

My Prayer Journal

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

Prayer of Confession:

Holy God, we pray for You to mold us into the faith of Philemon. Help us to put faith in Christ first in our lives, but to always make that faith effective through our acts of love for our community. Show us the people in our paths who are in need of the rest and refreshment that Your Holy Spirit can bring to them through our own ministries. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

My Prayers this Week:

Family Time:

Have you ever had a friend or a family member who got really sick, or who was having a really hard time and needed someone's help? Jesus taught that there are two main things that his followers needed to do—to help sick people and people who were in need, and to let people know that you are helping because that's what followers of Jesus DO! Sometimes it's easier to just help someone than to let them know you are helping because Jesus wants you to. But Christians are asked by God to both help people, and to tell people about Jesus. Think about how YOU might do both of those things at the same time!

MONDAY 9.14.20 Matthew 4:23-25; 9:35-38

Did you notice that Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 are nearly identical? In structural literary biblical analysis, these two verses form what is called an "inclusio," framing all the content that comes between them, from Matthew 4:24 through 9:34. In an "inclusio," the specific content of the bracketing verses define the thematic thrust of everything in between them—here, that Jesus' ministry focused on 1) teaching in the synagogues, 2) preaching the good news of the Kingdom, and 3) healing disease and sickness among the people. If you scan the "in-between" content, you will find the Beatitudes (Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God), proclamations of the actual inbreaking of God's Kingdom and how to be part of it, and numerous stories of healings. Throughout, Jesus demonstrates the breadth of Christian faith. As Christians, we are called to emulate Jesus in both proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God, and caring for the needs of others.

- Which of Jesus' actions are you more likely to focus on and participate in—teaching, preaching, or caring for others?
- How can you broaden the practice of your faith to include more of the others?

TUESDAY 9.15.20 Luke 10:1-17

Later, after Jesus had recruited and trained many followers, He sent out seventy-two (or seventy, in older Bible translations) of these followers, in pairs, to do what He had been doing. Notice the specific direction in verse 8—"heal the sick who are there and tell them "the Kingdom of God is near you." Again, we see the two primary tasks of followers of Christ—caring for the sick and downtrodden, and proclaiming the inbreaking of God's Kingdom. But we also have to see the frankness with which Jesus speaks to those He sends out—they go as "lambs among wolves"! Jesus does not hold back in letting these disciples know that when they go out to heal the sick and proclaim the Kingdom of God in Jesus' name, they will not always be welcomed with open arms. In fact, the imagery of "lambs among wolves" implies not only the possibility of rejection, but the potential for actual danger. Jesus was up front about what would happen to these people if they worked for Him, but also about God's response to their rejection.

- How prepared are you for the possibility of rejection, or danger, as a disciple of Jesus?
- Why do you think Jesus wanted to make sure His followers knew what they were in for? Do you know?

WEDNESDAY 9.16.20 Acts 4:32-37

Here again, in the early church, we see the followers of Christ demonstrating the breadth of their faith through the sharing of possessions with each other and caring for each others' needs, while "continuing to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." Frequently, churches and church leaders get classified as a "social justice" church or an "evangelism" church, as if the mandate to care for each others' needs and to witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ could be separated in that way. The Bible knows no such separation. The early Christians recognized Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross, vindicated through His resurrection, as the evidence that God ultimately rewards the taking of sacrificial actions on behalf of others. It was the grace of God, given through faith in Christ's resurrection, that gave them the courage to take such extreme sacrificial actions as selling property and giving the proceeds to church leaders to distribute to the needy. Without faith in the resurrection, such actions would be unthinkable, so they openly attributed their radical behavior to their faith.

- How is your faith in the resurrection determining your actions? How are you caring for the community of faith?

THURSDAY 9.17.20 Acts 9:36-43

It is no accident that this story of the raising of Tabitha emphasizes that she was "a disciple who was always doing good and helping the poor." In the Gospel of Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles (also written by Luke), doing good and helping the poor are frequently the marks of a devoted follower of Christ. Episodes in Acts frequently parallel episodes in the Gospel of Luke, because Luke's goal in Acts is to demonstrate that the same power that was at work in Jesus is at work in the apostles through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus had raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (see Luke 8:49-56), Peter (actually, the Holy Spirit) is able to raise Tabitha from the dead. Because of this great miracle, many people around Joppa came to believe in Jesus, because of Peter's proclamation that the miracle was only possible through Jesus. Furthermore, the story of Tabitha serves as a "case study," demonstrating the fact that those who follow Jesus, who are always doing good and helping the poor, will one day be raised to new life.

- How does the raising of Tabitha connect the proclamation of the gospel with the idea of caring for others? Think about both what Tabitha had been doing, and what happened to her, and what Peter had been doing, and what he did.

