

My Prayer Journal

Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day.

Prayer of Confession:

Holy God, help us to learn to disagree in love. Make us wise in our interactions with others, so that our words turn away wrath, rather than stirring up anger. Give us the wisdom to know when our words are needed, and when it is better to keep quiet. We seek to become people who heal division, and who make Your Kingdom visible on earth. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

My Prayers this Week:

Family Time:

What was the last really big disagreement you had with a friend? Were you tempted to talk about your friend behind their back? Did you want to tell other friends about it so you could win people over to “your side” of the argument? The Bible has lots of stories of people who had disagreements. But Jesus taught us that even when we disagree, we have to treat the other person with respect and kindness. We know we can do a lot of damage to other people with our words, and God wants us to only use our words to make people feel good, not bad!

MONDAY 8.10.20

Exodus 21:12-36

Our reading today comes from ancient Israel’s law code concerning how to deal with personal injuries. We have to read these laws through an ancient lens, or we will get caught up in questions that might be important, but distract from the point, like, “why does killing require more killing?” Or, “why doesn’t the Bible condemn slavery?” For the purposes of our study, we need to recognize that prior to the setting down of laws, life in ancient Israel was anarchy. People took whatever revenge they believed was appropriate when they experienced, or perceived, harm. The law codes, while seemingly primitive today, set a basis for the concept of “justice,” providing some level of equity, and ensuring the punishment fit the crime. By setting down specific penalties for specific crimes, escalation of vengeance between disagreeing parties was halted. The most common types of incidents that might arise among the people were identified and specific punishments instituted that made the penalty equal to, and no more than, the loss.

- What benefit do you see in everyone agreeing to a prescribed set of penalties for injury? How are you tempted to respond to personal injury?

TUESDAY 8.11.20

1 Kings 3:16-28

Even with prescribed penalties for personal injury, the laws could not fit every situation. When two women approached Solomon insisting that a dead baby belonged to the other, while a live baby belonged to them, Solomon had to use wisdom to settle the disagreement. He counted on the love of the mother of the living baby and the grief and envy of the mother of the dead baby in proposing a solution to the disagreement. We can acknowledge that Solomon’s proposed solution was incredibly risky—what if BOTH women had said “No, don’t kill the baby!”? The point, though, is that Solomon was able to defuse a potentially explosive disagreement through the use of loving wisdom and deep insight into the human condition. The people praised Solomon’s perception and his ability to find the path to justice in a seemingly impossible situation.

- What insights into humanity did Solomon draw on in making his proposal?
- Do you take into account the personal experience of the other person when you are in a disagreement?
- How might doing so help resolve differences you have experienced?

WEDNESDAY 8.12.20

Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus gets right to the point in this, one of His most challenging teachings of all. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute or harass you. Why? “So that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.” If God even takes care of people who are antagonistic toward Him (theologians call this “prevenient grace”), then those who purport to want to align their wills with God’s, will do likewise. The ancient world was built on a system of reciprocity, patronage, and the expectation that “if I scratch your back, you’ll scratch mine.” The only reason for me to go out of my way to do something for someone else was if there was an expectation that it would ultimately benefit me. Tax collectors and “pagans” upheld that system, but Jesus expects more from His followers. Even when we disagree with someone to the point that we consider them an “enemy,” we are commanded to love them, and to treat them that way. Look back at Matthew 5:20. The command to love our enemies is, precisely, the “surpassing righteousness” that Jesus calls us to.

- What examples can you point to where Christians are clearly *not* being obedient to this teaching? What examples can you point to where Christians *are*? Are *you* striving for this?

THURSDAY 8.13.20

Romans 14:1-13

Paul makes it crystal clear. Jesus, as Lord, is the final arbiter. When we accept Christ as our Lord, that is what we accept, and what we give up includes our right to pass final judgment. “To our own master we stand or fall,” and Jesus is our master. This does not mean “anything goes,” or that false teaching should not be challenged. We covered that territory in last week’s study of essentials and non-essentials. But Christians must work, in love, to understand one another’s differences. Even when we criticize, we are not to do it in a condemning manner. In disagreements, our human nature wants to tear the other down along with their arguments, to gain a victory over them so we can feel superior. Paul reminds us our Christian purpose is *always* to build the other up, not to tear them down. Our Bishop, Robert Farr, often reminds us that sometimes that is as simple as beginning our argument with the words, “I might be wrong, but” Loving the other through our disagreements requires an overabundance of the humility that Christ calls us to.

- Are you so confident in your disagreements with others that you would stand before God and say “I know I’m right”?
- How would letting Jesus be judge change your behavior?

