

DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING

to THE LINK
CHURCH

NOVEMBER 2025

DEEPER

November

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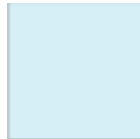
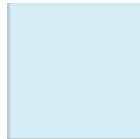
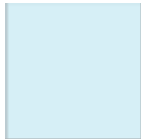
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DAY 303

Job 23-24 • Mark 11-12

Scripture Reading

MARK 11:15-19

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.” Mark 11:15 (NIV)

The gospels record Jesus cleansing the temple, not once, but twice (Mark 11 and Matthew 21). He could not stand it any longer! The corruption in the very temple of God was so appalling that Jesus was compelled to take immediate and radical action, not once, but twice! In both encounters, He flips over tables and benches while pronouncing condemnation over the religious leaders for making “the house of prayer” into “a den of robbers!” The religious leaders turned temple worship into big business. Exodus 30:11-16 required every Jew to pay a tribute of “half a shekel” to the temple.

This required them to exchange their Roman coins for the Jewish shekel. The religious leaders exacted a fee from everyone for this service. With thousands of worshippers coming to the temple they were getting wealthy off God. It gets worse! Leviticus 14:22 allowed the poor to sacrifice two doves or pigeons instead of a bull or sheep which they could not afford. Yet, it was difficult for them to transport these birds from a long distance, so they had to purchase them when they arrived. Knowing this, the temple merchants were charging exorbitant prices—price gouging! It was bad enough that this was occurring at all, but it was beyond the pale when the religious leaders who were representatives of God’s righteousness and justice became the ones who instituted the pilfering of the poor for their personal gain.

We do not see Jesus get angry very often, but seeing the corruption in the temple heated his righteous indignation to a boil. Through those confrontations, we learn what should anger us as well. When we see the poor or innocent being taken advantage of, especially by those who are charged with their care, we ought to act. We are charged to defend the weak and stand up for those who cannot.

Prayer

Father, Lord Jesus, help me to be zealous for the things that matter most to you, hurting people. Give me the courage to confront injustice and stand up for the downtrodden. Amen.

NOTES



DAY 304

Job 25 • Mark 13-14

Scripture Reading

MARK 13:9-11

Holy Spirit, Provider of Speech

TODAY’S FOCUS

“Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.” Mark 13:11

Being tongue-tied can happen to all of us. Someone says something to you, and you don’t know how to respond. But what about being speechless with terror in sharing your faith? Jesus gives assurance that even in those situations, the Holy Spirit can and will speak through us. Although Jesus describes a high-stakes scene, His promise here recalls promises found in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets were moved to speak by the Holy Spirit.

This speaking ministry of the Holy Spirit only occurred occasionally in the Old Testament, but the prophet Joel foretells of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on and speak through all of God’s children (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2). Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit’s work is for ordinary life, but it’s also for times of persecution. Jesus is obviously describing persecution in our passage. And, on separate occasions in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit speaks in and through Peter, Stephen, and Paul when their faith is on the line in desperate situations.

We have this same promise of the Spirit’s presence and power in our lives. We may or may not be faced with such difficult circumstances, but we all have the opportunity to point to Jesus every day. And if we face persecution, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit will speak in and through us. That’s a great comfort!

Prayer

Spirit of God, work in our hearts and give us the right words in all situations, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 305

Job 26-27 • Mark 15-16

Scripture Reading

MARK 15:38; LUKE 23:44-46

God's New Temple

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”
Mark 15:38**

While Jesus suffered on the cross, it may seem that God the Father was passive. But as soon as the Son's sacrifice was complete, the earth shook, rocks split, and the temple curtain tore from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51).

God was on the move. What is the significance of the torn temple curtain? Jesus, our ultimate High Priest, atoned for our sins with His own body, represented by the curtain (Hebrews 10:20). When He gave up His body to death, the curtain tore, and the Most Holy Place in the temple (God's dwelling place among His people) became open to all people. Further, Jesus had announced, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” But the temple He had spoken of was His body. After He was raised from the dead [on the third day], His disciples recalled what He had said (John 2:19-22). So by His death and resurrection, Jesus laid down His own life for us and set up a new temple, for His body of believers throughout the whole earth.

Now, because of Jesus' finished work “once for all” (Hebrews 10:10), we do not have to enter a building to find God. God is with us always in Jesus and through His Holy Spirit.

Everyone has equal access to God in Jesus. Every day we can enter the holiness of God. Our hearts can become God's home. So let's draw near to God every day. He is always near (Isaiah 46:13; 55:6; Philippians 4:5; James 4:8).

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, that we can find you because you are near. Thank you for finding us. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 306

Job 28-29 • Galatians 1-2

Scripture Reading

GALATIANS 1:6-9

The Gospel

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a [different] gospel, let him be condemned.” Galatians 1:8 (NKJV)

Words are pretty flexible. You can take an old word and pump a new meaning into it.

Sometimes that can be a good thing, sometimes bad. It seems that during the Middle Ages the first missionaries to Germany were at a loss to find a word in German to refer to the one, divine being of whom the Bible speaks. Missionaries were used to the Latin word Domine and the Greek word Theos. But these words would not mean anything to the local people, who were hunters and warriors, not language scholars.

So, with trembling, they chose the word the Germans used for their gods, gott, and began to give a new, biblical meaning to it. As the Germans accepted the gospel, the old meaning from their mythology faded from memory, and their faith in the one God grew. The opposite can also happen. Paul had trouble with people who used a great word, euangelion (“good news, gospel”), but drained it of all goodness. They pumped in a new meaning emptied of grace.

How tragic it would be if we gave our lives and treasure to evangelize (“bring the good news”) to our neighbors around the globe, but the truth of the saving death of Christ gradually faded from our message and some other message took its place. To avoid false teaching, we must communicate the truth of the Word of God in word and deed.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you, Lord, that the good news of your salvation changes lives and even changes all people. Help us to share the truth of your Word faithfully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 307

Job 30 • Psalm 120 • Galatians 3-4

Scripture Reading

GALATIANS 3:10-14

Triply Condemned

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us ...” Galatians 3:13

At the heart of the cross was the great reversal—the Holy One of God gave up His life for condemned criminals. In fact, Jesus died as a “triply condemned” criminal. Jesus was condemned by both the Jews and the Romans. He claimed to be God, and that was the ultimate crime for the Jews. He claimed to be King, and that was the ultimate crime for the Romans. But Jesus was also condemned by another; by God.

We see this in the way He died. Pilate, the Roman governor, asked the crowd, “What do you want me to do with Jesus?” (Mark 15:1-15.) They had many options. They could cut off His head. Or poison Him. Or throw Him to the lions. Or stone Him. Why? Because being hung on a tree, suspended between heaven and earth, rejected by both God and humanity, was a cursed death. Being crucified was the ultimate condemnation because it demonstrated that the criminal was cursed by God. That’s what the cross was about—condemnation. Jesus was triply condemned.

When we understand that, we may say with the songwriter, “Ah, dearest Jesus, how have you offended ... ?” And it’s true, He had caused no offense. But He died so that condemned criminals like us could be saved.

Prayer

Dearest Jesus, give us the eyes to see our crimes clearly so that we may see the depths of your love, “But they said, ‘Crucify him. Hang him on a tree’” for us. Amen.

NOTES

Job 31-32 • Galatians 5-6

Scripture Reading

JOB 31

Guard Your Heart

TODAY'S FOCUS

“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.” Job 31:1 (NLT)

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8). To some, a pure heart does not seem particularly necessary. They may say, "Just so long as you don't hurt other people, it doesn't matter what goes on in your mind." Others will hear Jesus and say with regret, "If only I could be pure!" The Bible says it's not just difficult; it's impossible unless we are born again! In Ezekiel 36:25-27, God says, "I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” In Job 31, a seldom-read, wonderful passage, we see a man of God whose heart has been transformed. From the wellspring of its purity, generosity, and love flow justice and blessing to everyone around him, without political jockeying, strident demands, or bloodshed. As Christians, we long for the purity of heart that will enable us to see God!

Jesus promised the woman at the well, “The water I give ... will become ... a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, give life to hearts of stone and cleanse minds that are polluted. May we on the day of resurrection be counted worthy to see you in your holiness and glory, because of Jesus. Amen.

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DAY 309

Job 33 • 1 Corinthians 1-3

Scripture Reading

1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-3:4

Discord

TODAY'S FOCUS

"For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like ordinary people?" 1 Corinthians 3:3

We live in a world of discord, and Christians are not immune. "Discord" is another possible translation of the word for "quarreling." Other options could be "contention," "strife," and "rivalry." The idea here isn't just intellectual debate, or even strong disagreement. Discord has to do with allowing our disagreements to separate us. Christians are supposed to have the Spirit of God, who knows the deepest things of God. Over time, the Spirit helps us to understand God and to live more and more in line with God's will. When we don't understand other Christians or we flat-out disagree with them, perhaps instead of trying to lecture them about what we think, we should engage in times of healthy and humble sharing and questioning together.

We should try to recognize the signs of the Spirit's work in each other and wonder what the Spirit is doing in the person we do not understand. The most likely scenario is that God has each of us on different learning paths, and perhaps by intertwining those paths, even uncomfortably, we could advance in the process of maturing in Christ. In your relationships today, what can you do to work toward unity in the Spirit rather than discord?

Prayer

Lord, we make slow progress against our vices and toward your virtues. Help us to recognize that people who have a sincere but different relationship with you might have some understanding that can help us grow closer to you. Amen.

NOTES

Job 34 • 1 Corinthians 4-6

Scripture Reading

1 CORINTHIANS 6:18-20

You Are a Temple

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit ...?” 1 Corinthians 6:19

The temple Jesus cleared when He chased out money changers and vendors, no longer exists. The Roman Empire destroyed it in the year A.D. 70. But, the Bible teaches that our bodies are the “temple of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus lives in us today by means of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul asks, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

God does not live in a building. God lives in the hearts of all who love and follow Him, in the lives of people who give evidence of the fruit of the Spirit; “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22- 23). God has chosen to live in His followers. Does that show in your life? When Jesus saw evil in the temple of the Lord, He cleared it out. What is there in our lives that stands in the way of being known as followers of Jesus Christ? If Jesus inspects our lives, will He find things that need to be thoroughly cleaned out? It is never a pleasant experience when the Holy Spirit shows us what really needs to change in our lives. But we aren’t left to do all the work ourselves. In fact, on our own, we cannot overcome the sin that needs clearing out. We need God’s power in order to change, and the Spirit works in us to make sure we do.

Prayer

Lord, we need forgiveness and cleansing. But we also need to grow to become more like Jesus. Help me to love and serve you each day, but by the power of your Spirit in Christ. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 311

Job 35 • 1 Corinthians 7-8

Scripture Reading

1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31

The Time Is Short

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Brothers and sisters ... the time is short.” (ESV)

1 Corinthians 7:29

Leisure, that sells in our society. People buy time-saving products so they have more time for recreation and relaxation.

But, the gospel message has an urgency about it. Paul says bluntly, “The time is short.” The advice in this message may sound a bit radical, as if marriage, mourning, and making a living aren’t important. But Paul’s point is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has ushered in the new kingdom age. “This world in its present form is passing away.” So many people today are scared that the world will soon come to an end. But what they need to realize is that ever since Jesus’ victory, this world is in transition. That’s why our top priority is to rededicate ourselves to God and His kingdom.

Everything that is only bound to this planet, even family relationships, will fade and eventually disappear. Only efforts that flow from a rededicated life will last for eternity. We must work for God because the time on earth is short. Now is the time to live for God and His kingdom.

Here’s another thing to consider. No matter what age you are, this could be the last year of your life. Cancer, heart disease, accident; all can bring life to an abrupt end. There is no time to waste. Draw near to God as He draws near to you. “The time is short.”

Prayer

Lord and Savior, guide and protect us from trying to coast through life. Holy Spirit, help us to use every moment for God and His Kingdom. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 312

Psalm 122 • 1 Corinthians 9-11

Scripture Reading

PSALM 122

Anticipation

TODAY'S FOCUS

"I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'" Psalm 122:1

"Are we there yet?" As much as we value Sunday worship, it would be unusual to hear these words from most of us as we drove to church. We generally save that kind of anticipation for an entertaining event. An even more anticipatory question is being asked as we approach the final months of the year, "How many days until Christmas?"

The psalmist, however, expresses joyful anticipation in Psalm 122:1 on his way to the temple of God. "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." Though we might nonetheless want to quote Psalm 122 on the way to weekly worship, the psalmist was more likely anticipating one of the yearly festivals of the old covenant. These were held at the temple in Jerusalem and going there would have been more like attending a great convention than a weekly worship service. Still, as exciting as a festival would have been, that wouldn't explain the depth of the psalmist's joy. The psalmist was looking beyond the festival to something greater. As the city of David and the city of God, Jerusalem was where God's rule connected with human reality, and the pilgrim would glimpse the very glory of God.

Similarly, the joy we anticipate as the Christmas season approaches should go beyond the holidays to something much greater. We believe that in Jesus' birth the kingdom of God has come near. The child in the manger gives us a glimpse of the heavenly kingdom. As much as we look forward to it, our Christmas joy merely anticipates a joy that is still to come. It whets our appetite so that we ask, "Are we there yet?"

Prayer

"O Jesus, joy of loving hearts," fill us with anticipation in this Advent season so that in our celebration of your birth we might catch a glimpse of your joyous heavenly kingdom. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 313

Job 37-38 • 1 Corinthians 12

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 12-14

Gifts for Others

TODAY'S FOCUS

“But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And yet, I am going to show you a far better way.” 1 Corinthians 12:31

The Christians in the city of Corinth were not very different from many Christians today. They wanted to use their spiritual gifts to make themselves the center of attention. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, the Apostle Paul listed some of these gifts but he also instructed the Corinthians to use their spiritual gifts for the benefit of others. Paul used the analogy of the human body to help the Corinthians see that each gift is important and should be seen as an integral part of building and strengthening the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). Their gifts were not for private consumption, but rather for corporate edification.

In 1 Corinthians 12:31, Paul teaches that each gift is to be used in love. The illustration and description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 helps us understand that spiritual gifts are useless without love. It is only when we use them out of a love for others that they have their full potency. When each spiritual gift is used correctly, people will experience some form of God's love. Examples of love being displayed in the use of spiritual gifts are: **1)** Preaching to exhort and encourage the brokenhearted;

2) Giving to those in need to remind them that they are valued by God; **3)** Encouraging the downtrodden so they can experience God's love and **4)** Leading the lost along a path to discover God's designed purpose for their lives. When you use a spiritual gift, is your focus on how you can love and serve others, or is it to show everyone how gifted you are? Are you humbly helping others get closer to God or are you competing for a prominent place in the church?

Prayer

Father, help us remember that the spiritual gifts we were given do not belong to us. They are given to us to be used for the enrichment of others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 314

Job 38-40 • 1 Corinthians 13-14

Scripture Reading

Job 38-40

The Lord Silences Job

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Then Job answered the LORD: ‘I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer — twice, but I will say no more.’” Job 40:3-5

Have you been through such a difficult time that you felt as if God owed you an explanation for what He allowed to happen in your life? In the book of Job 3-35, Job has multiple conversations with his four friends who have turned from comforting him amid his devastating trials to being his accusers. Job’s “friends” insisted that his children and possessions were taken away from him because God was judging him for his sins.

However, Job defended himself against their attacks by citing his good behavior and good work. Amid Job’s deep levels of depression, he sought an audience with God. He believed that if he could plead his case before God, he could get deliverance from his anguish and pain. Finally, in Job 38:1, God broke His silence. Instead of providing answers to Job’s questions and pain, God used three chapters to question him. God’s questions showed His character, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and wisdom to Job. Two-thirds of the way through God’s discourse, Job became speechless, unable to answer the Lord’s questions. Sometimes we are like Job. We want God to tell us why we are experiencing so much hurt and pain.

We may believe we did not deserve what we are going through, and that God owes us answers. However, just like God showed Job that He did not owe him anything, God does not owe us an explanation. If you are going through intense trials, hardship, or loss, you may not understand why God has appointed this time for you to suffer. However, every trial is an opportunity to hear and see God more fully and in Him, you can find peace and relief.

Prayer

Father, help me to listen when you speak to me through my pain and to respond in humility knowing that you are working all things for my good and your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 315

Psalm 149 • 1 Corinthians 15-16

Scripture Reading

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-20

Jesus, Our Hope

TODAY'S FOCUS

"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all others. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" 1 Corinthians 15:19-20

The hope of millions of people is dead, crushed by despair. Their eyes are swollen from all the crying. They are wounded by life's setbacks.

People live in this world without hope and without God. They run after one religion or another and only reap disappointment. They run to the banquets of sin and come out feeling even more frustrated. Eager to find meaning in life, many run to the fountains of adventures and avidly drink from the cups of worldly pleasures, but they feel even more miserable than before. Against this gray backdrop of despair, Jesus presents Himself as our hope. He is our hope because He died in order to save us. He is our hope because He rose to new life to sanctify us. He is our hope, because He will come back for us to glorify Him. Jesus can be the perennial reason for your joy and the secure anchor for your hope.

Already in the Old Testament Isaiah prophesied, "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:31). May your spirit soar today on the wings of Christ's love and grace.

Prayer

Gracious God, there is no situation that can kill my hope in Christ, not even death. For in Him there is life in all circumstances. Through him, I give you praise. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 316

Job 41-42 • 2 Corinthians 1-2

Scripture Reading

Today's Focus

"After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before." Job 42:10

Years ago I was diagnosed with a health condition that causes intense chronic pain through my body. As I pray and battled through 24/7 physical discomfort, I admit that sometimes being joyful was easier said than done. But, when I stopped looking through the lens of my suffering, and look through the lens of gratitude for His gifts of abundant and eternal life, I can thank, praise, and worship God regardless of the pain. He deserves it! So, even when I say, "I am having a rough day," I can also say, "I'm Romans twelve- twelving it!"... joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Romans 12:12)!

Has anyone ever replied, "Not good" when you asked them how they were doing? It's so unexpected, that we often don't know what to do or say next. What should our response be to the sufferings of others? We can look to Jesus' words to find strength. When Jobs' friends first heard about all that happened to Job, they went to "sympathize" with him for seven days and seven nights in silence, because they saw how great he was suffering. (Job 2:11- 13)

Though it didn't last, Job's friends initially offered him tremendous empathy and sympathy for a week. Some of us have never given or received that kind of compassion. Sadly, some of us often skip the love and solace and go straight to judgment! Likewise, many of us have received judgment from others in our suffering, abandoned by friends and family when we needed them most.

The Bible tells us that Job was "blameless and upright." What about when someone is not? What if they are suffering because of their sinfulness or because of a bad decision they made? That's when we need to remember that Christ died for all of us. God demonstrated His love towards us, even while we were yet stillsinners! (Romans 5:8)

Prayer

Dear Jesus, Your very name means that You save. When we suffer, may we remember Your promise that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. We thank and praise You for offering unconditional joy! Amen.

DAY 317

2 Corinthians 3-6

Scripture Reading

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-18

Becoming Like Christ

TODAY'S FOCUS

“We ... are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory...” 2 Corinthians 3:18

If the Holy Spirit's work in us is like the work of a gardener, what is the Spirit growing in us? The Spirit wants to reproduce Jesus' character in us. Our reading today states that we “are being transformed into Jesus' image with ever-increasing glory.” In other words, the Holy Spirit's aim is to make us more and more like Jesus. The Spirit's work is to nudge us, prod us, move us, and shape us to think more like Jesus, to better mirror Jesus in our character, and to increasingly help us love like Jesus in our daily life. Of course, it's not an overnight rush job. The Spirit doesn't guarantee delivery in full by 8:00 a the next day, or even within a few days.

This isn't the work of a courier driver. This is the work of the Master Gardener, the One who daily, gradually toils and works in our lives until the desired spiritual fruit eventually blossoms, to the glory of God.

There are times when the Spirit's work in us is immediate, dramatic, and maybe even spectacular. But usually the Spirit's work in us is slow and gentle. That's His trademark.

We are made in God's image, but that image is spoiled and polluted in us because of sin. So now God is slowly remaking that image in us—to be like Jesus!

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your Holy Spirit's life and work in us. Help us to grow and become more like your Son, Jesus Christ. In His name, we pray. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 318

2 Corinthians 7-10

Scripture Reading

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-9

Costly Kindness

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 319

2 Corinthians 11-13, 19 • Matthew 1-4

Scripture Reading

MATTHEW 3:13-17

Three-Person God

TODAY'S FOCUS

“The Spirit of God [descended] ... on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son ...’” Matthew 3:16-17

Christians confess their faith in God the Father. Other major religions such as Judaism and Islam do the same. But Christians go on to confess faith in God, the Son. Then they go further to confess faith in God, the Holy Spirit. Christians confess to a three-person God. This declaration of the triune God is where Christians part ways with Jews, Muslims, and people of other faiths. Although some suggest that the Christian faith would be more attractive if it dropped the teaching of the Trinity, Christians have unflinchingly maintained their commitment to God as Father, Son, and Spirit. Why? For one reason, it's taught in Scripture. At Jesus' baptism, all three persons are clearly present and active. The Son steps into the waters. The Spirit descends. And the Father speaks. To abandon the teaching of the Trinity is to abandon the honest truth God reveals about Himself. But, there is also a very personal reason Christians hold to faith in a triune God. The truth of the Trinity connects with the way we experience salvation. We pray to the Father, who is above us. We confess the lordship of the Son, who has come to stand beside us. And we experience the life of the divine Spirit, who lives within us and sustains our Christian walk.

In Christ and by the power of the Spirit, give thanks today for the God who is beyond all human definitions.

Prayer

Eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, your mystery we cannot fathom. Yet you have come to us in all your fullness to fill us with your life. We offer you all praise. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 320

Matthew 5-7

Scripture Reading

True Happiness

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5: 11-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them and all who gathered (Matthew 5:1-2). It was not a megachurch with comfortable chairs or air conditioning. There was no online service to stream from the comfort of home. But can you imagine being there watching and hearing Jesus preach His most famous sermon? The thought of Jesus standing on the side of a mountain preaching is beautiful. The words throughout the sermon are powerful. Jesus starts The Sermon on the Mount with “The Beatitudes”, a series of statements about being “blessed” or happy. Yet, He wasn’t speaking about happiness the way most seek it and experience it. He was preaching about a deeply rooted joy, contentment, and favor that occurs at a level far beyond anything the world can give. The type of happiness Jesus preached can be experienced in the midst of difficulties and hard times. Jesus concludes “The Beatitudes” by exhorting us to, “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 12).

In John 14:3, we read that this is not our home. The Lord has prepared a wonderful place for us where we will live with Him in happiness forever. Until that day comes, despite the troubles this life may bring, we can be “blessed” by living lives submitted and committed to the Lord. Our happiness will come from seeking what Christ wants, not what we want.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for your Word that teaches all we need to live a blessed, joyful, abundant life in you. Thank You for paying the ultimate price so we could have eternal life with you. Amen.

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DAY 321

Matthew 8-10

MATTHEW 9:1-8

TODAY'S FOCUS

Sometimes we think we can't be forgiven for the terrible things we've done, but Jesus assures us there is nothing He cannot forgive or restore. Forgiveness isn't just something we ask for ourselves. Jesus reminds us that we too are to forgive others. It may even require us to take the first step, and ask for forgiveness when we feel that only we have been wronged. But Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Luke 11:4). Jesus forgave a paralyzed man, God forgives us. Who is God asking us to forgive?

Dear God, help us to pray for forgiveness and to forgive, knowing that we can love because you first loved us. Amen.

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DAY 322

Matthew 11-13

Scripture Reading

MATTHEW 12:9-14

Do Good

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Matthew 12:12

What keeps us from doing good? Sometimes it's our busyness. Other times it may be that doing something good is not convenient. Or perhaps we just don't want to go against social norms, so we hold back. Whatever the reason, at one time or another, most of us have passed up an opportunity to do something good for someone. The Pharisees presented Jesus with a difficult situation. Their laws said it was a violation to do work on the Sabbath unless it meant saving a life. But here in the temple was a man with a withered hand. His life was not in danger, though. Should he be healed on the Sabbath? Jesus didn't even hesitate. He asked the religious leaders what they would do if something bad happened to one of their precious sheep on the Sabbath. Of course they would help the animal. And wasn't a person more valuable than a sheep? This man with a shriveled hand was precious to God. So of course, this man could be helped on the Sabbath. Then Jesus healed the man. Should anything stop us from doing good for each other? No.

Nothing stood in Jesus' way. We are His treasured possessions. He has done and will do whatever it takes to rescue us, and make us whole. Healing, deliverance, salvation, care—none of these things are beyond reason for God to act. So nothing should stand in our way either.

Prayer

Father, you never hesitate to pour out your goodness on us. Let us never hesitate to do the same for others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 323

Matthew 14-16

Scripture Reading

Matthew 14-15 Moved By Compassion

TODAY'S FOCUS

“When Jesus came ashore and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Matthew 14:14

In the Gospel of Matthew, there are two stories of Jesus fed large crowds of people as part of his ministry. In Matthew 14:13-21, Jesus feeds five thousand men plus women and children. The accounts in Mark 6:34-44, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-15, tell us that the disciples had just returned to tell Jesus about the things God had done through them. Jesus intended to retreat to a solitary place for rest and encouragement; However, the crowd ran on foot to catch up with them. When Jesus saw the crowd, He had compassion on them. According to Mark 6:34, Jesus saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

“Sheep without a shepherd” is a metaphor for being lost, aimless without guidance, and easily harmed by things or people. Jesus, seeing their helplessness, stopped and took the time to teach and feed them. We see a similar story in Matthew 15:29-38. After Jesus had been teaching great crowds of people and healing many, He had compassion on them because they had been with Him for three days. Jesus once again asked the disciples how much food they had. Then He worked a miracle, providing for over four thousand men, plus women and children. In both situations, Jesus was moved with compassion. He demonstrated His concern for their physical, mental, and emotional pain. He could have been moved with indignation since He had other things to do.

He could have been frustrated that these people compassion caused Him to do something, to rely on God's power, and to surrender His time, a valuable and limited commodity, to help them. Being like Jesus means that our hearts will be moved with compassion for others—a compassion that compels us to stop what we are doing in order to meet the needs of others. How often have we been consumed with our plans that we fail to stop to help others? When we are moved with compassion, we are available for God to use us to care for those in need.

Prayer

Father, help me to open my eyes, my heart, and my hands to meet the needs of others, so that I am more like Jesus. Please use what I have for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen!

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Matthew 17-19

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DAY 325

Matthew 20-22

Scripture Reading

MATTHEW 20:1-16

The Eccentric Owner

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“Are you envious because I am generous?”
Matthew 20:15**

This parable is often called “The Workers in the Vineyard,” but the central character is really the eccentric landowner. The landlord needs workers to maintain his vineyard. Some hardy souls are standing on the street corner ready for work at daybreak. Others start work a while later, and then others even later. Some, however, loiter all day and put in only one hour of work at the end. How does the master respond? He gives all the workers the same pay! This surprise gives us a window into the kingdom of God. God’s generous grace flows as freely to those who bow to Christ on their deathbed as to believers who have given a lifetime of service to Christ. But the owner’s most industrious workers grumble and complain. And, surprisingly, he reprimands them, though they have endured the burden of the work and the heat of the day. God is so concerned with producing generous and compassionate people that He rewards those who don’t put in a full life’s work. And He expects the rest of us to be happy about it. This story gives us a mirror in which we must examine the areas of our life that fail to reflect God’s character. Often we compare ourselves with others and are convinced we deserve more. But God’s generosity transcends human ideas of fairness. Divine generosity gives to all, expecting nothing in return.

Prayer

Gracious God, kind Savior, make us gracious and kind like you. Remove stinginess and faulty comparisons from our eyes. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DAY 326

Matthew 23-25

Scripture Reading

Matthew 23-25

Show-Offs

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples: ‘The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So, you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. Everything they do is for show. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!’”
Matthew 23:1-3, 5a**

“Do as I say, not as I do!” Often parents use this idiom to warn their children not to do something that they do themselves. It can also be said by someone who is a hypocrite. In Greek, the word hypocrite means “an actor or pretender.” When you look up the translation of the word hypocrite in Matthew 23:13, you will find the word “dissembler,” which means someone who lies and hides their real feelings or intentions with different ones. When Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, He was not just calling them pretenders. The Pharisees were the religious leaders who were supposed to model and teach God’s law. But instead of living out the law with justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt 23: 23), in their hypocrisy, they treated the Law like a script to be acted out. They were pretenders. As a child, a teen, and as an adult I performed singing and acting in plays. People who saw me perform, but didn’t know me well were always shocked to find out that off the stage, I was actually pretty bashful. “Then how do you get up in front of strangers and perform if you’re bashful?” they asked. “Because I’m acting. It’s a character I’m pretending to be, not the real me,” was my answer.

In what is known as The Seven Woes of Matthew 23, Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They were arrogant, decorated, religious actors on exalted stages, who performed in elaborate costumes, and recited practiced words. Jesus called the Pharisees white-washed tombs pristine on the outside, but spiritually rotten on the inside. He exposed the selfishness of their hearts hidden behind their religiosity. How can people tell who we really are at our core? By examining the fruit of our lives. If we are grafted into the vine, the Holy Spirit will produce good fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). The Pharisees were producing phony fruit. They were dissemblers pretending to be what they were not. Are you just a show-off? Are you merely a performer who knows all the phrases and churchy words Christians should say but has not committed to an authentic relationship with the Lord? Just like the Pharisees, Jesus can see what is inside our hearts. What kind of fruit are you producing?

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to pursue authentic, intimate relationships with you so that we produce good spiritual fruit. Search our hearts and expose anything that is not of you. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

Psalm 125 • Matthew 26-27

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 type 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 it 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?”

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 328

Matthew 28 • 1 Thessalonians 1-3

Scripture Reading

Producing Faith, Love and Hope

TODAY'S FOCUS

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”
1 Thessalonians 2:13

Just imagine, one day after going to church for years you hear a guest preacher explain the Scriptures and teach a life-changing message. As you lean in to hear what he is saying, you begin to believe it. You invite the preacher to your house for a meal to hear more of his message. Suddenly, the police barge into your house looking for the preacher. When they can't find him, they grab you and put you and others in jail.

According to Acts 17:1-9, that is essentially what happened to the new Christians in Thessalonica after they heard Paul teaching in the synagogue. His use of the Old Testament scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Messiah was enough for some Jews, many God-fearing Greeks, and a few prominent women to accept Jesus. After hearing Paul's message, the new converts in Thessalonica were severely persecuted for their faith. Some were insulted, some were beaten, some had their property seized and some were put to death.

Paul wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians to the Christians in Thessalonica to express how thankful he and his companions were for their faith, and to encourage them. Paul gave thanks to God because, amid intense persecution, the Thessalonian believers had faith, love, and hope (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 13:8). The persecution did not discourage them, rather it became an opportunity to show the power of God. The young Thessalonian church modeled Christ in the way they responded to persecution.

What do we model when we go through intense difficulties and are mistreated by people because of our faith? Would people describe us as amazingly loving, patient, kind, joyful, and self-controlled? Or, do we become the reason people shake their heads and say Christians are unloving hypocrites who are no different from those who do not go to church?

Prayer

Father, thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit, who produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in us for the benefit of others. Help us to not be discouraged by the trials and difficulties you allow in our lives because through them you become real to those around us.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 329

1 Thessalonians 4-5 • 2 Thessalonians 1-3

Scripture Reading

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-22

The Primary Habit

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Pray continually ...”

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Throughout history, Christians have developed practices that help them grow in their walk with God. These have often been called “spiritual disciplines.” A general list of spiritual disciplines would include worship, prayer, tithing, meditation, fasting, study, memorization, and confession. The list of potential disciplines could grow to a point where we might feel we could never do enough. The purpose of developing spiritual disciplines is not to add accomplishments to our spiritual resumes. If we believe that we somehow might earn credit in God’s eyes by mastering a list of spiritual disciplines, we misunderstand how these practices are beneficial. They are not ends in themselves, but simply a means to help us grow nearer to God. In our text for today, the Bible calls us to “pray continually.” This statement teaches us that prayer is the primary habit that we seek to develop in order to grow nearer to God. Some spiritually mature people do not fast. Some are not good at memorizing Scripture passages. Yet every spiritual mentor worth imitating has developed the practice of seeking God in prayer. Spiritual disciplines make us aware of God’s presence, and there is probably no clearer way to acknowledge His presence than to approach God in prayer.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, please help me to know the wonder of dwelling in your presence through a life of prayer. Amen.

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DAY 330

Romans 1-4

Scripture Reading

Romans 1:18-20

General Revelation

TODAY'S FOCUS

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” Romans 1:20

Recently, I took my family to the Texas State Fair. Every year we catch the “Soar” bird show. I am always amazed by the splendor, intelligence, and uniqueness of these amazing creatures. Some, like the condor, can soar over mountains at incredible speeds and altitudes, while others, like the peacock, have brilliant colors and feathers. Parrots can imitate speech, and pigeons have built-in homing devices.

There are over 9,000 different species of birds that we know of. It would take a lifetime just to explore the beauty and variety of this one species alone! Think of the countless universes we have yet to explore! Creation reveals God’s greatness. His creativity is unmatched. The Apostle Paul argues that when we look at creation, we cannot help but see God’s glory.

To deny it is to repress the obvious. God has not left Himself without a witness to His glory in the created order. Even those who never read the Bible know there is a Creator and they owe Him worship and gratitude. Just looking at the magnificence of creation should inspire awe and command worship. It is not a surprise that the number of people who truly claim to be atheists is quite small. According to a recent survey, less than two percent of people worldwide deny the existence of God.

Even those who do, Romans 1:18–32 tells us, are denying reality and what they know to be true. It takes an intentional effort to repress what you see with your eyes and know in your heart. The beauty of this world leaves us “without excuse.” I am a beach lover. My family and I count down the days until we can escape to the beach for a week. St Thérèse of Lisieux best articulates my love for the beach in this way. I was between six and seven when I saw the sea for the first time. I could not turn away my eyes, its majesty, the roaring of the waves, the whole vast spectacle impressed me deeply and spoke to my soul of God’s power and greatness.” Psalm 104:24–25 echoes the sentiments declaring, “How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small.” The created order itself bears abundant witness to a Creator who is a masterful designer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we worship your greatness as we enjoy the beauty, splendor, and majesty of all that you have created. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 331

Romans 5-8

Scripture Reading

The Adam's Family

TODAY'S FOCUS

“But the gracious gift is not like the offense. For if by the offense of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many.”
Romans 5:15

I must admit as a kid I grew up watching reruns of the black-and-white version of The Addams Family. This macabre pop culture classic has since been rebooted and made into several movies. However, it is best known for its catchy theme song with two snaps. The Addams Family is about a dysfunctional family, all whom are “living dead” people trying to function in the world of the living. Every storyline seems to center around the fact that they are already dead.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we are all born into a dead, dysfunctional family, the family of Adam, the first created man. Because of his sin, even before we have a chance to make our own decisions, we are cursed, because we are a part of the family of Adam. We are all born with a proclivity to sin. We cannot help it. We prefer sin. We inherited this from Adam. His one act of rebellion resulted in condemnation for his entire family tree (Romans 3:23). That includes you and me! The good news is that we have the option to choose to be adopted into a new family led by a new Adam, Jesus Christ. Paul contrasts the two Adams in Romans and 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.

The First Adam succumbed to temptation and all of creation fell under the curse of sin. The Second Adam was tempted, but knew no sin and is restoring all of creation back to God. Through the first Adam's disobedience, we inherit eternal judgment, but through the second Adam's obedience, we inherit eternal life. Just as the first Adam was the first creation of the human race, so Christ was the first of those raised from the dead to eternal life. And just as we bear the likeness of the first Adam, we will one day bear the likeness of the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:48-49). Which Adam do you choose?

Prayer

Lord, we are grateful that we are no longer under the curse that the first Adam wrought. We have a new Father, a new family, a new life, and a new inheritance! Amen.

NOTES

DAY 332

Romans 13-16

Scripture Reading

The Bible Gives Light

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light ... clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Romans 13:12, 14**

Augustine grew up in Africa. His mother was a Christian and prayed fervently for him, but his journey to belief in Christ took many detours. Gifted with a brilliant mind, he explored and followed several religions and philosophies, teaching in graduate schools. He indulged his sensual passions and lived with a woman for ten years.

He was drawn back to the church by powerful preaching and came to grips with his sin. At the age of 32, he was in a friend's garden shedding tears over guilt deep in his soul. His friend had opened the Bible and was trying to explain the gospel to him. Augustine walked away, but heard the sound of a child's voice, as if from a house nearby, telling him again and again to “take up the Bible and read.” He picked up the Bible, and his eyes fell on our reading for today. “Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light... Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,” Romans 13:11-14.

He testifies, “I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. It was as though the light of faith flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.” God later called St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) to become one of the most significant Early Church fathers. He preached over 6,000 sermons and wrote church doctrine that would forever shape the Christian church. Are you searching for truth? Are you in the dark and wondering about God? Take up His Word and read, asking God to reveal Himself, because He will.

Prayer

Lord, I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore, I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path (Psalm 119:104-105). Amen.

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