forward to the day when God's kingdom will be fully known and all of creation will rejoice and praise his holy name forever.

Prayer

We worship you, Father, "for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." Help us to live in such a way that our words and actions proclaim who you are.

Amen.

NOTES

1 Kings 3 • 2 Chronicles 1
Psalm 78 • 2 Thessalonians 2

1 Kings 3 • 2 Chronicles 1
Psalm 78 • 2 Thessalonians 2

Prayer

1 Kings 3:1-15

Amen.

If you walk in obedience to me and keep my ... commands ... I will give you a long life.”
— 1 Kings 3:14

There was especially one way in which Solomon affirmed his walk with God, and that was in his request for wisdom. One night, after Solomon had offered a thousand sacrifices to the Lord, God came to him in a dream and said, "Ask for whatever you want." Solomon answered well by asking for wisdom to govern God's people.

God was pleased by this request, so he gave Solomon remarkable wisdom. God also promised Solomon great wealth and honor, saying that he would have “no equal among kings.” And it wasn’t long before God fulfilled those promises. (See 1 Kings 3-10, and especially 10:23-24.)

What gift do you especially ask from God? Many people today ask for riches and honor. Perhaps the request of Solomon should have a greater impact on us. God does not demand that we be perfect as we walk with him. But he wants us to try to walk faithfully, depending on his Spirit to guide us. Pray daily for God's wisdom in your life. And whatever gift God gives you, use it in his service.

NOTES

DAY 139

1 Kings 4-5 • 2 Chronicles 2
Psalm 101 • 2 Thessalonians 3

Scripture Reading

Faith Journey

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

TODAY'S FOCUS

The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.
— 2 Thessalonians 3:3

Reflecting upon the fruit of the Spirit, we reveal how these virtues are rooted in the character of God. This is incredibly good news, because it assures us that producing this fruit is ultimately God's work. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, sinful people are increasingly transformed to become like Christ (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

When we consider faithfulness, we can see that this is especially anchored in God's character. The Old Testament of the Bible resounds with examples of God's faithfulness. God is faithful and keeps his promises, despite his people's unfaithfulness to him. In the New Testament the Greek word for "faithfulness" points to being full of faith. That says something about a person's dedication, as well as their reliability. A faithful person not only has strong faith; that person is someone in whom others have faith. A faithful believer not only trusts wholeheartedly in God; that person is someone others know they can trust.

We see the connection most clearly between our faith and the Lord's faithfulness. The Lord has pledged always to love us, despite our unfaithfulness to him, the Lord is faithful. God's covenant of faithfulness is the sure foundation on which all our faith securely rests.

Prayer

*Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father!
How comforting it is to know that my faith
rests on the solid ground of your promises.
Help me to grow in my faithfulness to you.*

Amen.

NOTES

1 Kings 6 • 2 Chronicles 3
Psalm 97 • Romans 1

Wholeheartedly Seeking God

2 Chronicles 31:20-32:8

Hezekiah ... sought his God and worked wholeheartedly.

— 2 Chronicles 31:20-21

God's Word gives us lots of perspectives, promises, and guidance about seeking Him. In God's Word, we also find clear examples of people who sincerely sought after the Lord and were blessed beyond measure.

King Hezekiah sought after God in everything that he did. From the very beginning of his reign, when he became king over Judah at age 25, Hezekiah did “what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God.” For Hezekiah, seeking God meant re-establishing the worship of God throughout the land. That meant taking on specific projects: purifying the temple, restoring the celebration of the Passover, smashing idols, and ordering people to give support for the worship at the temple. The king also motivated everyone by his own example of generosity, and money gifts poured in. (See 2 Chronicles 31.)

The chronicler sums up this seeking after God as working “wholeheartedly.” In other words, Hezekiah sought God not by cloistering himself away from everyday life but rather by rolling up his sleeves and fixing things. He got his hands dirty in the hard work of getting every part of worship right again.

Let's seek God wholeheartedly in all we do.
Staying in tune with God through
worship, we know God is with us always.
God is our comfort and strength.

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]

1 Kings 7 • 2 Chronicles 4
Psalm 98 • Romans 2

Joy in Worship

TODAY'S FOCUS

What music will your life express for the Lord today?

Amen.

NOTES

1 Kings 8 • 2 Chronicles 5
Psalm 99 • Romans 3

1 Kings 8 • 2 Chronicles 5
Psalm 99 • Romans 3

Worshiping at God's Footstool

Psalm 99

Hallelujah! Our God reigns forever and ever!

NOTES

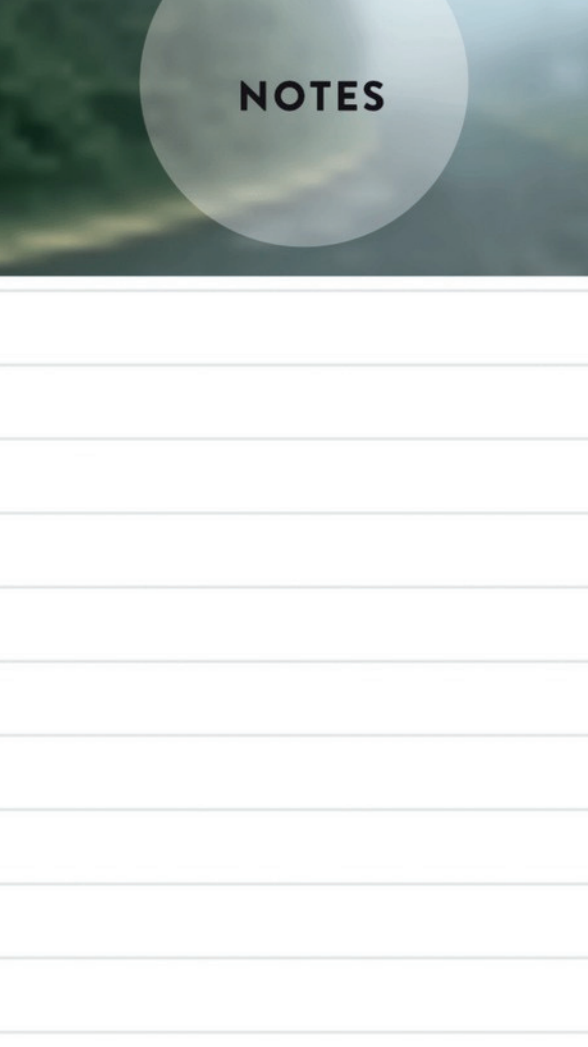
2 Chronicles 6-7 • Psalm 135 • Romans 4

Hoping in God
Romans 4:18-25

Even Abraham didn't always understand. His wife hadn't borne a child, so he tried helping God to fulfill his promise by having a child with his wife's servant (Genesis 16). But God didn't need Abraham's help, and God doesn't need our help. He is God, and our hope is in Him, not in the power of our hope.

*Father, help us to put our hope in your power and love. Strengthen our faith to embrace your promises.
In Jesus' name. Amen.*

NOTES



NOTES

DAY 144

1 King 9 • 2 Chronicles 8
Psalm 136 • Romans 5

Scripture Reading

Counting Our Blessings

Psalm 136

TODAY'S FOCUS

He remembered us in our low estate . . . His love endures forever. — Psalm 136:23

“Count your blessings, name them one by one. . . .” These words are part of an old hymn Christians have sung for more than 100 years, and the message is still important today. Central to the pilgrim journey we travel is taking stock of the gifts God has given us.

Psalm 136 has reminded people of this fact for well over 2,000 years, and it urges us to remember God's goodness in community. In this Psalm we can see a clear call-and-response format. As God's people sang this psalm together, a worship leader would sing the first phrase, and the people would respond with the refrain “His love endures forever.” Again and again they would recount what God had done for them—from freeing them, to feeding them, to remembering them. And as they counted their blessings, they would say, “His loves endures forever.”

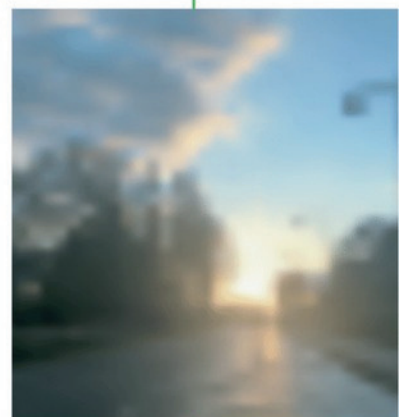
When God's people gather to worship, we see echoes of this psalm's graceful rhythms. The wonders of God's grace and forgiveness are declared, and the people sing songs of thanksgiving. The good news that Jesus saves and that God's Spirit is at work among us is preached, and the people commit themselves to grateful service. At the end of the worship time, God's promise of blessing is spoken over his people, and they receive it joyfully with an “Amen.”

With whom will you join to count your blessings today?

Prayer

Gracious God, we often try to seize for ourselves what you delight to offer as a gift. Help us to look today to Christ, who has already paid the price of your blessing for us.

Amen.



NOTES

DAY 145

1 Kings 10-11 • 2 Chronicles 9 • Romans 6

Scripture Reading

Count Yourselves Dead

Romans 6:11-14

TODAY'S FOCUS

Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:11 –

When Paul says that we died to sin, he is talking about something that must happen in our own minds and hearts each day. The power of the cross will change us when we “count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

The word for “count” is from the same root word as our word for “logic.” Paul is saying that if we’re going to change, we must think logically and reasonably about ourselves.

How do you think of yourself most of the time: as a winner or a loser, a good person or a bad person, a Dr. Jekyll or a Mr. Hyde?

Well, says Paul, if you want to be changed by the power of the cross, you should think of yourself in connection with the deepest reality. Whatever else I am, I am a person who died and rose with Christ so that I am dead to sin and alive to God.

When you face a decision, the first thing you should do is consider who you are because of the power of the cross. Then, you are ready to make a choice to take action in a way that will honor God.

Let the crucified and risen Jesus be Lord of everything in your life, and you will be changed from one degree of glory to another until you become like Jesus.

Prayer

As I live my life today, O God, help me to think reasonably about who I am and how I should live as a crucified and risen person.

In Christ. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 146

Proverbs 1-3 • Romans 7

Scripture Reading

The Law

Romans 7:7-25

TODAY'S FOCUS

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual. — Romans 7:14

Sometimes while we're on the road, especially if we're in a hurry, we can lose track of how fast we're going. Then suddenly we notice flashing lights in our rear-view mirror. Sure enough, we didn't see a reduced speed zone, and we are now up against the law. We might try to explain that we didn't mean to break the law, but unless the officer is willing to give us a break, we must pay the penalty.

Most of us realize that laws are important, but laws are limited in what they can do. Police officers may diligently enforce the rules of the road, but laws are unable to make us better drivers. Similarly, a law against bullying at school cannot make a bully into a kind person. Nor could a law make an overweight person into a trim and fit athlete! We need more than law to transform our lives.

The apostle Paul knew the importance of God's law. But he also knew that pleasing his heavenly Father was not just a matter of obeying a set of rules. Jesus gets at the spiritual nature of law when he says he came to fulfill the law rather than to do away with it (Matthew 5:17; see also 22:36-40).

As Paul wrestles with his own sinful nature, he cries out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Then comes the glorious answer: "Thanks be to God, who delivers

me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" He turns our heart of stone into a heart of love; He gives us new resolve and blows a new Spirit into us.

Prayer

Lord, we know what you have in store for us—a life of trust in you so that we can't imagine settling for anything less than your best for our lives.

Amen.

NOTES

Proverbs 4-6 • Romans 8

No Condemnation

Proverbs 7-9 • Romans 9

Learning and Teaching

NOTES

DAY 149

Proverbs 10-12 • Romans 10

Scripture Reading

Kyrios: "Lord"
Romans 10:5-13

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." — Romans 10:13

The most common name for God in the entire Bible is the Greek word *kyrios*, which means "Lord." Combining its use in the Old Testament (when translated from Hebrew to Greek) and the New Testament (written in Greek), the word *kyrios* for "Lord" appears more than 6,000 times!

The word *kyrios* originally meant "power" or "might," but over time it came to mean "lord" or "master." When the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek, it used *kyrios* for "Lord" wherever the words *Yahweh* or *Adonai* occurred in the Hebrew text.

The Jewish writers of the New Testament, who were likely raised reading Scripture in both Hebrew and Greek, similarly used *kyrios* whenever they referred to *Yahweh* and *Adonai*. Further, they used *kyrios* in a radically new way, declaring that Jesus also is Lord. In Romans 10, for example, Paul uses *kyrios* in a discussion about Jesus, quoting Joel 2:32, which states, "Everyone who calls on the name of *Yahweh* will be saved." Paul uses *kyrios* in this passage to refer to both Jesus and *Yahweh* as Lord, declaring that both are the one true God. In this example we see the central teaching of the Bible, built on this foundational truth: Jesus is Lord!

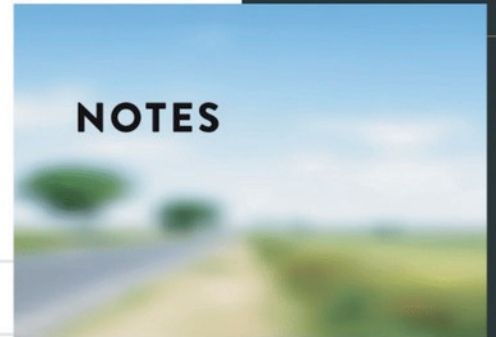
Bow to him today and worship Him! Jesus is your Lord and your God!

Prayer

Lord God, we worship you with wonder for your mysterious and majestic plan of salvation. In our amazement and awe, help us to trust you and to call on your precious name.

Amen.

NOTES



DAY 150

Proverbs 13-15 • Romans 11

Scripture Reading

Part of God's Family Tree

Romans 11:13-24, 33-36

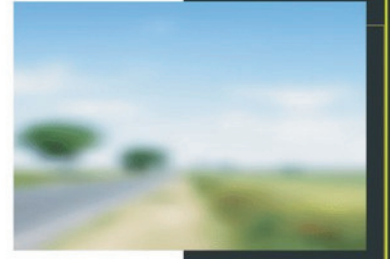
TODAY'S FOCUS

**You, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others. . . .
— Romans 11:17**

In our reading today, the apostle Paul is talking about his own people, Israel, as an olive tree rooted and cultivated by God, and he is speaking to Gentiles, people from all other nations besides Israel.

We all need tangible ways to picture what God is doing with us in the story of salvation, and this passage is like a forest of many images that relate to trees, branches, roots, sap, and grafting to help us understand God's purposes. Although this chapter is rather difficult on some levels, even a basic reading of the verses shows that God is eager to take on the challenge of integrating wild branches with a cultivated rootstock, which is not the usual practice. It's typical to attach a cultivated branch to the root of a wild tree, because a wild rootstock is usually more hardy and a cultivated branch usually produces more fruit.

But we can see that by reversing the process, God has the power to sustain the weaker root and will also insert weaker branches, which will still, because of His kindness and mercy, result in a vibrant, fruitful tree. God not only includes strong, able people, but He also shows a preference for weak and unlikely candidates. God will even go so far as to graft a broken branch in again.



We don't know why God chooses to gather His people this way, but for all of us who feel weak, disabled, left behind, or inadequate, this passage offers profound hope. God can and will include us in the big story of His never-ending love.

Prayer

Father, thank you for patiently waiting for us to come home to you. As you run toward us, we run toward your arms ready to embrace us.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 151

Proverbs 13-15 • Romans 11

Scripture Reading

Are You TransFORMED
or ConFORMED?

Romans 12: 1-2, 9-21

TODAY'S FOCUS

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will. — Romans 12: 1-2

The book of Romans was a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the new church in Rome. In Romans 12, Paul describes how a Christian should live and urges the Church, then and now, to offer our lives to God, holy and sacrificially, to please Him. He reminds us that because of God's mercy towards us, He is worthy and deserving of our "true and proper worship."

Paul cautions that we should not be conformed to this world. Being CONFORMED means being molded, or to become just like something else--to take on its shape. Instead, Paul challenges us to be TRANSFORMED, which from the Greek means to actually "change form"--to take on a new nature and become something completely different. I Peter 1:14 tells us, "... do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." Praise God, we no longer have to live in ignorance! God has given us a manual (the Bible) and a Counselor (the Holy Spirit) so we can have transformed minds with new defaults.

Many people only see Jesus as a savior. However, have you surrendered to Jesus as your Lord--defined as a master having influence, to whom obedience and service is due? Are your thoughts, preferences, actions, reactions, attitudes, and words transformed by God? Or are they conformed to the world and popular culture?

Prayer

God, we are grateful! You sacrificed your Son for us to have abundant and eternal life. We want to live transformed lives, surrendered to You as our Lord because we owe You everything. If we live by the instructions in Your Word, we can have joyous lives in the center of Your perfect will, no matter what tests and trials we face. We thank you!

Amen.

NOTES

Proverbs 19-21 • Romans 13

Stewardship
Proverbs 19:17

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