

JANUARY PRAYERS

Week 1

Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome about a variety of subjects, but principally about the basic Gospel story and how it is open to everyone. He repeatedly explained that salvation through Christ comes about quite simply: looking to the Lord in faith and repenting of sin just simply result in something called "righteousness," a new level of life lived in communication with God through Jesus.

Monday. "It's news I'm most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else! God's way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: 'The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives.'" (Rom. 1:16, 17, *The Message*)

God, I thank you today for the glorious Message. You have included everybody and that means me. Again, I confess my sins and failures and I ask that you put me right, *keep* me right with you. I want to *stand right* with you, so support me as I grow in faith and learn more about your love. Then, and then only, will I *really live!* Like Paul, I am honored and even proud to be included in your powerful plan. And like him, I will be proud to proclaim it in any way you will lead me. It's an honor! Help me live up to it, I pray. And I pray for...

Tuesday. "...what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out... When I want to do good, evil is right there with me." (from Rom. 7:14-21)

Dear Lord, I especially thank you for these words of confession from Paul, your servant, because they ring true for me also. My heart would lead me to you, but my temptations lead away. It will only be your love at work within me that will keep me walking

in your steps. So I claim the promise Paul claimed, **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”** (Rom. 8:1, 2). Thank you for that freedom to be your child, O God. Keep me safe in my freedom, I pray. And I also pray for...

Wednesday. **“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of Sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...”** (from Rom. 8:15-17)

Lord, thank you for these words. Fear lurks for so many of us. You know who we are, and you know how afraid we can be of all sorts of things. Fear curtails what we would otherwise do to fulfill our lives as you would have us do. But much more damaging is what fear does to keep us from you: while we’re afraid and worrying, we’re not resting in the peace only you can give. Invigorate us with the power of your love so that fear doesn’t have a chance of getting us down on any of the levels of life. We are your children, your heirs! Instill that message in us so firmly that we are thrilled with the joy of it – how then can we be afraid! I pray now for...

Thursday. Paul wrote about his own sufferings and of the suffering and trouble, which are to be expected in the lives of us all. **“I consider our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.”** (Rom. 8:18)

Paul is right on the mark again here, Lord, because we’ve all got such a variety of problems as life moves on. We all get our share and sometimes it looks as if we get way more than that. Help us to remember that you know all about it even before it happens, so that it will be easier for us to come to you for comfort and for guidance. Then we’ll better understand that whatever comes our way doesn’t count very much after all, for surely the peace that you give in the middle of it makes your glory shine in our lives. And you’ve even promised more of your glorious gifts as life proceeds and then when it’s past. Thank you, Lord! Keep our

memories full of all your marvelous truths – they will sustain us! I pray now also for...

Friday. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express... in accordance with God’s will.”
(from Rom. 8:26, 27)

Lord, thank you that we don’t have to come up with the right words when we pray. You already know all about it, and we see that we just need to make ourselves totally available through trust in you. You know our hearts and minds and what our desires are, and you have said elsewhere to bring all that to you in specific prayer. Not knowing your will, we ask. Trusting in your love, we await your will. But for those times when we face a blank wall, help us remember that the Holy Spirit is there to intercede – what a grand plan you’ve made for us! Thank you, Lord. I also pray for...

Saturday. “For I know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (from Rom. 8:28, 37-39, 31)

After all that, how could there ever be any doubt about the hugeness of your love, O God! We thank you for the beautifully comforting, grandly worded, all-encompassing reassurances about your love, which are scattered from the beginning to the end of the Bible. Thank you for using your servants to write it all down, for where would we be without it! It only remains for us to read, to hear, to believe, to accept. You call us to your purpose and you will work everything out for us, no matter how thorny the problems – thank you! You protect us from threats, no matter how formidable – thank you! You keep us with you and you with

us in every circumstance of life, no matter how ominous – thank you! We praise and magnify your name! And now I pray for...

In Others' Words...

"Jesus lived a life of utter trust because he understood his Father to be unfailingly competent and wholly devoted. Here is the striking result: 'With this magnificent God positioned among us, Jesus brings the assurance that our universe is *a perfectly safe place to be.*'

"Really? Our universe? We talk much in our day about safe places, because our world seems so unsafe. Catastrophes and violence and disease blanket the earth.

"And yet this is the discovery that gets made over and over in the Scriptures. Lions' dens and fiery furnaces, Pharaoh's prison and the floor of the Red Sea, a battered little boat in the midst of a violent storm – all these seemed to be most dangerous, but turned out to be the safest place of all.

"What would my life look like if I lived in the settled conviction that because of God's character and competence this world is a perfectly safe place for me to be?

- My anxiety level would go down...
- I would be an unhurried person... busy... but I would have an inner calmness and poise.
- I would not be defeated by guilt... would live in confidence that comes from the assurance of God's love.
- I would trust God enough to risk obeying him...

"A **person** in whom the peace of Christ reigns would be an oasis of sanity in a world of pandemonium.

"A **community** in which the peace of Christ reigns would change the world."

(from John Ortberg's *Love Beyond Reason*)

January - Week 2

"Deliver us, Father, from futile hopes and from clinging to lost causes, that we may move into ever-growing calm and ever-widening horizons.

"Where we cannot convince,
let us be willing to persuade,
for small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.

"We know that we cannot do everything.
But help us to do something.

"For Jesus' sake. Amen."

(from Peter Marshall's *Meditations*)

Monday. "The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock." (from Ps. 27)

Dear Lord, you are truly my light and my salvation – where would I be without you? With you, I will not be afraid but will overcome! Help me to keep these words hidden in my heart this week, I pray.

"...The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (from Rom. 10:8-10)

My Lord and Savior, your word speaks to me so clearly. I hasten to acknowledge that you are my Lord. Open the doors through which you would have me go. Lead me for my own soul's sake, and then on to proclaim your saving grace so that others may know you. And I pray for...

Tuesday. “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings out the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” (Rom. 12:1, 2, *The Message*)

O God, all this is what I do truly want to do. But I must have you to help me: lift me out of my humdrum life. Change me from the inside out. Show me what you want of me and tell me how to respond quickly. *The mature Christian me* – that’s who I ask you to make me be, Lord! And I also pray for...

Wednesday. “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.” “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ...whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” “You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or look down on your brother?” (from Rom. 14:1, 7, 8, 10)

Father, sometimes we get so caught up in trying to understand your word about how we are to live that we think we have all the answers – we don’t see why everyone can’t agree! Forgive us for our arrogant attitudes. Remind us that – no matter the church or where one is in it – we’re all in this together and you said we’re to live as one body. Teach us patience and love so that instead of getting into disputes, we’ll pray for each other and open up our minds to what others understand. Help us see that we are all disciples on the same journey. When we are presumptuous, show us your own openness, for surely you are open to all who come to you. Humility is what we need and not so much of assertiveness that leads to smugness. O Lord, let us see your love so we may reflect it! I pray for...

Thursday. “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.” “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” (from Rom. 14:13, 19)

Lord, keep telling us in ways we won’t forget about your command to love others – at least as much as we love ourselves! However hard it is to do, with your help, we can do it. Then we won’t pass judgment.

We won’t do anything to cause others to stumble, but will do what you said to do: support and sustain each other; come to one another’s aid in things both spiritual and material; be makers of peace! This is where we want to go – take us there, Lord. I pray...

Friday. At one point in his letter to the Romans, Paul seemed suddenly to be overcome with passionate praise to God. He quoted some Old Testament Scriptures: **“Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments... from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!”** (from Rom. 11:33-36)

O God, sometimes I too am overcome with thanksgiving and praise – how I wish to honor you! You know all things, do all things, see all things, and you love us all! Your ways are beyond our knowing, and your understanding of us and our world from its beginning is without limit. So we place ourselves before you. Fulfill your promises to guide us, great God of us all. Being what you want us to be is all that matters. We give you glory forever! I now pray for...

Saturday. Paul used love as a springboard to cover other aspects of Christian behavior: **“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good... Honor one another... keep your spiritual fervor... Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer... Bless those who persecute you... Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony... Do not be proud... conceited. ...Do not take revenge... If your enemy is**

hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (from Rom. 12:9-21)

Lord God of all humankind, thank you for these words which challenge who we are and tell us who we need to be. It's an instruction which we must turn into a prayer, for only with your help will we do these things: may we shun even the appearance of evil and identify only with the good; may we give ourselves honorably to others; may we keep our spiritual lives fresh and active always; may we learn to be joyful because of our hope in Jesus Christ; may we be patient in the hard times and wait for your will to develop; may we never forget to pray consistently and daily; may we learn to love those who wrong us; may we give real and meaningful support to those who are in trouble, just as we learn to share in their happy times; may we be tools of peace and harmony, giving without conceited expectations; may we spurn anger and thoughts of revenge and, instead, find ways to help those who don't know you and might even do us harm. And, most of all, to ensure all this can happen, instill your very own love within us. I also pray for...

January - Week 3

"Sir Isaac Newton (whose ideas about gravity keep us down-to-earth!) served in the British Parliament for a time. Only once did he speak for the record. He asked that a window be opened. Maybe to let some of the hot air escape." (Anon.)

How is it most of us never learned what Mama and the first grade teacher kept saying: *think* before you speak? They must have read the Bible...

"He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity." (Prov. 21:23)

"A gentle answer turns wrath away, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Prov. 15:1)

"...out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." (from Matt. 12:34)

"The words of a talebearer are as wounds..." (from Prov. 18:8)

"Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing... this should not be." (from James 3:10)

It was Jesus who said, **"For I will give you words and wisdom..."** (from Luke 21:15)

Monday. "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." (Ps. 19:14)

Lord, among the many gifts you have given us is the ability to reason and think; and yet we don't seem to know what we should say when, or when we should say nothing at all. Forgive our thoughtlessness. We wound so quickly with what we say to or about people. Forgive our insensitivity. And when others say things which injure us or someone we care about, we hold onto

grudges. Forgive our stubbornness. Guide us with your words, your wisdom so that, truly, the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts will be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer! I pray also today for...

Tuesday. "Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun." (Ps. 37:1-6)

God, we confess that sometimes we do fret about people, especially those who just seem set on getting their own way at the expense of others. Teach us how to bring them to you in prayer so that you may guide their lives. Help us to tend to our own affairs, our own connections with you. Let us keep learning to trust only in you, committing our lives only to you. Keep revealing to us those safe pastures where we find delight, where you satisfy our desires to be among your righteous people, where we can join the host of those who reflect your love in pure and shining ways. I pray now for...

Wednesday. "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil. I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken." (Ps. 37:7,8,25a)

Dear Lord, you know us well: we have a hard time being patient. We don't even think about how we should settle down quietly, should go on with our daily lives peacefully waiting for you to lead us. How can we forget so important a promise that you are forever with us, always wanting to shelter and lead us! But we do forget and create our own worries and resentments and hot tempers – *all leading directly away from you!* Forgive us, Lord, and teach us the patience that comes from confidence in you.

Your assurances are true: you will never leave or forsake us – thank you, Lord. I pray also for...

Thursday. “My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning.” “O Lord, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord, my Savior.” (Ps. 38:4-6, 21,22)

God, you made a way through the sacrifice of Jesus for me to understand about your love and forgiveness. But there are times when I have simply ignored that almost incredible truth, and I have gone about my life as if that sacrifice never happened. And I have sinned. I have pursued my self-interests, all of them so piddling as to be embarrassing when I consider your greatness. You love me and want to guide my life – I know it and am ashamed that I brazenly pay no mind to it. Come quickly to help me, O Lord, my Savior – forgive me and love me in spite of me! I pray also today for...

Friday. “I’m determined to watch my steps and tongue so they won’t land me in trouble. I decided to hold my tongue as long as Wicked is in the room. ‘Mum’s the word,’ I said, and kept quite. But the longer I kept silence the worse it got – my insides got hotter and hotter. My thoughts boiled over; I spilled my guts.” (Ps. 39:1-3, *The Message*)

Lord, I must pray about this again: whatever this Psalmist was going through is very like what I encounter much too often – I confess my weakness and my sin here, just like this writer did. You know me well. I give it my best try and fail miserably. And it’s not just about anger; it’s also about my eagerness to get things done and move on without consulting you to find out your will, to wait for your guidance. So it will only be you who can help me. Draw me close to you and keep me there – there where peace is, even in the middle of the confusion of my own making. I also pray for...

Saturday. "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem." "May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, 'Peace be within you.' For the sake of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your prosperity." (Ps. 122:1,2,7-9)

God, thank you for our church, for all who gather there in your name. I do rejoice when I think how marvelous are your works, that you should have caused your disciples before us to construct and maintain this building. *This is your house!* Not just the structure, but so much more – your people and their lives and their work – all those are part of your house. Help us to be faithful to your cause in it; help us to worship you in spirit and in truth in it; and help us preserve it for those who are yet to come to join with us. *Make the prosperity of the Gospel of Christ be the central reason for our togetherness.* Let there be no division; let your peace prevail. Establish an air of security born of your love for us all. We will rejoice. We will give thanks. We will praise your holy name! I also pray...

January - Week 4

“This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” (Lament. 3:21-23, King James Version).

The Old Testament book of Lamentations has within in it, as the name implies, a series of laments. Some scholars have attributed these writings to the prophet Jeremiah, but others have suggested one or more writers recorded the five poems (chapters) when both Jerusalem and Judah had fallen to their enemies in Babylon. The poetic formats are part funeral dirge, part lamenting of the peoples’ plight, and part thanksgiving. It is in the heart of this thanksgiving that one of the great hymns of the early twentieth century was born.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness (written in 1923 by Thomas O. Chisholm) uses the text from the King James version of the Bible, and it articulately expresses God’s love and grace in the life of the Christian. As the years go by, we can look back with growing awareness that God has led, loved and protected. As the evidence grows, so faith grows. And our enjoyment grows so that we truly relish life in the presence of the Lord. So it is that this great old hymn can be our heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving and can serve to begin our prayers.

Monday. “Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with Thee; Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not; as Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!”

Tuesday. “Summer and winter and springtime and harvest; sun, moon and stars in their courses above join with all nature in manifold witness to Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!”

Wednesday. "Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth. Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide; strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! Great is Thy faithfulness!

Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see; all I have needed Thy hand hath provided; great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!"

A prayer to consider as we bring our other prayers to God the rest of the week and, indeed, for all of life:

Great God of love, I pray today as the Psalmist prayed long ago:

"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made... All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (from Ps. 139)

Please, God, make this my prayer for all my days.