



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 | A HOLY PLACE FOR GOD

READ → Exodus 8:25

²⁵ Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land."

Exodus 40:34-35

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

REFLECT → God has always wanted to be present with us rather than being far off and inaccessible. In the beginning, God walked through the Garden of Eden and chatted with Adam and Eve.

In the days of Moses, God appeared before the Israelites as a pillar of cloud during the daytime and a pillar of fire at night, and led them on their journey. When the Israelites camped, God wanted a place to live among the people.

So, at God's direction, the Tabernacle was built. Because of the nomadic nature of the Israelites, the Tabernacle was really a big tent that could be folded up and carried across the desert. But it was made with the greatest care of the finest fabrics. The furnishings were all constructed of gold and other precious materials. Great care was taken in the care and upkeep of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Everything was routinely cleaned and purified by people who did that as their fulltime jobs. And there were strict laws governing the cleanliness of the people who entered the Tabernacle. In short, the house of God was not to be tainted by impurities.

These same laws and purification rituals were transferred to the permanent Temple when it was built after the Israelites settled in the Promised Land.

RESPOND → Today, the Temple is no longer there. We no longer have the tradition of going to a place where God lives. Instead, we know that *God lives within each of us*. That's what we call the Holy Spirit. That's why somebody might say, "My body is a Temple." Knowing about the care that was taken to keep the Tabernacle free of impurities, what steps should you take to make sure that your body remains a holy place fit for God to live in?

TUESDAY | TAKE OUT THE TRASH!

READ → 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

REFLECT → A few years ago there was some controversy in the trucking industry. It had to do with the same trailers being used to haul both garbage and food. Trailers would be full of garbage and then rinsed out and used to haul produce and grain. Most people didn't know this kind of thing was going on. Once they found out, there was a huge uproar over this unsanitary practice. People felt that no amount of cleaning would make a trailer safe for hauling food once it had been befouled by rotting garbage. You wouldn't take the garbage can out from under your kitchen sink, wash it out, and use it as a punch bowl, would you? Legislation was introduced to make it illegal to use the same trailers for hauling both food and garbage.

Yesterday, we talked about how the Tabernacle was kept clean. Much care was taken to insure that the house of God didn't become impure. We also talked about how God now lives within each of us. "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit."

Tomorrow, we'll talk about the awesome cleaning and purifying power that comes through the grace of God.

But today, we're going to talk about the garbage that we allow into our bodies and minds. We sometimes allow ourselves to become befouled--unfit, really, for God to take up residence within us.

Our physical bodies are our gifts from God. Taking care of these gifts, by eating healthy, practicing good hygiene, and avoiding stuff like smoking, drinking, and drugs, brings honor to God.

It also goes beyond our physical being and into our spiritual being. Sexual immorality, stealing, inappropriate conversations, gossip, cursing, cheating--it's like having a garbage dump right in the middle of God's living room.

RESPOND → Take out the trash! Spend some time in quiet, meditative prayer, contemplating the things that might be "junking up" your relationship with God. Make a list of things you can work on and set about making your personal house of God free from impurities.

WEDNESDAY | WHEN WE MESS UP ROYALLY

READ → Psalm 51:6-9

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

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- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

REFLECT → We know that God dwells within us and that means we should try our best to keep ourselves free of things that God would find undesirable. At the same time, we're not perfect and we sometimes mess up.

King David messed up. In fact, the king messed up royally! He had an affair with a woman named Bathsheba who was married to a man named Uriah. When Bathsheba became pregnant, David tried to trick Uriah by calling him in from the battlefield, getting him drunk, and sending him home to be with his wife. Everybody would think the baby was Uriah's and David would have covered up the scandal. The only thing was, Uriah was an honorable man and he refused to go home to sleep in his comfortable bed while all his friends were risking their lives on the battlefield. Instead, he slept on the ground at the city gate. David tried again the next day, but the same thing happened. Finally, David gave orders to his army general to abandon Uriah during the battle so he would be killed. With Uriah dead, David took Bathsheba as his wife and he went on as though nothing had ever happened.

God was quite displeased with his actions and sent the prophet Nathan to call David on the carpet. (It's amazing how Nathan goes about accusing the king of his wrongdoing. Read about it in 2 Samuel 12.) When confronted with his sin, David immediately acknowledges his offense. He wrote Psalm 51 as his confession and plea for forgiveness. Even though God was unhappy with what David had done, Nathan assured him that God had forgiven him and would continue to love him.

RESPOND → There is nothing we can do to cause God to stop loving us, but that does not mean that we don't have to acknowledge those times when we mess up. Spend some time in prayer, giving consideration to sins you may have committed. Confess them to God. God will forgive you and will continue to love you.

THURSDAY | HE HELPED ANYWAY

READ → **Leviticus 19:18**

¹⁸ "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

REFLECT → Jesus is so famous for telling us to love our neighbors as ourselves that sometimes we think he said it first. In fact, the idea goes all the way back to the beginning of the Bible. God has always wanted us to have a high regard for the people we share this world with.

But what does it mean to *love* our neighbors, exactly? If you love somebody, doesn't that actually mean you really, really, really, really like that person? Doesn't it imply romance or, at least, quite a bit of fondness?

Well, Jesus would say that you don't have to like someone to love that person. In fact, you don't even have to *know* that person to love him. In his well-known "love your neighbor" story, the *Good Samaritan*, the two men had never met. Moreover, there was racial tension between the two men. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be social outcasts, undesirable people. Really, the Samaritan had no reason to help the other man—and, possibly, some reasons *not* to help him. But he did anyway.

The Bible tells us that if we see a person in need and have the ability to meet that need, but we do nothing about it, we do not have the love of God in us.

So, our directive is to use whatever we have to be a blessing in the lives of those around us. That includes people we don't know and people we don't particularly like.

RESPOND → What are some ways in which you can "love your neighbor?" Is

there somebody you haven't been particularly loving to? Is there something you can do to correct that?

FRIDAY | SLAP IN THE FACE

READ → **Matthew 5:38-39**

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'
³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.

REFLECT → This is a difficult Scripture because, at first, it looks like Jesus is telling us we aren't allowed to defend ourselves if somebody is trying to harm us. Well, let's take a look at the context of the word "slaps."

Have you ever heard the phrase, "That was a real 'slap in the face'?" It means, *that was really insulting*. Yeah, it hurts, but being slapped in the face is more of an insult than a physical injury.

In Jesus' day, the law literally said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." It was intended to have a justice system where the punishment would fit the crime: if you injured somebody, your sentence would be an equal injury; if you stole something from somebody, your sentence would be replacing it with your own property.

Unfortunately, people started using the law to justify seeking their own revenge rather than going through the justice system. This is at the heart of Jesus' teaching: don't have a vengeful nature, have a forgiving nature.

When somebody insults us, calls us a name, or says something else mean, we generally want to retaliate—say something equally hurtful to really put that person in his place. It's human nature. But Jesus calls us to rise above human nature. Jesus would say that *God is love*, and love does not keep track of wrongdoing and does not seek revenge. Love is kind and love forgives.

RESPOND → There will come a time when you will really want to strike back because somebody is being a real bonehead. But if you do strike back, doesn't that make you equally boneheaded? Wouldn't it be better to let others see you demonstrate the love of Jesus and "turn the other cheek?"

SATURDAY | LOVE UNEXPECTED

READ → **Romans 13:9-10**

⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," [] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [] ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

REFLECT → This passage says, "Love does no harm to its neighbor," which is true. But don't read this as though all Jesus wants you to do is refrain from being nasty to people. Jesus is actually expecting a little more from us. He expects us to *actively* care for and attend to other people—even people we don't know or don't particularly like. In fact, *especially* those we don't know or don't like.

Feeding the hungry and going on mission trips are good examples of the kind of love Jesus expects from us. But it can be simpler, too. Love can be a word of encouragement. It can be being a friend to someone who has none. It can be mowing the grass for the old lady who lives down the street and then visiting with her for a while.

RESPOND → There is somebody you can love—somebody who isn't expecting it from you. Who is that person? What can you do to actively show that person the kind of love Jesus is wanting from you?