

THURSDAY – May 7th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: By your grace, help me...to love as you love.

God of everlasting love, you created us in love and to love. You made us to love you and one another. We confess that Jesus is Your Son and the source of our salvation. He is also the source of our love. Forgive us when we fail to love. In your Son's Holy name we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:7-21

KEY VERSES: 1 John 4:16-21

(16) “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. (17) In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. (18) There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (19) We love because he first loved us. (20) If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. (21) And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (NIV).

Twice in today's scripture is the definition, “God is love.” The first time occurs in verse 8 and now we see it in verse 16. Our love is made perfect and in this sense, perfect means complete. None of us knows exactly what happens when we die, but those of us who have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, have the hope of eternal life with God in heaven. Yes, we must face judgment, but if we love God, love the Lord Jesus, and love one another, then we have the right to be bold and we will have no reason to fear the Day of Judgment. The child of God does not need to fear any judgment which is coming. It was all settled when Christ died for us.

God alone is worthy of our love, but we are still commanded to love one another. John says that anyone who says he loves God, but hates his brother, is a liar. Those are strong words. To say that we love God, but not our brothers also makes us hypocrites. If we do not love one another, then we do not love God. We must demonstrate God's love in our lives and in our service. That is one of the commandments on our road to redemption. Hallelujah! Christ is risen! The love of the risen Lord abides in us. Let us live in love.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; Matthew 22:37-39

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. In what ways am I 'dedicated' to the Lord?
2. Do I demonstrate God's love in my daily walk?
3. Am I living a lie, by saying that I love God, but am secretly holding a grudge against my brother or sister in the Lord?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Look up all the verses in the Bible containing the words love and neighbor.
2. Make an honest appraisal of your relationships.
3. Continue to reach out to someone from whom you are estranged.

God of power and life, I know your commandments. Help me to keep your word in my heart that I may not sin against you. Open my eyes to opportunities to demonstrate your love to the world. In Your Son's Holy Name, I pray. Amen.

FRIDAY – May 8th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Help me remain in you...on my journey.

Gracious God, without you, we can do nothing. You have called us as your children, sons and daughters, heirs of salvation. Remove from our lives that which would hinder us in our journey of faith. In your Son's Holy name we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: John 15:1-8

KEY VERSES: John 15: 1-4

(1) "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. (2) He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (3) You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (4) Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (NIV).

We all have areas of our life that need pruning. Sometimes God's pruning is painful. But it is always necessary. If we are to bear fruit, then we must be pruned. This is a very familiar section of scripture and as a result, we may over look its importance in our lives. What kind of fruit are we as Christians supposed to bear? The first thing that comes to mind is Galatians 5: 22,-23a, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* While these virtues or graces are important, there are other fruits we need to consider.

In Romans 1:13, Paul speaks of winning souls to Christ and helping them grow as a kind of fruit. Romans 15:25-28, speaks of contributing to the poor as a fruit. Certainly in today's economic environment, there are many opportunities to help the poor. Praising God and giving thanks is a fruit we all too often tend to neglect. In all the Gospels, we see Jesus praising his Father and giving thanks to Him. Should we do any less? Hallelujah! Christ is risen! Let us give thanks and bear fruit.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Romans 13; Romans 15:25-28

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. Is my life bearing fruit for God? Are there areas that need pruning?
2. Am I a thankful person, giving thanks to God always?
3. What graces do I exhibit to show a Christ-like character?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Volunteer at a food bank or homeless shelter.
2. Look for opportunities to help someone grow in the faith. Become a mentor to a new Christian.
3. Consider leading a small group. Pray about it.

Creator God, fill my life with an abundance of you. Make me fruitful and thankful. Keep me close so I may become more like your Son, my Lord and Savior. In his holy name, I pray. Amen.

SATURDAY – May 9th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Let my life be lived...for your Glory.

Glorious God, we love you and we long to be with you forever, but we know that much work remains to be done here on earth. There are still souls to be harvested. Give us boldness and wisdom as we seek to do your will in all things. In your Son's Holy name we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: John 15:1-8

KEY VERSES: John 15: 5-8

(5) "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (7) If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. (8) This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (NIV)

One characteristic of a branch bearing fruit is that it produces a product identical to itself. One way we show ourselves to be disciples is by producing other disciples. Matthew 9:37 reads, "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.' This has always been the case and in our society today, it seems that the workers are becoming fewer and fewer. That must mean that we are not doing our job of producing disciples.

How do we know when we are making disciples? How did Jesus transform the hearts and minds of the ordinary men into disciples? Discipleship is spiritual formation. It is not our job to convert people to Christ. It is our job to plant the seed and then let the Holy Spirit work in the life of the non-believer. Once someone accepts Christ, it is our job to nurture them and help them grow in the faith. In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth." Yes, God causes the belief in God, but baby Christians need a mature Christian to help strengthen their faith. We all become weak in the faith at various times in our lives, without another disciple to strengthen us; our faith may get choked out by the weeds.

God intends for us to be a light to the world, just as he is a light to us. This is why he gave the gospel to us. It is a tool we use to reach the lost. It is God's power to save souls. We all have the witness of what God has done in our lives. We can start by sharing that message with someone. Hallelujah! Christ is risen! And he works with us and through us to make disciples.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Acts 2:36-38; Romans 1:16

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. When was the last time I witnessed to someone about Christ?
2. Do I consider myself equipped to 'make disciples'?
3. Am I a good example of what a Christian ought to be?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Consider taking a small group study in evangelism.
2. Read your Bible daily. We cannot be witnesses about that which we do not know.

Abba, Father, there is none like you. Make me an example of godly courage and conviction. Make me a bold witness of the faith which sustains me. Let my life be a letter to the world. In your Son's Holy Name, I pray. Amen.