

## My Prayer Journal

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

### Prayer of Confession:

*Holy God, we long to love others the way You have loved us. We give You thanks for the gift of Jesus and pray that we would grow every day in our faith in the salvation He brings. Enter into our hearts and enable us to be motivated by Your love, and not by fear. Help us to live in love. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

### My Prayers this Week:

### Family Time:

Have a conversation together about some problems that happened in the last week. Maybe fights among the kids, or disagreements with parents and kids. Talk about how those were worked through and how you came to a reconciliation. Sometimes we forget how powerful communication is when we are able to sit down and talk through issues. Take time to pray as a family on working through difficult moments and how you can each learn to live with reconciliation on your heart.

### MONDAY 12.14.20    Genesis 27:41-45; 33:1-11

The story of the feud between Isaac's twin sons Esau and Jacob is also one of the Bible's earliest stories of reconciliation. This week, we recognize that in sending Jesus to us, God was offering reconciliation between Himself and the world. In our daily readings, we will learn that God's will is for the healing of broken relationships—whether between God and us or between us and each other. Jacob and Esau were only the second generation after Abraham had been called by God to leave his homeland to settle in Canaan, having received God's promise to bless all peoples on earth through his family line. But Esau was murderously envious of his brother Jacob, forcing Jacob to flee. Note that the story of Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in Genesis 32 and 33 is only interrupted by the story of Jacob wrestling with God—the event in which Jacob receives his new name, "Israel." The placement of the story suggests that reconciliation with God, and finding our true identity in God, is a necessary precursor to reconciliation with our enemies.

- How would you describe Jacob's approach to meeting Esau, even after his struggle with God? Is he cautious? What are his expectations? What do you think this implies?

### TUESDAY 12.15.20    Isaiah 27:1-5

When Isaiah wrote his prophecies, the people of Israel had slid further and further into idolatry and evil behavior had become more and more rampant among them. Isaiah writes with the promise of a future day when the forces of evil, symbolized by "Leviathan, the monster of the sea" will be destroyed by God. Isaiah describes God's watchful and protective care of His "vineyard," the people of Israel. Yet, God acknowledges that even within His vineyard, there could be "briers and thorns" destroying His plan for a fruitful life. He acknowledges only two possibilities—He can destroy the briers and thorns, or they can choose to turn to God and seek peace. God's preference between the two is clearly demonstrated in the closing line—"yes, let them make peace with me." God's desire is not for punishment, but for reconciliation and peace. But God will not permit "Leviathan" to continue, unrestrained, with the result that his vineyard is unfruitful.

- Why do you think God uses the metaphor of a "vineyard" to describe God's people?
- Do you know any "briers and thorns" who threaten the fruitfulness of God's vineyard? Can you lead them to peace?

### WEDNESDAY 12.16.20    Hosea 11:1-11

Like Isaiah, Hosea writes of God's great love for His people, Israel. But whereas Isaiah used the metaphor of a vineyard to portray God's desire for Israel to be a fruitful people, Hosea uses the emotional language of parent and child. Israel is like an ungrateful child who does not realize all their parent has done for them. Still using the parent-child analogy, Hosea portrays God as a father who has at first opted for punishment, but whose love and compassion for His child has caused Him to change His mind. Though He was fiercely angry, He holds out hope for the day when the wayward child stumbles home, trembling, to find a home still waiting for Him. God is so hopeful that we will turn to Him for reconciliation that God restrains His own anger. The writer of the Gospel of Matthew saw these opening verses as not only a historical remembrance of Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt, but as a foreshadowing of God's protection of His son Jesus, whom Joseph had taken to Egypt to protect Him from King Herod's wrath. When Herod had died, and all was safe, God called Jesus, His son, "out of Egypt" (see Matthew 2:14-15).

- Are you able to commiserate with the voice of God here? How does this affect your self-image in relation to God?

### THURSDAY 12.17.20    Matthew 5:21-26

Today's reading from the Sermon on the Mount doesn't really mention reconciliation with God ... but it has plenty to say about our need to seek reconciliation with others. We are shocked when Jesus seems to equate uttering a mild oath toward someone else with the judgment of hellfire that we thought was reserved for murderers; when Jesus suggests our gifts to God are unacceptable if we are holding a grudge against our sibling; and when Jesus implies that our inability to resolve a minor debt without going to court will land us in the county jail. Surely this is hyperbole—exaggeration just to make a point! But the point is serious—the desire to be reconciled with our adversaries is a sign of our reconciliation with God. A failure to seek reconciliation with our adversaries is a reflection of our lack of reconciliation with God. Surely these teachings were in John's mind when he wrote the words in this week's Sunday Scripture, "those who don't love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen." Jesus is making the expectation clear—"first, go and be reconciled with your brother or sister."

- Is failure to be reconciled with someone in your life hindering your relationship with God? What can you do about it?

**FRIDAY 12.18.20**

**Romans 5:6-11**

The apostle Paul makes the reason for Jesus’ death perfectly clear—“we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.” The entire reason God sent His Son into the world, the entire reason that one week from today we will celebrate the holy day of Christmas, is that it demonstrates the lengths God has gone to in order to be reconciled with His people. Please don’t miss the past tenses Paul uses throughout this passage! “We were reconciled” ... “we have now received reconciliation.” Reconciliation with God is not something we merely hope for, it is not something that will happen when we die, but it is a gift God has already given us, if we will simply choose to receive it! Paul wants us to understand that just as Jesus’ death achieved this reconciliation with God, Jesus’ resurrection to new life has also achieved our salvation! The remaining verses in chapter 5 refer to this as God’s great gift to humanity—the gift of eternal life through the righteous obedience of one man: Jesus Christ.

- Do you feel like someone for whom reconciliation with God has already been accomplished? Or do you view your relationship with God as somewhat adversarial, as if the relationship is still strained? Why does Paul insist that this situation is already taken care of?

**SATURDAY 12.19.20**

**2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2**

Paul continues his theme of being reconciled to God in this letter to the church in Corinth. But now the emphasis has shifted from the reality of this reconciliation with God that Jesus’ death has accomplished for us to the implications of this reconciliation. As people reconciled with God, we are given the “ministry of reconciliation.” Part of the mission of persons reconciled with God is to then purposefully reach out to others to encourage them to receive the gift of reconciliation as well. This is why Paul pleads with the Corinthians: “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” When the church speaks of the “ministry of reconciliation,” it is recognizing both the reconciliation Christ has already achieved on our behalf, and the missional purpose we share in telling other people about it so they too can receive it. It all hinges on the Christmas gift of Jesus—because Jesus has made it possible for us to be reconciled with God, it is possible for us to all be reconciled with each other as well. When the world believes that God has “made peace” with us, the world will have the tools it needs to “make peace” with each other, as well. No wonder the angels boldly proclaim, in the coming of Jesus, “On earth peace, goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14, KJV).

- How are you receiving the gift of reconciliation?



Daily Study Guide

December 13-19, 2020

**Sermon Series: The Gifts of Christmas**

**Week Three: “The Gift of Reconciliation” - Rev. J. David Israel**

*Scripture for Sunday, December 13: 1 John 4:7-21*

“Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn’t love does not know God, because God is love. This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent His only Son into the world so that we can live through Him. This is love: it is not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and His love is made perfect in us. This is how we know we remain in Him and He remains in us, because He has given us a measure of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. If any of us confess that Jesus is God’s Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. We have known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God’ and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don’t love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! This commandment we have from Him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.” (CEB)

*Things that really impacted me from today’s sermon:*

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**Prayer Requests**

- Janet Rasbach
- Helen Rager
- Carol McKay
- Jim McKay
- Joe Lemaster
- Charlotte Ottley
- Delaney Digman
- Bill Reichter
- Bob Vincent
- Peggy Cruse
- Bill Cruse
- Sophia Miller
- Judy Hoffman
- Nini Schneider

Everyone affected by the COVID-19 outbreak

The Mordt and Engerer families on the loss of Fred Engerer

Family and friends of Paul Steckler

Family and friends of Thomas Bedell

Family and friends of Julian Trevino

The Kimker, Mullen, and Golden families on the loss of Brenda Mullen and Barb Golden’s stepmother, Claire Kimker

The Wells and Cleveland families on the loss of Michele Wells

Share prayer requests online at livingwordumc.org