

My Prayer Journal

Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day. Then, pray for church requests and personal friends and needs.

Prayer of Confession:

O Lord of compassion and mercy, we confess that one of Your greatest gifts to us has so often been the source of our greatest trials. You have given us the gift of choice. We can choose between right and wrong, between love and hate. We can take the high road or the low road. We can reach out in Your name or we can retreat in the name of selfishness. O great God of grace, help us to choose with clarity, compassion, and commitment. Cleanse us from every wrong and give us the joy of making choices that bring honor to the name of Christ.

My Prayers this Week:

Family Activity:

So let's talk for a minute about blaming. Have you ever blamed your brother or sister for something that happened? And if it really was their fault did you feel ok about that? What if it was a mistake? Or what if someone made a bad choice? Did you still feel good about blaming them for what happened? How do you feel when someone blames you? Even if you did something wrong, it still feels horrible when people keep telling us how badly we messed up. Jesus never told people it was ok to do something wrong, but He DID tell them that He forgave them and to not make that choice again. Think of someone in your life you need to forgive...and maybe you'll be lucky and someone will forgive you, too.

MONDAY 1.27.20

Genesis 45:1-15

The backstory to today's Scripture reading is in Genesis chapters 37 through 44. Joseph had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, but rose to power in Egypt through his ability to wisely advise the Pharaoh concerning the Pharaoh's dreams. When famine hits the homeland of Joseph's brothers, they come to Egypt seeking aid, because by Joseph's advice, Egypt is prepared for the famine. Years have elapsed, and the brothers do not recognize Joseph, but Joseph recognizes them. From his position of power, he has every opportunity to avenge the wrong that was committed against him. Instead, Joseph gives grace. Instead of focusing on his personal hurt, and retribution, he sees the broader picture of a God at work to redeem evil with good. The sin is forgiven, and Joseph's family comes to thrive in Egypt, rather than dying in Canaan.

- How does Joseph judge the fact of the brothers' actions? Does he acknowledge their wrongdoing, or ignore it? Why do you think Joseph is able to move past a desire to condemn his brothers for their previous sin, and see an opportunity for redemption instead?
- Giving grace does not imply that no wrong has been committed. Giving grace does not ignore the reality of sin. Are there instances where you have been hurt in your own life that ultimately led to a greater good? If not, does the story of Joseph provide hope that God's future for you can bring redemption from such hurts? Are there opportunities for you to give grace to those who have sinned against you?

TUESDAY 1.28.20

Ezekiel 18:1-32

In ancient Israel, people thought much more "communally" than our present-day individual mindsets. If an individual in the community sinned, it reflected on the moral character of the entire community. The entire community was understood to suffer the damaging effects of any individual's sin—perhaps even for many succeeding generations! In Ezekiel's day, the Israelites were in exile in Babylon, their nation having been overrun by the Babylonian Empire. Because of their communal understanding of sin, they believed their present suffering was not due to their own wrongdoing, but the wrongdoing of their parents' generation. Ezekiel insists this is bad theology—individuals, and individual communities, suffer the effects of their own sin, not that of others. We can't blame our parents—we have personal responsibility for the consequences of our individual actions. Ezekiel insists that what is needed is our own repentance.

- Look closely at verses 30 through 32. Even though God judges, what is ultimately God's will for us? What does God take delight in?
- Sin DOES have communal implications. Others DO sometimes suffer the results of our own bad choices. How does that affect our tendency to blame others even when others are NOT to blame?

WEDNESDAY 1.29.20

Jonah 3

Most of us know the middle of the story of Jonah. Jonah was swallowed by a whale (not really—the Bible says it was a big fish). But Jonah was swallowed by the fish because he was running from doing a job God asked him to do, that he didn't want to do. That job was going to the evil, enemy city of Nineveh to call them to repentance. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a nation that was aggressively attacking Israel. Jonah didn't want God to have mercy on Nineveh, Jonah wanted God to destroy Nineveh. He ran from the assignment to call Nineveh to repentance, because he was afraid that if he did, Nineveh WOULD repent, and God would show them mercy. But after Jonah was saved from the fish debacle, he obeyed God, and went to Nineveh. And lo and behold, exactly what Jonah feared would happen, happened. God spared Nineveh, and showed them mercy because of their repentance. If you read chapter 4, you'll see that Jonah was pretty hacked off by God's response!

- What does it imply about God that God wants Jonah to go to his nation's enemy to implore them to repent and turn to God? Is there anyone unworthy of hearing God's message?
- What is the relationship in the story of Jonah between condemnation, repentance, and God's mercy?
- Jonah forces us to consider—who would we rather God not have mercy on? Serial killers? Drug kingpins? Terrorists? Are there people you would prefer God to condemn rather than extend mercy to? What does Jonah say about that?

THURSDAY 1.30.20

Luke 17:11-19

The story of the ten men healed of leprosy by Jesus is a classic story of Jesus' mercy and grace. Jesus is in the borderland between Samaria and Galilee—two areas that historically despised each other. To Galileans, Samaritans were outcasts. Even in a group of men with leprosy, all of whom would have been outcasts from Galilean society, the Samaritan with leprosy would have been an "outcast among outcasts"! Jesus heals all ten of the men who cry out to Him for healing—but only this "outcast among outcasts" returns to thank Jesus and praise God. Just as the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 has served as an example of neighborly kindness, this Samaritan serves as an example of gratitude. It is important to note that even though only one of ten men exhibited gratitude, all ten were healed of their skin disease.

- What do you think is the difference between the "cleansing" the men experienced in verse 14, and the "wellness/healing" that Jesus proclaims of the Samaritan in verse 19?
- Do you expect to receive expressions of gratitude for your own acts of mercy or grace? Are you tempted to withhold future acts of mercy if you do not receive them? For Jesus, is the offer of grace impacted by the response anticipated? What are the implications?

FRIDAY 1.31.20

Luke 18:9-14

When reading this parable of Jesus, we must recognize first that Pharisees were the upstanding religious leaders of the Jewish community. Most Pharisees were seeking to be fully obedient to God’s laws as laid forth in their Scriptures. Tax collectors, on the other hand, were despised for their collusion with the occupying Roman authorities, and their tendency to get rich off the backs of the people. In the parable, the Pharisee extols his own virtues before God—he obeys God’s law, he doesn’t rob, or commit adultery, or cheat people like a tax collector. He fasts and tithes on his income. The tax collector, though, simply confesses his sin before God, and pleads for God’s mercy. It is a lesson in humility, and teaches us what God truly rewards.

- Who is condemned in the parable, and who is extolled? Consider the fact that the Pharisee, most likely, is not lying—he really has been living an obedient life. The tax collector really has, most likely, taken advantage of people. Why then, is the condemnation placed where it is, and the praise where it is?
- How hard is it for you to confess sin before God? Are you ever guilty of the Pharisee’s behavior? In prayer, do you ever simply fall on your knees and ask God to “have mercy on me, a sinner”?

SATURDAY 2.1.20

Acts 17:16-34

On his missionary journeys, the apostle Paul traveled throughout modern-day Turkey and Greece, taking the news of Jesus Christ to a Roman world full of other philosophies and ideas. In this reading, Paul is in Athens, which for over 400 years had been the center of philosophic debate. Into this hotbed of ideas, Paul proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He appeals to their apparent religiosity, their poets, and the magnificence of their temples. Still, the message he delivers is ultimately one of judgment. A day is coming when God will judge humanity through Jesus Christ. He invites the Athenians to repent—to change their hearts and minds in preparation for this judgment by Jesus—who, as a matter of fact, has been resurrected from the dead. In a city embracing an enormity of ideas, this is too much. Many decided Paul was a nut case. A few, though, responded to Paul’s message, and came to Christian faith.

- Can you think of a comparable environment today to the one Paul encountered in Athens? How is the Gospel of Jesus Christ received there? Does Paul condemn their beliefs, or invite them to Christ?
- What can you learn from Paul’s approach in speaking to the Athenians? How might we approach a skeptical world with the Gospel of Jesus? What is the power of a simple invitation?



Daily Study Guide

January 26 - February 1, 2020

Sermon Series: You Be the Judge

Week Four: “Neither Do I Condemn You” - Rev. J. David Israel

Scripture for Sunday, January 26: John 8:2-11

“And Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he returned to the temple. All the people gathered around him, and he sat down and taught them. The legal experts and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery. Placing her in the center of the group, they said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone women like this. What do you say?’ They said this to test him, because they wanted a reason to bring an accusation against him. Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. They continued to question him, so he stood up and replied, ‘Whoever hasn’t sinned should throw the first stone.’ Bending down again, he wrote on the ground. Those who heard him went away, one by one, beginning with the elders. Finally, only Jesus and the woman were left in the middle of the crowd. Jesus stood up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Is there no one to condemn you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don’t sin anymore.’” (CEB)

Things that really impacted me from today’s sermon:

Prayer Requests

- Pamela
- Vicki Robinson
- Frank Lindsey
- Duke Goodwin
- Rebecca Ware Mitchell
- Karen Taschler
- Richard Mikolajczyk
- Sandra Lewis
- Debra Thibault
- John Wilson
- Shirley Culella
- Doris Jackson
- Steve Dickinson
- Bob Savage
- Nicole Crothers
- Al Sappington
- Mary Hediger
- Delaney Digman
- Bill Reichter
- Jan Reichter
- Bob Vincent
- Bill Cruse
- Jim Stephens
- Sophia Miller
- Judy Hoffman
- Nini Schneider

The Campbell and Balzraine families on the loss of Beth Balzraine’s aunt, Mary Ella “Sissy” Campbell

The Brown and Savage families on the loss of Bob Savage’s sister, P.K. Brown

Family and friends on the loss of Samantha Olszewski

Share prayer requests online at livingwordumc.org