

# July

## Week 1

**Monday. "Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, 'Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!' and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup – where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?" (James 2:14-17, *The Message*)**

God, you are making this as clear as crystal here. And elsewhere in your word you say that faith is the essential element to a relationship with you. And you said we don't have to manufacture that faith – you offer it as a gift. But now it's clear we have a choice about what we do about acting on our faith. If we're totally honest, most of us have to admit we're interested first in ourselves and maybe even stop right there. Help us – help me – to see the opportunities to act out our faith, to do the work that you want us to do. I pray also for...

**Tuesday. "I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, 'Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I'll handle the works department.' Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove." "... Do you suppose for a minute that you can cut faith and works in two and not end up with a corpse on your hands?" (from James 2:18, 19, *The Message*)**

Dear Lord, this clarifies even further that I mustn't go overboard one way or the other. Just doing good works might make me look good to myself and others, but that's not going to work. Help me, O God, to keep it straight in my mind and my actions: it begins with faith in you; works must naturally follow. Faith works!

Thank you for your word which simplifies all this so well. It just remains for me to follow through, and I know I can do that with the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. Thank you! I pray also today for...

**Wednesday. "...the tongue is a small part of the body but it makes great boasts... It corrupts the whole person... no man can tame the tongue... With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness..."** (from James 3:5, 6, 8-10)

Father, thank you for telling this to us; it's square on the mark. The times people have said sharp or hurtful things to others – or about others – are stuck in my memory. Just thinking about it makes me cringe inside. But I wonder if there have been times I've done such a thing and didn't even think about it, or maybe I knew it but refused to acknowledge it. If that has happened, I ask your forgiveness. Speech is actually another of your gifts, and we take it for granted. We abuse it to the detriment of others and of ourselves. But, surely, if we tune our lives to you, we'll say the right things because our concentration will be on the right things. Make it happen, I pray. I also pray for...

**Thursday. "Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: *Live* well, *live* wisely, *live* humbly. It's the way you *live*, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting...isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth...isn't wisdom... Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats."** (from James 3:13-16, *The Message*)

Lord, I see that it's the *living out of your love* that works, not the living out of self-interest. Thank you for your words which force us to see that. Self-interest makes us mean-spirited and deceitful. And anyhow, if all we're concerned about is how we look, help us see that such behavior just makes us look ridiculous! Your word is making that clear here; thank you for it. Help us all – help me – to catch on quickly when we're tempted to put self in front of the two most important things: loving you and loving others. I also pray for...

**Friday. "...the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."** (from James 3:17,18)

O God, to be a peacemaker – Jesus talked about it before this, succinctly and distinctly: peacemakers are *themselves* blessed (Matt. 5:9). And here it's clear that they even help other people move on into higher levels of righteousness. That must mean peacemakers show by example what right living is about, what a right relationship with you is about. That's what I want to be, God. Help me to stay pure, to love peace, to be considerate and submissive and merciful and impartial and sincere – to be a peacemaker! I pray also for...

**Saturday. "Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves... You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God..."** (from James 4:1, 4, *The Message*)

God, you are *ALMIGHTY* God! Who am I to assume so much self-importance? To put my own ideas up against your will for my life is not only daring – it's so senseless and ludicrous that I am chagrined just thinking about it. Forgive me, Father. If by putting myself first I put you last – cheat on you! – then I need you to make me think about it every day. To be anti-you, an *enemy*, is preposterous. I want to be your child, your beloved, and keep that as a constant relationship, not just waffling around. Teach me to draw near to you, because, as you have promised, you will draw near to me. Thank you! I pray also for...

## Week 2

**Monday.** “So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud *no* to the devil and watch him scamper. Say a quiet *yes* to God and he’ll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field. Hit bottom and cry your eyes out... Get serious, really serious. Get down on your knees before the Master; it’s the only way you’ll get on your feet.” (from James 4:7-10, *The Message*)

Father, saying *no* to evil and *yes* to you makes such obvious sense, and it seems easy enough on the face of it. But for many of us, it isn’t. We have been playing on both sides long enough that it’s become a habit. We can’t purify our inner lives on our own. So the power of your love and the presence of the Holy Spirit are what we need. That’s the way we can get really serious and get a down-on-my-knees attitude. It’s the only way. And so I ask that you instill that love and power in me – in all of us in our church – and not just today, but every day. I pray also for...

**Tuesday.** “...do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. ...There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?” (from James 4:11,12)

Dear Lord, here is something that your word decries many places in the Bible. You tell us that evaluating and judging people to see if they measure up to some system we’ve got in our heads is not only deplorable – it’s a sin. It’s the exact opposite of love. While we may not always be blatant when we do such things, we find small, subtle ways to do it, both within and without the presence of the person we target. We lift an eyebrow, give a “knowing” smile, shrug the shoulders a little, say just a “small” word. All that is just as bad, as sinful, as if we were brazen about it. This is so hurtful. And it makes for sneaky ways that *evil enters our own lives*. If we’re doing it without knowing it, keep this Scripture fresh for us. Pull us up short and show us when we’re about to give into this sin. And forgive us – forgive *me*. Help us all to *love*

*our neighbors.* Then, we'll support them, not put them down. And I pray for...

**Wednesday.** “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ ” (from James 4:13-16)

Dear Lord, forgive me for striking out on my own, not even thinking about what your will is for my life. Much of the time, the ideas I have and the plans I make all seem so enormously important that they crowd out thoughts of you. Forgive me. But somehow I deplore the notion that my life is just a “mist.” I know this means life is such a short affair and one person’s existence is such a tiny, almost invisible spot in the overall scheme of things. But this is what I ask you to help me with: make my misty life into something of extraordinary value *because it exists in the light of your love, consistently defined by your will.* Guide me, Lord, so this will actually be who I am, all the time – a life of meaning and worth *in your sight*, not in mine or someone else’s. I pray also for...

**Thursday.** “Friends, don’t complain about each other. A far greater complaint could be lodged against you, you know. The Judge is standing just around the corner.” (James 5:9, *The Message*)

God, your word tells us repeatedly not to judge and mistreat people based on our own opinions and standards. But we do it anyway, just like I confessed on Tuesday. Could it be that we think it makes us look better or smarter? You’re saying here it’s the exact opposite; in fact, what we’re doing when we judge and complain is far worse. You see all this and disapprove as we’re doing it. Help us – help me – to accept peoples’ foibles, then respect them and actually love them. After all, they may be trying to get past *my own foibles* and give me some love and respect. And, for sure, you are loving all of us during all of this – however

warty, blemished and opinionated we let ourselves become. Forgive us – forgive me – and set us straight. I pray too for...

**Friday. “Take the old prophets as your mentors. They put up with anything, went through everything, and never once quit, all the time honoring God. What a gift life is to those who stay the course! You’ve heard, of course, of Job’s staying power, and you know how God brought it all together for him at the end. That’s because God cares, cares right down to the last detail.”** (James 5:10,11, *The Message*)

Father, thank you for the evidence in your word about your love for so many people through so many generations. How could I ignore it? Job hung on even when he thought he had been deserted. You said I’ll never have to feel desolate and forsaken if I hold on to you - you’ll always be there, loving, caring, supporting me no matter what happens. But sometimes I do let go and start feeling disconnected and discouraged. At all times, and especially in such times as those, please shine a bright light on this text for me. I pray too for...

**Saturday. “My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God’s truth, don’t write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.”** (James 5:19, 20, *The Message*)

O God, do we get so busy and tied up in our own affairs that we don’t see people who are missing out on your love? Maybe people who have once walked with you but strayed away out of discouragement or getting caught up in bad choices? Do we just not see it or, if we do, look the other way? If so, forgive us. Forgive me, I pray. Teach us to be alert. Teach us to love diligently. Teach us to look beyond ourselves. Then when we see this happening, teach us what to do and how to demonstrate your love. For surely, this will be your commandment in action: we will be loving others as much as we care about ourselves. I also pray today for...

## Week 3

**Monday.** **“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”** (John 3:19-21)

Father, many of us – all of us? – have secrets in our lives which we would have a hard time talking about with anyone else. Cause us always to be at ease talking about them with you. Help us bring everything out into the light of day, into the light of your love. Where those secrets are about fears we have, failures we've had, embarrassments we suffer, help us lay them out before you, and then give us the joy of getting beyond such things. Where those secrets are about sinning, forgive us. Thank you for the gift of your Son, our Savior, who IS the Light of the world and through whom our sins are forgiven. Let there be no dark corners. I pray too for...

**Tuesday.** When Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman at the water well, he told her about **“living water.”** He said, **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, that water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** (John 4:13,14)

Dear Lord, like this woman at the well who said, **“...give me this water,”** I pray for the refreshing water of life, the living water which you alone can give. Sometimes my life seems parched and empty. But that's always when I've let myself drift from you, forgetting that you are the source of all that is genuine and pure. For that, I ask for your forgiveness, and I ask for yet more of your love in spite of – well actually, *in view of* – my weakness. What you offer is not only a life of love and rich fulfillment, but even beyond such gifts, you bid me a welcome to an eternity with you.

Thank you, my Lord. I do thank you with all my heart. I also pray today for...

**Wednesday.** Pharisees and others brought a lawbreaker to Jesus (a woman accused of adultery) and tried to trap him, but he merely said, **"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."** Then they all silently drifted away, leaving Jesus alone with the woman. He asked her, **"Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?"** **"No one, sir"** she said. And Jesus said, **"Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."** (from John 8:1-11)

All-knowing God, there is nothing hidden from you. You see all our faults and sins and you know that none of us is exempt. And yet you love us all anyway. Help us not to look for the sins and failures in others, to ponder them, to judge them, to – how dreadful – talk about them to other people! Forgive us when we do and lead us so we avoid repeating the sin. We would stand condemned in our own sin but for your love. Teach us a love for others which reaches beyond their faults, no matter what they are. I pray also for...

**Thursday.** Jesus said, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (from John 8:31-37)

Thank you, Jesus, for your teaching you led others to record for me to read. Holding to it all should be the center of my life, I know. But too often, I just don't do it. Maybe it's because I don't read it enough? Or maybe I let it go in one ear and out the other? How self-important and cocky is that! Forgive me. This is *your word*, the communication of the God of this world to all of us – even me. And here, as elsewhere, you say that is what will free us to enjoy a life centered in you. Thank you. Teach me to be a faithful truth-seeker, a sincere disciple. I pray too for...

**Friday.** As in other texts, Jesus presents himself as the shepherd who offers a **"sheepfold"** to all who come; they will hear and recognize his voice. And he says, **"I am the door: by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture... I am come that they might have**

**life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”** (from John 10:1-10)

Dear Lord, thank you for the invitation to live in your presence, to be watched over and loved, even as I go about my days, in and out, here and there. Your promise is loving and kind. Help me to remember it always, to heed your voice in all things. For, surely, that is how my life will be fulfilled to abundance, how I will grow and be the person, the Christian, you have designed me to be. Any other way can only produce a sorry copy of the disciple you alone know I can be. How glorious are your works in this world. I am humbled to see that I am one of them. I magnify your name. And I pray also for...

**Saturday.** When Jesus washed his Disciples' feet, Simon Peter cringed in dismay at the honor, but Jesus said, **“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me,’ whereupon Peter exploded with passion, ‘...Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!’ Then Jesus explained his purpose that even as Lord, he showed humility. He said, ‘I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.’”** (from John 13:4-17)

Father, your word tells us that as your followers, we are to meet together, to help shoulder each other's burdens, to pray for one another, to be as one body through Christ. I thank you for those great messages. They present a beautiful outline for the lives of all Christians. But too often we just stop there, admiring the plan and not putting those principles into action. We confess: we commend the concepts of all-out Christian living, but skip the deeds. Some of us just nod in agreement; some of us give it a half-hearted try; some of us fade out when the going gets rough. You have washed us in your love. Help us give that same love to others, no matter what they might do or say, no matter how tough it might seem at first. We can do it because you promised you will be there to help, to reinforce, so that what we do and say will be a witness of your love. As you forgive us, draw us so fully into your way of living that we, like Peter, are passionate about it. Also, I pray for...

## Week 4

**Monday.** Jesus said it: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”** (Matt. 22:37-39)

And he also said: **“A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** (John 13:34, 35)

Dear Lord, many of us know these words so well. For a lot of us, they are just part of the basic meaning of Christianity. Just? Just? Is that it – “just”? Do we insert these texts into memory, catalog them and let them lie dormant? If that’s what we do, forgive us. For, surely, these are among the most profound words ever spoken: they are at the heart of who you are to us; they are the challenge which, when met, turns us into Christians. Sharpen our minds, I pray, and cause these words to define our lives. And thank you for one of the greatest revelations in all the Bible: we are to love “as” you love, and that means we don’t invent love – you give us the ability to love like you love. Thank you! I pray also today for...

**Tuesday.** Jesus said, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”** **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”**

(from John 14:1-7)

Lord, thank you for these words. Although they are familiar to many of us, has the huge significance of all this really hit home?

We pray that you will make this Scripture *live* for us all. Help us to see that this isn't just about an eternal life with you, but that it's about life here and now. Right now, not later, we can know God through our Lord and Savior! We can have peace in the place of troubled hearts – grant it, Lord. We can know what it really means to trust in you beyond any doubt – implant it in our hearts, Lord. We can have assurance about whatever our future is in this life and beyond – show us how to accept it, Lord. I pray also for...

**Wednesday.** Jesus said: **“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.” “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” “Because I live, you also will live.” “...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”** (from John 14:15-26)

Dear Lord, you teach us how to love you and all we have to do is listen and respond – thank you. Then you give us promises through a grand design which encompasses all the powers of the Holy Trinity – thank you. (How weak a mere “thank you” sounds in the face of the immensity of all of this; I wish I could express it better.) Guide us so that we stay open to the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit. Thank you that your grand design has a plan for each of us, uniquely ours. Help us to hear and retain your teaching so that we will find and follow those individualized plans. Then we can *live – really live!* Here, now, are my other prayers for today...

**Thursday.** Jesus said: **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** (John 14:27)

Lord, you know all about me, and so you know that sometimes I really am afraid and troubled and upset and frustrated and...

Thank you for this chance to talk to you about this, because there isn't anyone else I can tell such things to, however close I might feel to other people in my life. Just telling you gives me comfort, and I see why that is: you give me *your* peace. It won't come

from anyone else, and I can't give it to myself, no matter how I hard I work at keeping my chin up on those tough days. Thank you, my Lord! Keep me ever mindful of these loving, gentle words, I pray. And I also pray for...

**Friday.** Jesus said: **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."** (John 15:5)

Dear Lord, forgive my self-will and the impertinence of assuming I have such fine abilities that I don't need you – I do that more often than not, as you know. I think that's exactly what happens when I go for days and weeks without meeting you in prayer, without reaching out to accept your love, without waiting for you to guide me. You say that when I cut myself off from you, it's as if I am a branch cut off from the main vine, and such a branch just withers and dies. So when I set out on my own, when I imagine my ideas are great and I don't need to talk to you about them, quickly connect me back to you. Help me to be the vibrant, living, fruitful person you want me to be. And I pray for...

**Saturday.** Jesus said: **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command."** (John 15:9-14)

Lord Jesus, today I ask for a special awareness, a reawakening to the depth of meaning in these words. You call me "friend" if I obey your commandment to love others. But you know that I cannot do that through my own pitiful abilities to love. Mostly, I limit my loving to the people who love me, to those who treat me well, and that's about as far as I go on my own. But your love has no limits – you demonstrated that when you died on the cross for all of us. So help me to receive *your* love – *the way that you love* – then help me to put *that* love into action. Help me to remain in it as you said to do. Then help me to see the evidence

of that love through the joy that will mark who I am. I now pray  
for...