



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 | THE VINEYARD OWNER

READ → **Matthew 20:13-15**

¹³ "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?'
¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

REFLECT → Jesus told a parable about a man who owned a vineyard. At six in the morning, he went out to hire some people to work for the day, offering to pay each of them \$100 for the day. So, they agree and go to work.

The man goes out at 9:00, noon, and 3:00 and hires some more workers.

At 5:00, the vineyard owner goes into town once again and finds some people who hadn't found work all day. He tells them to go to work at his place.

When 6:00 comes around and the workers line up to collect their pay, the owner pays them *all* \$100! The workers who had been there only an hour can't believe it! But those who had been there all day began to complain, saying it wasn't fair because they had worked for 12 hours and got paid the same as some who had worked for only one.

The owner says: Hang on a second. I'm not treating you unfairly. I paid you exactly what we agreed to this morning. You're just mad because I decided to be generous to those who came later.

Jesus says the kingdom of Heaven is like this. There are people who go to church since the day they are born. They develop a relationship with God early in life and strive to live according to Jesus' teachings. Then, there are people who go through most of their lives not knowing God at all. They get into some pretty nasty things and aren't very concerned with pleasing God. Only later in life do they come to know God and get themselves on the right path for eternity.

Jesus says the latecomer's reward will be just as awesome as those who have been on the right path for their entire lives.

The temptation is to say: That's not fair! I've lived my entire life being careful to do the things Jesus would have me do. I have avoided bad parties; I have sacrificed popularity, all to please God. This guy has lived like a scoundrel, drunk all the time, bullying people...and now that he has "seen the light," he gets the same reward I do?

But before we give in to that temptation, let's consider something that truly is unfair: Jesus had to die so that we could live forever. Eternity is his gift, and he can give it to whomever he wants. He chooses to offer it to everyone who accepts it.

RESPOND → In prayer today, pray for those who do not yet know God. Ask God for the opportunity to introduce somebody to God. And ask God for the courage to make the most of that opportunity.

TUESDAY | PEACE OF MIND

READ → **John 10:27-28**

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

REFLECT → Yesterday, we talked about the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. The vineyard owner went out throughout the day and hired workers. At the end of the day, he paid the ones who worked only a few hours the same amount as he had promised to pay those who worked all day. The point of the story being that the promise of Heaven is for everybody, including those who don't start working for the kingdom until later in life.

Today, we are going to consider the story from a different perspective: someone who didn't get hired until 5:00. He had been waiting all day for an opportunity to work. Nothing had come up. By noon, he was really starting to worry. Without the day's wages, how would he be able to buy dinner for his family? How would he pay for a room that night? His future was very uncertain.

In contrast, somebody who had been hired at 6:00 that morning had peace of mind. He was secure in the knowledge that his wages would provide for his family that night.

We have that same kind of peace of mind because we are followers of Jesus Christ. We don't have to worry about our eternity. Our future is secure.

Those who do not know Jesus do not enjoy this certainty about their future. As Christians, charged with loving our neighbors, it's our job to help them find it.

RESPOND → Pray today, as you did yesterday, for those who do not yet know God, for an opportunity to introduce somebody to God, and for the courage to make the most of that opportunity.

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WEDNESDAY | THE LOWLIEST OF JOBS

READ → **John 13:4-5, 13-15**

⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.

¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

REFLECT → With dirt roads and sandals for footwear, people's feet would get really dirty as they went about their day. In most places, there would be a basin of water inside the door so that people could wash off their feet when they came in. In nicer homes, there might be somebody who would wash your feet for you.

There certainly wasn't a lot of honor or prestige in being a foot washer. It was the lowliest of jobs. So imagine the disciples' horror when Jesus got up from the dinner table and started washing their feet!

Afterwards, Jesus told them that he had set an example for them—and for us. We are to serve others. Often times, serving others isn't easy, convenient, or pleasant. But if the Son of God was willing to wash people's dirty, stinky feet, what job are we justified in not doing for someone else?

Every day, we are presented with opportunities to serve. We often pass up these opportunities, saying it's too hard, we're too busy, or we just don't like that person. But would these excuses wash with Jesus? Probably not.

RESPOND → Think of some ways in which you can serve others. Write down these ideas and continue to reflect on them. Then, in prayer, ask God to help you think of others more than yourself and to help you become the servant that Jesus would want you to be.

THURSDAY | GET IT?

READ → **Luke 19:5-7**

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

REFLECT → You may remember the story of Zacchaeus. He really wanted to see Jesus, but he "was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he." So, he climbed up into a big tree so that he could catch a glimpse of Jesus as he passed by. The only thing is, Jesus didn't pass by. He stopped. He looked up, told Zacchaeus to come down, and invited himself to dinner.

This sent a shockwave through the crowd. Gasp! Jesus is going to hang out with a *sinner*! (Zacchaeus was a tax collector and had apparently swindled a lot of people out of a lot of money.)

The crowd didn't get it. Of course Jesus was going to spend time with a sinner. What did they think he was here for? After all, it isn't healthy people who need a doctor. Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost. They didn't get it.

Wouldn't it be awful if we still didn't get it? Wouldn't it be just terrible if the nastiest bully or the biggest druggie at school came to our youth group and wasn't made to feel welcome because he didn't belong there? If that happened, it would run counter to everything we say we stand for.

RESPOND → How can we make sure that all people are welcomed into our youth group, regardless of who they are or how they live their lives?

FRIDAY | SHEEP AND GOATS

READ → **Philippians 2:3-4**

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

REFLECT → In Matthew 21:35-46, Jesus tells the story of the sheep and the goats. It's about Judgment Day, when all people will be separated into two groups.

To the first group, he will say: Come with me. You have done well. When you saw me hungry, you gave me something to eat. When you saw me without clothes, you gave me something to wear. You cared for me when I was sick and visited with me when I was lonely.

The people in the first group will be confused because they have never seen Jesus in such poor conditions. But he will tell them: Whenever you cared for one of your brothers or sisters, neighbors or strangers in need, you cared for me.

To the second group, he will say: Get away from me. When you saw me in need, you neglected me.

The second group will also be confused, wondering when they ever saw Jesus in need. And he will tell them: Whenever you did not care for one of your brothers or sisters, neighbors or strangers in need, you did not care for me.

RESPOND → Jesus considers your treatment of others equivalent to your treatment of him. Think about that as you interact with those around you each day.

SATURDAY | THE HIRED HAND

READ → **John 10:11-13**

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

REFLECT → The hired hand doesn't care about the sheep. For him, this is just a job. Hey, if something happens to the sheep, he can just get another job. He's certainly not going to risk his life fighting with the wolves, just to save the dumb sheep.

But the shepherd, now that's different. The sheep are his. They belong to him. He has spent his entire life caring for the flock. He was there when they were born. He has cared for them, nurtured them, made sure they've had food, and kept them safe.

To the hired hand, they all look the same. But the shepherd knows each one's name. The shepherd recognizes each one's bleat.

The shepherd will give up his life without a second thought if it means saving his sheep. That's what Jesus did for you and me.

RESPOND → What is the most appropriate way to respond to the unconditional love that Jesus gives us? It's trying our very best to show that same kind of love to everyone we meet.