

## 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 be neighbors even to people we will never meet. Make a way for us to fulfill the calling You have given us and give us the courage to reach out to new people so that we can be mutually encouraged in our faith. Remind us, always, that there is no one beyond Your reach, and no one who cannot help our own faith to grow. We pray in the holy name of Christ our Lord, Amen.*

### My Prayers this Week:

### Family Time:

Paul often wrote letters to different churches—sometimes he knew the people he wrote to personally, at other times he didn't. Even when Paul didn't know someone personally, he tried to make sure he let them know he was praying for them and thankful for how they were serving God. You probably know about how Living Word helps people in inner city St. Louis, in Mexico, and even in Ghana, in Africa. Think about ways that these people, who you will probably never meet, can know that you want to be neighborly toward them. Who could *you* write a letter to, to give them encouragement?

### MONDAY 9.7.20

### Joshua 22:1-34

When the land of Canaan was distributed among the twelve tribes of Israel, three tribes—the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasse—received lands on the east side of the Jordan River, while all the other tribes' lands were on the west side of the Jordan River. In today's reading, after the conquering of Canaan, Joshua sends these eastern tribes to settle in their homeland. As they approached the Jordan River, these three tribes built an altar on the west side of the river, before they crossed over to their own territory. Because the official altar to Yahweh, the God of Israel, was in Shiloh at this time, the western tribes took this action as an act of rebellion—that these three tribes were abandoning the true worship of God, and that God would judge *all* the tribes for this blasphemy. In response, they gathered for war, condemning the building of the altar. The eastern tribes insisted that the purpose of the altar was to be a reminder to the western tribes that they had relatives—neighbors—across the natural boundary of the Jordan River. They feared the boundary would someday make them “outsiders” among their own people.

- What boundaries, today, separate “us” from “them”?
- Is it hard for you to consider “them” your neighbors?

### TUESDAY 9.8.20

### Isaiah 56:1-8

The laws in the book of Deuteronomy had forbidden Ammonites and Moabites from worshipping with Israel. Eunuchs were similarly forbidden. Such laws, to us, appear arbitrarily discriminatory. But biblically, the forbidding of these foreigners was divine punishment for the hostility exhibited by the Ammonites and Moabites during Israel's wilderness wanderings, just prior to the setting down of these laws. Self-emasculation was a common act of devotion among the Canaanites who worshipped other gods, and God prohibited those who did such things from participating in Israelite worship. While we may not fully understand the reasons for such exclusions, today's text from Isaiah makes clear that this was not God's final plan, but a temporary arrangement during Israel's earliest days. Through Isaiah, God exclaims that status before God isn't determined by ancestry or physical wholeness, but by personal behavior, especially with regard to faithfulness to justice, righteousness, and keeping the Sabbath. Even these former outcasts are to be fully welcomed in worship.

- How would Isaiah's words have expanded an Israelite's understanding of “who is my neighbor”?
- Are there people you would exclude from worship?

### WEDNESDAY 9.9.20

### Esther 4:1-17

Because the Persian king's assistant, Haman, had a personal grudge against the Jewish Mordecai, Haman influenced the king to allow him to issue an edict against the entire Jewish population of Persia. Every Jewish person, regardless of age or gender, was to be killed. When Mordecai learned of the edict, he, like many other Jews, began fasting and mourning. Mordecai's cousin, Esther, was the king's wife, ostensibly queen, but really part of a large harem. Thus, she was only allowed to see the king when he called for her personally. Esther was the king's favorite, but Mordecai questioned whether this would make Esther exempt from the edict. At great personal risk, Esther agreed to confront the king to attempt to save the lives of the Persian Jews. Although she could not possibly have personally known all the thousands of Jews who would be impacted by the king's order, she felt a personal responsibility for their protection due to her privileged position. The remainder of the story describes how Esther's heroic actions did, in fact, save her “neighbors.”

- How can social standing isolate someone from the reality of the circumstances of their neighbors?
- How can we be “neighbors” to those we are isolated from?

### THURSDAY 9.10.20

### John 17:20-26

The setting of John 17 is the Last Supper. Prior to today's verses, in 17:1-5, Jesus prays for Himself. In 17:6-19, Jesus prays for His disciples. Now, remarkably, in verse 20, Jesus says “I'm not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word.” (CEB) Has it ever occurred to you that at the Last Supper, Jesus, quite literally, prayed for *you*? We are, many generations later, the people who believe in Jesus because of the testimony of the disciples, and the disciples after them, and the disciples after them. Jesus prayed that we would be united with God the Father just as He was, so that the entire world could know God's love. Did you catch the “so that” in the middle of verse 26: “so that your love for me will be in them”? Jesus wants the entire world to know what He has always known—the internal love of God, the very love that the Father has shared with the Son since before the creation of the world! Through His prayer, Jesus demonstrates that even the generations who come after us can be prayed for, and loved, as “neighbors”!

- Is your definition of “neighbor” so inclusive as to include even generations before you and generations yet to come?
- How can you actively show neighborly love to future generations?

