

August Prayers

Week 1

The Bible – what a gift. God empowered people to record all those words in a plan so large it's above perceiving.

Paul was one of those fellows who had been one of the chief opponents of the developing church of Christ. Not just an opponent, he was an activist who persecuted with violence. But he became the busiest missionary/evangelist on record as well as the most prolific writer. He clarified what it meant to be a Christian. He spotlighted the joys of it, but he didn't duck the difficulties. Even while writing about specific issues at specific places, Paul was empowered by God to make a record for humankind of every future day.

An air of loving support blends in with the instructions of Paul's writings. Naturally so, because it all echoes the teachings of Jesus. The love makes the challenges come alive. One of the best examples of how Paul did that is in his Letter to the Ephesians:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is...against the forces of evil... Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground... Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” (from Eph. 6:10-18)

Monday. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...for it is light that makes everything visible. That is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'" (from Eph. 5:8-14)

Dear Lord, shine on me today, I pray. Have I been a "sleeper, " drowsing along in apathy? Have I been a taker, seldom giving? If so, it seems from this Scripture that I might as well be dead, at least as far as my connection with you is concerned. Rouse me, Lord, and make me into one of your lights here in my world. You want me to be a light that makes your love visible, and not just for me, but for people around me. To do it, I need the power of your love, so that is what I pray for today. And I also pray...

Tuesday. "Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." (Eph. 5:15-17)

Father, whatever wisdom I have on my own is, after all, your gift to me. I unabashedly ask for yet more of your wisdom. Whatever I know of your will is also your gift to me. I ask for more of that gift so I may be increasingly confident of what you want me to do. Then I can use the kind of care Paul tells about. Otherwise, on my own, I am bound to make foolish choices and do foolish things. Come to my aid so that when opportunity to act within your will comes, I can know it and follow it speedily and well. Thank you, my God, for your word which shows me how desperately I need you. I pray also for...

Wednesday. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)

Dear Lord Jesus, like your servant Paul, I too need to live only within the context of who you are. Help me to understand how to give myself up to you – daily. Help me to experience the delight of having you live within me – daily. Help me every day to see beyond my own self, beyond the commonplace matters which so

easily capture my attention. They are of small and paltry meaning at the end of it all. Help me to grow in a faith which soars and takes me into a continuing familiarity with what life in you really means. This, I start to see, is *living* – true living as you intend it to be. Like Paul, that is what I want. Increase my wanting, I pray. Thank you for showing me these things through your word and the examples of others. Now, I pray for...

Thursday. “In Christ’s family there can be no division in Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ’s family, then you are Abraham’s famous ‘descendants,’ heirs according to the covenant promises.” (Gal. 3:26-29, *The Message*)

Lord, as much as you love us individually, you love us equally – how glorious is your loving power and how grateful I am to be encircled in it. Thank you for your word which affirms the tradition of your love from the beginning of time through all the generations of every kind of person in every kind of place and circumstance. And it will never end. What a wonderful thing to know! It is both thrilling and comforting. Keep me deeply conscious of it. Keep me joyful in the knowledge that I am in your family. Thank you, my gracious Lord and Savior. I pray now for...

Friday. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.” “So, I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Gal. 5:1, 13, 16)

Dear Lord, the gift of freedom is both stupendous and scary. It is a thrill knowing that I can choose you. But it is frightening to think that I might not – that I might enslave myself to a sadly sinful life. So while I thank you for the freedom, I pray that you will lead me to use it wisely. I will live by the Spirit but only as you support me in the choices I make. So I ask once again for your nonstop guidance in all I think and do and am. You show

me a life in which all that can be mine and, at the same time, I can serve others because of the love you teach me about. Show me how to be alert to the needs of others. And not just their physical or material needs. Help me support them in prayer and in other ways as they have need of spiritual growth. Serving others is what you tell me to do; guide me so that I may obey your commands. I pray also for...

Saturday. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph. 5:19-21)

Father, I come to ask that you will be present in persuasive and obvious ways as we meet to worship in our church tomorrow. Make our songs, our thoughts, our words and our understanding all be centered in you. We so need you among us. Otherwise, being there doesn't have much meaning. We need to leave our worries and hurts and resentments and ambitions at your feet, and we need to do so as one body, relishing the togetherness. You and you alone can satisfy such needs. So within the confidence of your loving promises, I pray for these things. And I pray also for...

Week 2

Imagining God

What can our imaginations do for us when we think about God? Can we conjure up an image of God just by thinking about it? Some of the people in the Old Testament tried figuring it out on their own and, alas, just created idols they could see and touch. So that didn't work.

Understanding God begins with a simple statement: **God is love** (1 John 4:8). God defines love. He is defined by love. He is the source of love. Understanding God is a life process which begins with love.

The New Testament makes it clear in several places that Christ, as the Son of God, embodies God's image. He lived and taught and died and was resurrected in an astounding demonstration of love. It was all about love. He talked about it straightforwardly: the most important thing for us to do is love God. When we discover love, we discover God. As we discover God, we discover growing love. Then comes an amazing power. A power to love others. A power to live in a steady awareness of God. A power to know God personally and daily in everything we do, everything we are.

Using our imaginations? Foolish and pointless. Our small abilities to imagine, even stretched to the limit, won't take us there. But when we open ourselves to God's limitless love, we're carried into the very presence of a God we can reside with and walk with and **know**.

"...love comes from God" (1 John 4:7)

"...God has poured out his love into our hearts" (Rom. 5:5)

God is love.

Monday. “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Cor. 13:1)

Father, thank you for the *gift of me*. I am who I am through the complexities of family history and circumstances and the rest of your plan to construct the person I am. It has all come together to be the gift of the life you have given me. Whatever good and productive things I have done with that gift were the direct result of your guidance – even when I didn’t ask for it and didn’t know it. Thank you! The contrary and perverse things were of my own doing – I confess that and ask your forgiveness. How could I ever have insulted so marvelous a gift by ignoring the love that brought it about? Keep me from being superficial, from being hollow with a false front. Fill me with the richness of your love, Lord. And I pray...

Tuesday. “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:2)

God, thank you for this message; it’s plain that without your love, I will amount to little. I confess: where I take pride in my own strengths, I am only arrogant; where I try to contrive a “faith” of my own making, I am only foolish; even if the person I project looks fine, it is merely a fraud unless your love is the source of who I am. Give me continuing reminders of this, I pray. Keep me aware that it is only your love that fulfills me as a person, as your child, as the user of the abilities you have given me. I also pray for...

Wednesday. “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:3)

God, what does this mean – maybe that we can get so caught up in the idea of doing good works that we forget what is even more important: being caught up in your love? If that’s it, forgive us. Do we get one-sided and think it’s all only about doing good things? If so, do we run the risk of feeling guilty when we don’t think we’re doing enough of those good things? Or maybe even feeling competitive with others about it? Or feel like martyrs to

the cause - a prideful state of affairs?! If so, forgive us. Thank you for your word which warns us. Keep us clear-minded about all this, God, and let us concentrate first on accepting your love so we will, in turn, love others unconditionally. Then cause that love to be the force which leads us to do the good works you lead us to do. I pray too for...

Thursday. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Dear God, what beautiful and clear words you give us here. They leave no doubt about what your love will mean in our lives. Thank you! Give us all full measures of this love which causes us to be patient, humble, selfless, thoughtful, even-tempered, and forgiving. Teach us how to exercise that kind of love with everyone, beginning at home. (We confess that way too often we use the relaxed freedom of where we live *not* to love – holding grudges, being rude and thoughtless, thinking only about ourselves.) And help us carry through with that kind of love everywhere else we go. Teach us how to *rejoice* about this kind of loving. Lead us into a peace where we leave worry behind, knowing that you will sustain us and we will overcome – we really will persevere under your protection. We thank you as we praise you. I pray today also for...

Friday. "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away." "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:8, 13)

Father, thank you for the truth of your promises which are timeless and for your love which will preserve us always. Nothing else compares. You give us faith. You give us hope. But most of all, you give us love. Help us to comprehend it, to take it in so that we may love you absolutely and praise you fully. And so that we may be witnesses of your love to others. I pray also for...

Saturday. “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Cor. 13:11, 12)

Lord, thank you for your word and for the witness of your people, for these give me sound teaching so that I may learn about you. As I look back, I am humbled by the things I've learned. But that same reflection also makes me joyful about what I have yet to discover about you, about your kingdom, about your love – I've got the rest of my life to live with you. What I already know is that I can be equipped at all times to deal with life as it comes, because you are always there beside me. Thank you. Help me never to forget it. Help me to trust in you without wasting time worrying about the mysteries of the future. Help me to rest in your love in all my circumstances. Help me to enjoy my journey with you. And I now pray for...

Week 3

“Being good” isn’t Christianity

The Golden Rule wasn’t introduced by Jesus. Doing good works doesn’t make us Christians. Politeness and socially acceptable behavior don’t spell Christianity.

Does that sound like heresy? It really isn’t. All such behavioral attributes have symbolized most cultures ever since people began forming social systems and governments. They have always been the implicit bases for laws so as to have an orderly society. “Do as you would be done by,” as C. S. Lewis put it, has been around a long time - in most religions in most places in the world. Jesus certainly reconfirmed it. And he reaffirmed all those “being good” ideas like doing good things and keeping a polite and mannerly profile.

Those things describe people who choose to behave nicely – but maybe only to look good, to have friends, or to win at something. And they help to describe Christians. But not because Christians just opt for them; it’s *because* they are Christians, and these are just some of the *results* of following Jesus. There are so many more than that. It takes a thorough reading of Scripture to learn the rest, to relish the whole of it. But a good beginning is to understand how Christians are blessed.

The famous Beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) tell much about how Christians act and how they are blessed in the process. “Blessed” is used nine times, and the word doesn’t just mean happy. It is a joyous promise, a pronouncement of a state of well-being for Christians, whatever their circumstances. Gloom and Christianity don’t mix. And that isn’t about a remote future, but a fact of present condition.

Jesus said this is how things are for Christians (from Matt. 5:1-12):

Monday. “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (When you realize you are helpless

without God, through Christ, it's the start of feeling great.) **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."** (If you sorrow over the loss of a loved one, if you're saddened by the plight of others, if you're sorry for your own sins, through Christ, all that will be turned into feelings of comfort and encouragement.)

Dear Jesus, what marvelous promises – thank you for them. For you know of the times I feel destitute, and you redirect me back to you. You know about my sad times and you give me joy. You know about my sins, but you re-embrace me with forgiveness. And you know about others who have trouble of many kinds; some of these are my friends and relatives. I bring all of them to you and ask for a new measure of your peace for us all. Cause our faith to be the source of our rejoicing. I pray also for...

Tuesday. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Not spineless or fawning, you are meek when you accept God's guidance, and that's how you get order in your life. Being humbled before God, you know you are weak without the Lord; with him, life will be beautiful.)

Dear Lord, thank you again for another terrific promise, for in this one I see yet more of what I can be as your child. Help me to stay humble before you, even when I am tempted to think too well of myself. In that state of humility, teach me to hear your voice and to accept your leading. When I am tempted to be angry or pushy because of selfish reasons, show me how to be passionate about loving you. I pray also...

Wednesday. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled." (If you yearn for and urgently crave the purity of life in Christ, an authentic relationship with him is there for you; you'll be rewarded with his righteousness, a joy to overflowing.)

My Lord and Savior, this is at the heart of where I need to be. The truth is that I've never seriously suffered for lack of food or water –

like so many in the world and even this country at this very moment – so I don't know the desperation they feel. And I confess that in the contentment of the life I have, I too often don't think of them, don't act to help them, don't pray for them.

Forgive me for that and remind me often enough that I may do better. Then let me experience a similar kind of hungering and thirsting for the fullest possible connection with you. Make this the driving ambition of my life. Because from what you say here, I know you will meet and exceed that desire. Thank you! I pray now for...

Thursday. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." (If you sympathize with the difficulties others have, but go beyond that and be deliberate and purposeful about it, finding ways to forgive them, support them, and help them sort through their dilemmas, you will enjoy God's mercy and the joy of knowing you're acting in obedience to him.)

Dear Jesus, you who demonstrated mercy in the most profound sacrifice in human history, thank you that there are ways for me to show kindness and love and support for others. Forgive my waywardness and my selfishness which prevent me from seeing the opportunities which must be all around me. Alert me so I *will* see and sympathize, *will* be intentional, *will* seek and find ways to serve others to your glory and not to my own. I pray also for...

Friday. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (When your motives are centered on a life with God, uncluttered by selfish aims, God will reward you with his presence right now and forever.) **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God."** (If your motives are not only for your own heart's purity, but also for others to learn of God's grace which brings peace to and among them, then you're truly acting like God wants his children to behave.)

Dear Lord, not in my wildest dreams could I on my own achieve a state of purity or be an active agent of your peace. But here you say that's exactly what I can and should do. Help me, my Lord, and lead me to be motivated first and foremost by your love, to *want to be* like you, to *want to be* an effective worker among your people. How humbling to think I can really do things to bring your love and peace and joy to people in your world. Help me not only *want to do it*, but *to do it*. I pray, too, for...

Saturday. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven..."

My Lord, no one has ever persecuted me for these reasons. I have been hurt by people in other ways and, looking back, I know you carried me through and will if it happens again – thank you. So I pray for others who are similarly hurt. I pray for those here and elsewhere in the world who have to suffer persecution because of their relationship with and testimony of you. Undergird them all with the love and peace which you alone can give. Give them joy in the knowledge of your love and of the magnificent joys of being in your kingdom. Also, I pray today for...

Week 4

Do you ever feel that life isn't fair? Friends disappoint. Stock markets mess up. Politicians can't be trusted. Governments and corporations and employers and all sorts of institutions let you down. Nobody cares much anymore. Trusting? It's for the naive and the losers. Suspicion gives you the edge you need. The best way to win is to stay on your toes, ready for anything.

But what does the Bible say?

"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." (Ps. 118:8)

"Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." (Ps. 62:8)

"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me." (Ps. 25:1)

"The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." (Ps. 18:2)

Monday. "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." (Matt. 7:15,16a)

Lord, we are all susceptible to being fooled and swayed by dishonest people who take advantage of our trust. You have said that we are supposed to love these people – how, if we can't trust them? Give us the ability to discern the fruit of who they are without being sinfully judgmental, I pray. And help us to love them no matter who they are; we sure can't do it alone. **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."** (Matt. 7:21) God, as we learn how to find and follow your will in our own lives, help us to recognize when others seek to do so as well. Then help us to bond closely

with them, for they are your church in this world. I pray now also for...

Tuesday. **“Those who live by their own rules, not God’s, can expect nothing but trouble, and the longer they live, the worse it gets.”** (Job 15:20, *The Message*) (Why does it seem that this isn’t always the case? Why is it that some people who trust just in themselves and run rough-shod over others seem to prosper very well - good health and material success and status and the like? Or maybe that’s not the point? What is meant by “trouble” here? Is it trouble in the soul, in the heart, so that those who are too self-involved move farther and farther away from God? If that’s it, what a tragedy!)

Lord, I pray you will perform miracles of awakening in the lives of those who live by their own rules. Reveal yourself to them so they will see what your love is and what they are missing. I don’t want to be one of them! I pray that I will never stray into paths of my own making but will daily and forever walk with you. I now pray for...

Wednesday. **“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall.”** (Matt. 7:24, 25)

Jesus, thank you for making it so easy to trust in you. I want a rock-solid relationship with you, and it’s clear here that to have it, I must know you through your words. Help me to read and hear and understand and live out the meaning of your great Gospel. Help me not to omit a single instruction, not to miss a single opportunity. Help me to hide your teaching in my heart so that it is my guide for all I do, all I say, all I am. Clearly, I won’t be exempt from storms but – thank you! – you’ll hold me up. This is another grand revelation! Help me remember it, to store up your words in my heart and mind so I can recall them and relish them in the rough times. I pray also for...

Thursday. Jesus talked about two-for-a-penny sparrows which wouldn’t fall to the ground apart from God’s will and said, **“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So**

don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

(from Matt. 10:29-31)

O Lord, this is such a vivid picture of how much we are loved – your “eye is on the sparrow” – so trusting in you just comes naturally. Your word expresses your love so beautifully that we can only respond with gratitude and trust and worship. Thank you for your word, for those who help us remember it through preaching and songs and the examples of their own lives. In the face of such promises, it makes no sense that we could ever be plagued by doubt, but sometimes we are anyhow. When it happens, forgive us and refresh our memories with the beauty of your word, I pray. And I also pray for...

Friday. “Anyone who loves his father or mother... son or daughter... more than me; ...does not take up his cross and follow me... is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (from Matt. 10:37-39)

Jesus, these seem fearful words until you help us see that it's all about trusting in you without reservation. Thank you for letting me see that, far from lessening our love for others, all our loving is heightened in the light of the great love we can share with you. We pray for even fuller knowledge of it and deeper enjoyment of it. Help us to find life in you in increasingly abundant ways. Then help us to follow through by loving family and friends and neighbors without reservation. Help us even to go beyond your command so that we will love and value others *more* than ourselves. How marvelous to learn to trust in you! I pray now for...

Saturday. “Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30)

Dear Lord, what more beautiful words could ever fall on the ears of humankind! What an invitation – thank you! You make trusting in you the greatest of all joys. We bring you the weariness we have from time to time – sometimes it even seems endless. We bring you our burdens which often seem beyond

bearing. And we ask for your yoke of love, to be enjoined in a fellowship with you, to relish your presence, to partake of your gentleness, to know what resting in you really means. We praise and thank you, Lord! Now I pray for...