

My Prayer Journal

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

Prayer of Confession:

Merciful God, we confess that we have not always lived up to the example set by Your Son, Jesus Christ. We confess how difficult it is to truly love the people around us; to care as deeply for their well-being as for our own. We confess how often we act out of our own self-interest, putting our needs and desires ahead of the needs of others. We confess how easy it is to do what we know is wrong; to rationalize our bad decisions and behaviors. You call us to turn away from the attitudes of the world around us, and to be renewed and transformed by Your grace at work in our lives. Through Your Holy Spirit, continue the work that You have begun in us, so that our words and deeds may bring honor and glory to You.

My Prayers this Week:

Family Time:

When we reflect on God's work in our lives we can see that sometimes we shy away from His way. We struggle sometimes to see the path He has laid out for us. As a family there are large decisions that affect all of you. Maybe it's a new job, moving to a new house or even getting a new family pet. All these decisions are led by God. Maybe this is the year you decide to start a family devotion time, or Bible study. We want to make sure we are disciples of Christ who are following God's lead in everything we do. Take time as a family to decide how you can continue to be disciples of Christ.

MONDAY 1.18.21

Matthew 6:22-7:29

Today's reading brings Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to a close. The section begins with Jesus' teaching on wealth. The point is not to give rules about the use of money, they are about the fact that wealth is the primary competition God has for our allegiance. But if we aren't to be concerned with money, won't we worry about how our basic needs will be met? This thought provides a natural progression to Jesus' teaching on anxiety, which advises us to "seek first God's Kingdom," trusting that God will care for those who actively participate in building His Kingdom. Jesus' basic teaching on judgment begins chapter 7—while we do have to make judgments in our lives, we are to make them charitably and ensuring we have done some serious self-analysis first. The sermon concludes with the Golden Rule, and the fact that the exceedingly demanding ethical teaching Jesus has laid before us forces us to make a choice. Which road will we take? Where will we establish our foundation? Jesus warns us to watch out for those who will sway us away from what He says. No wonder those who listened were "amazed" by Jesus' teaching!

- How do you discern the "wise choice" from the "foolish choice"? What makes the "easy road" attractive to you?

TUESDAY 1.19.21

Matthew 8:1-34

From the beginning of chapter 8 through chapter 9, Matthew moves away from focusing on Jesus' teaching to focusing on His miraculous deeds. By introducing Jesus to the reader in this way, Matthew presents Jesus as Messiah in both word and deed. Ten miracles of Jesus will be narrated—nine healings and one "nature miracle." Here in chapter 8, we see Jesus healing a man with leprosy through touch, we see Jesus healing a young man from a distance (and this, a Gentile!), we see Jesus heal Peter's mother-in-law of fever, and we see Jesus heal many who were possessed by demons, including two men who were extraordinarily violent. And yet, in the midst of witnessing these miracles, the disciples fear they will drown when a storm arises at sea. The church has long interpreted this story as a demonstration of our need to trust Jesus in the face of adversity. But don't miss the fact that Matthew emphasizes the disciples' reaction after Jesus' calms the seas—"What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!" In the story yet to come, the debate and disagreement about just who this Jesus really is will take center stage.

- Do you tend to focus more on Jesus' words or Jesus' deeds in your faith life? How do both Jesus' words and deeds demonstrate Jesus' unique authority?

WEDNESDAY 1.20.21

Matthew 9:1-38

While chapter 9 begins with another healing narrative, this time of a paralyzed man, the theme of forgiveness of sins is now introduced into a healing story for the first time. In fact, the healing itself seems almost secondary, as Jesus only does it "so that you may know the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins"! We may also be surprised to recognize that in Matthew's telling of the story, only Peter, Andrew, James, and John have been called as disciples through all of these teaching and healing stories. The calling of Matthew himself, the "sinful" tax collector, comes immediately after the declaration of Jesus' authority to forgive sins! The healing of the paralyzed man and Jesus' dinner with the tax collectors and sinners also introduce Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who begin to challenge and question Jesus' practices. The role of faith in Jesus as a precursor to healing begins to be emphasized, as a sick woman, the father of a dead girl, and two blind men express faith in Jesus prior to their healings. As news about Jesus spreads, the Jewish leaders try to spread the rumor that Jesus acts with Satan's power, leading Matthew to call the people "sheep without a shepherd."

- How have healing and faith been linked in your life?

THURSDAY 1.21.21

Matthew 10:1-42

Chapter 10 contains what is known as Jesus' "Second Discourse" (after the first, the Sermon on the Mount), and is also referred to as "The Missionary Discourse." Matthew organizes Jesus' teachings into five "discourses," somewhat parallel to the five books of Torah, with healings, miracles, travels, and other events coming in between the teaching discourses. The teaching in this second discourse presents instructions concerning the missionary work of Jesus' twelve disciples, who are finally named as a group in the opening verses. Jesus shares his authority to proclaim the kingdom with them, empowering them to heal sickness and exorcise demons. Jesus lets them know that in the course of their work, they might be welcomed, but they might also encounter persecution, or be maligned when it is learned who they represent. He makes clear that the coming of the Kingdom is divisive, and yet the disciples are to boldly do their work without fear, knowing their eternal lives are in God's hands. Those who do Kingdom work in Jesus' name are assured of receiving their reward.

- What do you expect to encounter as a Kingdom-worker? What does it say to you about Jesus that He is so up front with His disciples about the realities of Kingdom work?

