



PRAYER JOURNAL

This week, I will praise God for...

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I will ask God for...

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I will thank God for...

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I need to confess...

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I will pray for others...

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MONDAY

READ → **Matthew 12:33-37**

³³ "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in them, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in them. ³⁶ But I tell you that people will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

REFLECT → You can tell a lot about people by the bumper stickers they have on their cars. You can tell if a person has a good sense of humor, prefers vacationing at the beach, likes to debate politics, is concerned about the environment, or perhaps has a nasty streak—all by what the car's bumper sticker says.

In a similar way, people can tell a lot about us by what we say. Jesus says the words we speak reflect what is in our hearts. If we are holding a grudge or are jealous—if we are harboring anger or hatred in our hearts—it's going to show in the way we speak to others. We might put people down, be short-tempered—we might even bite our best friend's head off, even though we're not mad at that person. (That's happened before, right?)

When we clear out all that junk, we can allow compassion and forgiveness and love to take its place, and we can start speaking the encouraging and uplifting language that Jesus would have us speak.

RESPOND → Reflect for a few minutes on what is in your heart and how it affects how you speak to others. What kind of junk are you allowing to clutter up your heart? Spend some time in prayer and give that junk to God. Ask God to fill your heart, instead, with compassion, forgiveness, and love.

TUESDAY

READ → **Galatians 5:16-26**

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

REFLECT → This passage tells us that the sinful nature and the Spirit of God are in conflict with each other. What, do you think, does that mean? Does the Scripture seem to allow any room for compromise? The Apostle Paul wrote this passage. What, do you think, would Paul say about a person who calls himself a Christian but often partakes in the acts of the sinful nature?

We know that Jesus died so that our sins could be forgiven. But this passage tells us to avoid the things that would have us needing forgiveness in the first place. Instead, we should chase after God's holiness.

RESPOND → Memorize verses 22 and 23. Which of these fruits are in full bloom in your life? Which ones still need to ripen? How can you work on those in the coming week?

WEDNESDAY

READ → **John 15:1-10**

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, as I also 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.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are 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 done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

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REFLECT → Orchard owners often prune the fruit trees. They cut off the useless branches. The trees had been expending energy on the useless branches, but now that they are gone, more energy can be used for the growing of fruit—the trees' real purpose.

As Christians, our purpose is to grow fruit, too (as defined in yesterday's devo). Jesus says that God cuts off every branch that bears no fruit. If God were pruning you, what would get cut off? In other words, what gets in the way of your living your life as a full follower of Jesus Christ?

RESPOND → Find a quiet, private place to meditate on that question. Ask God to reveal to you anything that is keeping you from being a faithful follower and needs to be cut out.

THURSDAY

READ → **Ephesians 4:25-32**

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Those who have been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

REFLECT → This passage could almost be used as a checklist for Christian living.

Do you speak truthfully? When do you find it difficult to do so? Are there any falsehoods that you should clear up?

Anger itself is not a sin, but we can be drawn into sin if we handle our anger poorly. Are you good at dealing with anger?

Did you know that copying a friend's CD is stealing? It's true. If you have it but didn't pay for it, it's stolen.

What about verse 29? If you were giving yourself a letter grade on how well you did with that in the past week, what would it be?

Reread verses 31 and 32. Are you holding on to any anger or bitterness? Are you openly compassionate and forgiving?

RESPOND → Pray about the answers to these questions. Ask God to continue to bless you with strength in the areas where you're doing well, and for more strength for the areas that need improving.

FRIDAY

READ → **James 3:3-12**

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by human beings, ⁸ but no one can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

REFLECT → Do you remember a time when somebody said something that made you feel really great? How about something that made you feel awful? Did you ever say something that made somebody else feel awful? How did you feel about that?

We wield a lot of power with our little tongues. The Bible compares them to the little things that steer ships and start forest fires.

Reread verses 9 and 10. What lesson do these verses have for our everyday conversations?

RESPOND → Carefully consider the words you are about to use before you speak. Remember that Jesus would have us speak to others as though we were speaking to him.

SATURDAY

READ → **Proverbs 6:16-19**

¹⁶ There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:

¹⁷ haughty eyes,

a lying tongue,

hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,

¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up dissension in the community.

1 John 2:15-17

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful people, the lust of their eyes and their boasting about what they have and do—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

REFLECT → The Bible tells us not to get mixed up in the things that would cause us to stumble in our walks with God. Some of the things mentioned here include bragging, lying, being conceited, and seeking revenge. Society offers up plenty of other stumbling blocks, too. What are some that you can think of? What stumbling blocks have you struggled with in the past? Which ones are an issue for you right now?

RESPOND → In prayer, confess how it is that you might be stumbling in your walk with God. Ask for clear guidance and the strength to avoid these temptations. It might also be helpful to find a youth leader, pastor, or Sunday school teacher who you can talk to and pray about these things together.