

DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING

DAY 211

2 Kings 21 • 2 Chronicles 33 • John 4

Scripture Reading

Prioritizing God's Will

John 4:1-34

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.'" John 4:34

Have you ever asked God for something, but He gave you something else? In John 4, Jesus encounters a woman at a well. Because John 4:4 tells us that Jesus "had to go through Samaria," we know His encounter with the woman was intentional. When He began His conversation with her, she was on a mission to get water. She focused on her physical needs throughout most of her conversation with Jesus. When she believed Jesus had the ability to give her everlasting water, she was eager to receive it. However, after her conversation with Jesus, she left her water jar by the well. Her mission had changed from satisfying her physical needs to telling people about Jesus.

Jesus went through Samaria consumed with fulfilling God's plan, not His physical needs. Surely, His feet were tired from walking and the hot desert sun made Him thirsty for water, hungry, and tired. However, His thirst and hunger for the will of God outweighed His physical needs. How often do we engage in a conversation with God (prayer) completely consumed by our needs? Do we stop praying for ourselves long enough for God to mention anything about meeting the needs of others? Maybe we should consider that God wants to talk to us about His need for us to help others find hope and joy in Him.

Prayer

Father, help us as we converse with you in prayer to hear your heart for those around us who need your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 212

2 Kings 22 • 2 Chronicles 34 • John 5

Scripture Reading

Beautiful Feet, Beautiful Message

Nahum 1:7-15

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Behold ... the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace!” Nahum 1:15

Remember Nineveh? Remember Jonah? In the Bible book that bears his name, God rebukes Jonah for not wanting to share God's mercy with Nineveh. Even though Jonah was a reluctant missionary, the whole city of Nineveh repented! But Nineveh fell back into its sinful ways. Again, they became an oppressive, evil nation, and by the time of Nahum, they had made life miserable for God's people. But Nahum had a message of good news for Judah; God had seen His people suffer at the hand of Nineveh, and now he would set them free. Nineveh would be destroyed. Their idols would be torn down, their city walls reduced to rubble, and their temples burned to ashes. And God's people would be restored.

God tells His people, “Celebrate your festivals ... and fulfill your vows.” Religious and family life for Judah would resume because God would defeat their enemies. That truly was good news! That good news is a reminder for us too. God has defeated the kingdom of Satan and has released this world from sin's grip. As hearts submit to Jesus, racism, hatred, greed, and all other evils lose their power. When addiction, temptation, or sin seem overpowering, rejoice and be strong! The Prince of Peace releases us from the grip of Satan's kingdom.

Prayer

King of peace, sin disrupts so much of this world. But you bring renewal and restoration! Help us to seek your peace wherever we see brokenness.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 217

Jeremiah 1-2 • John 10

Scripture Reading

God Has a Purpose for Your Life
Jeremiah 1

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.' They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.
Jeremiah 1:4- 5,19

Have you sat and wondered, why was I born? What is it that God wants me to do? What is my purpose?

People all around the world have asked these questions. One way we know this is that *The Purpose Driven Life* is the best-selling hardback in U.S. history with more than 30 million copies sold. It has been translated into over 50 languages according to its publisher, Zondervan.

In Jeremiah 1, we are introduced to the prophet Jeremiah. God came to Jeremiah with a plan made before Jeremiah was conceived. Son of the priest Hilkiah, who found the Book of the Law in the temple during the reign of King Josiah of Judah, Jeremiah was to be a prophet to the nations. Jeremiah was young when he heard God's call upon his life. However, he did not believe he could fulfill it. He had good reasons to be concerned because he was appointed to not just speak to a few people in an obscure place, he was going to be a prophet (God's mouthpiece) to speak to nations.

It can be very intimidating, terrifying, and dangerous to speak judgment to people in power. Amid Jeremiah's concerns, God reassured him that along with the call on his life, He would give Jeremiah everything he needed to be successful. Then God gave him the words he was to speak. Has God reached out to you and called you to a task or mission? Are you backing out of it or moving towards it? Are you listening to God for further instructions as you move in obedience or are you making excuses and refusing to obey? Jeremiah's assignment was extremely difficult, but God promised to be with him. Likewise, God is and will be with us in our assignments.

Prayer

Father, thank You for giving me purpose. Please help me to listen and obey your call upon my life. Help me to surrender my anxiety, frustration, fear, gifts, skills, and talents to you so that I will accomplish your purpose for my life. Help me enjoy your abundant love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

DAY 219

Jeremiah 5-6 • John 12

Scripture Reading

"Come out, come out,
wherever you are!"

Prayer

God, it is a blessing that you know us!
Each one of us individually, personally,
and most of all intimately! Thank You
for your son who has delivered us!
Amen.

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Roam about through the streets of Jerusalem, and look and take notice. And seek in her public squares, if you can find a person, if there is one who does justice, who seeks honesty, then I will forgive her." Jeremiah 5:1

"Come out, come out, wherever you are!" A number of us remember these words from the game Hide and Seek. In this text, Yaweh is not "it" but He is declaring through the prophet Jeremiah, judgment unto the nation of Judah. Judah had hidden behind idolatry and spiritual adultery and they were not following God. They thought mingling with foreign gods and nations would not incur a price (Jeremiah 1:10). Jeremiah prophesied judgment upon the nation of Judah for her repeated covenant disobedience against God; however, judgment is not forever since God will also provide a future deliverance for His people and judge the nations for their evil. There was good news here. For each outpouring of wrath on men, a remnant is rescued. Anyone who knew the Lord and Jeremiah to be His spokesperson had options that led to safety during those trying times (Jeremiah 28:1-10). In some versions of the game Hide and Seek, the seeker calls out a previously agreed phrase like, "Olly, Olly, oxen free!" to signal the hidiers to return to base. Nobody is hidden from God. He knows who the righteous are. "Come out, Come out, wherever you are!"

NOTES

DAY 226

Jeremiah 23,25 • John 19

Scripture Reading

Name Brand IS different!

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will live securely. And this is His name by which He will be called, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness.’”
Jeremiah 23:6**

When it comes to having a right standing with God, the first place I check is my personal ledger. If my report happens to be good, I gain a higher sense of confidence in God. If I've messed up, I can't help but feel distance or a lack of assurance. I feel off. It's kind of ironic, primarily because the exact opposite is true; at the time when I've messed up the biggest, God's grace is most available (Romans 5:20 "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more!). Conversely, when I'm "nailing it", chances are I'm depending on my own righteousness. This is (pause for effect) exhausting.

When I was a kid, my parents were experts at shopping for generic store brand Cheerios, shoes, etc. My dad's favorite statement was, "It's all the same. It's made in the same factory!" The truth is, we just could not afford the name brands. A mile up the road, I had a buddy, Bayle. He lived in the "rich" area of town (the name of the area was Ridgecrest, we of course called it RICHcrest). He had ALL the name brands....everything! I can tell you I went back and forth between the two houses as if I had two families, one generic and the other name brand...they were NOT the same! There was something different, something special about the name brand. Sure the packaging was different, but also, the taste...it was just...right.

When the Bible says Jesus is our righteousness, it is saying there is a divine 'brand' of righteousness. It comes from Christ. It is perfect. It is incorruptible. It was purchased and is offered free of charge by the only one who could pay the high price (and a dear price it was!). You cannot afford to buy it, trust me. The scripture also refers to our own, off-brand righteousness...the generic. It is NOT the same, it's just not right. Today, receive the free gift of the real, true righteousness and let go of trying to pay for your own off-brand. Even if you are successful, it is not the same. To add to the irony, it will cost you so much more. When the Lord Jesus is your righteousness, whether it is a good day or bad, your Heavenly Father accepts you because of His perfect Son. Even when you feel all wrong, you are still...right.

Prayer

Righteous Jesus, I receive your free gift today. Thank You for forgiveness and grace. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 228

Jeremiah 45-47 • Psalm 105 • John 21

Scripture Reading

What is Your Fallback?

John 21: 1 –6

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“So Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’”
John 21:5**

Have you ever tried something new and were excited about it? You told all of your friends and posted daily about a new routine or life change you were about to make. You had the "before and after pictures" on your bathroom mirror or your screensaver. You even wrote your daily confession to help support this change. Then the unthinkable happens, you do not reach your goal. After three years of sacrifice, hard work, and belief, you find out everything you had hoped for and dreamed of never materialized. That goal, that better day, never happened. You are discouraged, disappointed, and disheartened.

This is how the disciples felt after the crucifixion of Jesus. For three years, He had led them, fed them, taught them, and loved them, and now what? What do you do now that your dreams and hopes for a better day have died? Peter decided to go back to what he did before, which was fishing. What do you go back to when it seems like God is not answering your prayers?

What is your fallback position when life does not make sense? For some of us, it is a big bowl of ice cream. Perhaps you go back to manipulating or nagging. You may go back to sinful pleasures or pretend that everything is ok, even if your heart is broken.

Or Peter, going back to fishing did not work guess that what we “go back to” does not work or satisfy us either. It keeps us busy, but it does not fulfill us or capture our hearts. When there is a God-sized hole in our hearts, only God can fill it.

So instead of moving away from Jesus, sit still and allow Jesus to move toward you as He does in this text. Jesus reaches out to us no matter where we are. He gives us direction and welcomes us to the shore with loving arms. When our substitutes and fallback plans fall empty and hollow, sit still, and listen for Jesus. He will instruct you where to place your net for a meaningful and full life.

Prayer

Jesus, I am so grateful there is no need for a “Plan B” when I follow you. Even when it seems like things are not working out, I know you are working them out. Therefore, I will sit, listen, and follow your wonderful and loving plan for my life.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 234

Jeremiah 37-39 • Psalm 79 • 2 John

Scripture Reading

God's Grace...Our Disgrace

Psalms 79:4

TODAY'S FOCUS

"We have become a disgrace before our neighbors, an object of derision and ridicule to those around us." Psalm 79:4

Have you ever done something that you regretted not just because it was wrong, but because it disgraced your family, your team, your organization, your community, or your people? Have you ever done something that brought shame upon God's name and ruined your testimony? Most of us have. This was the case for Israel in Psalm 79. Not only was God repulsed by Israel's sinfulness, even their ungodly neighbors recognized their moral depravity. The Chosen People had completely lost their testimony and were now damaging the name of YHWH, God. "We have become a disgrace before our neighbors, an object of derision and ridicule to those around us" Psalm 79:4.

Things are really bad when non-Christians must rebuke Christians and the Christian Church. We can be sure that the wrath of God is sure to follow because God is zealous for His name. There is more at stake than the disobedience of His children. When those who proclaim to be followers of Christ use position, power, or status to take advantage of others, they invalidate the truth of the Gospel. This stirs God's anger and provokes a severe response. What do you do when you have not only irrevocably tarnished your character but your actions have impugned the name of God as well? Like the people of Israel, you cry out for mercy! Not because you deserve it, but for the sake of God's glory. Israel recognized that God's discipline was a manifestation of His grace. God's love for them would not permit them to continue in their sin. His grace was His discipline. The only thing that would stay the fullness of God's wrath was an appeal to the glory of His name.

If Israel was utterly forsaken as their sins deserved, God's promise to redeem the world through the seed of Abraham would be broken and God would be made to be a liar. Thus, Israel appealed to God on behalf of His name's sake. "Help us, God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and save us and forgive our sins for the sake of Your name" Psalm 79:9. If you are suffering from the effects of your own sin, there is still hope! We can appeal to God's undeserved mercy because we are still His children, His namesake. He can still use us for His glory, if we repent.

Prayer

God, we know we do not deserve a second, third, or forty-ninth chance, but today we plead for your loving-kindness and mercy to fall upon us. Will you restore us once again so that your name will be glorified and your grace be known to the ungodly?

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 236

Jeremiah 52 • Psalm 143-144 • Revelation 1

Scripture Reading

Cristo Viene ya! Christ is coming!
Revelation 1:7

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." Revelation 1:7

Walking the dusty streets of the Dominican Republic, I would often see the phrase "Cristo Viene Ya!" prominently painted on the front door of many houses. Although the humble structures were a mixture of cinder block, irregular sticks, and corrugated sheet metal cobbled together to keep most of the sun and rain out, the solid wooden doors proudly proclaimed what the families who dwelled inside firmly believed: Christ is coming again! I felt convicted the first time my interpreter explained what the phrase meant. How different my life would be if I were reminded every time I entered my house that Christ is coming! I wondered what effect it had on the lives of these people who lived in great poverty. Did it provide hope to endure their daily suffering?

Or did it eventually lose its impact like the encouraging statements I often write in marker on my bathroom mirror? Knowing that Christ will return does not mean that we should sell everything, find a cave, and count down the days. On the other hand, we should not live a life of complacency, ignoring the urgency of the times we are living in. In fact, in 2 Peter 3:11, Peter admonishes the Saints to keep praying for each other, loving each other, fellowshiping with each other, and serving each other even as the day of Christ approaches. There is no need to panic. Neither should we become disinterested, self-focused consumers. We must live between the two extremes.

Prayer

Father, keep us from complacency and hysteria. Ready us to proclaim salvation to all those who will listen until the day we die or You return. Maranatha!

NOTES

DAY 239

Ezekiel 8-11 • Revelation 4

Scripture Reading

Worship the Lord
Revelation 4:1-8

Prayer

You are holy, Lord God Almighty. We bow before you, the one who was and is and is to come. We thank you that our times are in your hands. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

TODAY'S FOCUS

"...day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.'" Revelation 4:8

The apostle John wrote this letter to the churches in Asia Minor in a time of great crisis. Persecution had greatly increased among first-century Christians. John was banished to the island of Patmos for refusing to worship the Roman emperor as Lord. From there, he sent this letter describing a vision from God. He challenged his readers to see that what they were experiencing was a prelude to the joyful celebration that would take place when the Lord returns. By faith, we too must see what is going on in the world. By faith, we must see that the kingdom of God has come because Jesus has come.

By faith, we can serve him with joy every day. John invites us to worship God in song, joining with the four living creatures near the throne, saying, "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and who is to come." Whenever we worship God, we are invited to sing with these creatures that our God is eternal and absolutely pure. No matter what season of life we are in, or what our circumstances may be, and no matter who the shakers and movers in our world appear to be, we too can sing, "Our God reigns! He is in control!" Because of Jesus we may joyfully approach his throne and worship him today.

NOTES

DAY 240

Ezekiel 12-14 • Revelation 5

Scripture Reading

Blood Relatives
Revelation 5:9

TODAY'S FOCUS

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slaughtered, and You purchased people for God with Your blood from every tribe, language, people, and nation.’” Revelation 5:9

Under the vast horizontal sky, a mission team and over 15 tribes and 6 denominations gathered together in Kenya for a marriage conference. The men assembled in a barn-type structure reminiscent of a stable that you would erect for a Christmas manger scene.

There was even hay on the ground. The husbands were charged with the task of preparing the meat for our fellowship meal and the women prepared the vegetables. I had never seen a sheep slaughtered before. As the husbands led the large furry animal through the throng of men I could not help but feel a range of emotions; sorrow for the sheep mixed with trepidation and slight queasiness.

Moreover, I could not help but become overwhelmed by the evocative symbolism of this moment so often used to illustrate Christ's sacrifice for my sin. True to form, the sheep was slaughtered without uttering a sound. Although the men held its feet, it offered very little resistance. Unless you have experienced an animal giving up its life so that you may live, it is hard for these verses to command the power that they had for both New Testament and Old Testament readers.

The men revered the moment and respected the sheep by utilizing every part of it, nothing was wasted. Finally, we broke bread together, in the sanctuary of the rustic church. We ate, we danced, and we sang glorious songs unto the Lord. It was beautiful to see God's people celebrating together at this marriage feast. We were of different colors, different nations, and different tongues. It was the most vivid foreshadowing of what the Apostle John promised in Revelation 5:9-11 awaits those who believe!

Prayer

**Lord, we thank you for your sacrifice that will one day allow all nations, tribes, and peoples to celebrate together in your presence. Only through your blood can we be made one. We long for that day!
Amen.**

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