

May

Week 1

Monday. The Christians at Berea, Macedonian city in Greece, were of **“noble character”** for **“they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day...”** (from Acts 17:11)

Dear Lord, as I begin this week, I pray that my thoughts will be directed more intentionally to your word. As with the Bereans, I ask that something excellent, something “noble,” will result from my own study of Scriptures – cause me to be eager about it. May that something be a closer walk with you, a stronger awareness of your presence, and a readier acceptance of your leading me into your own paths of righteousness. Thank you for my Bible. Make your words my words, I pray in Christ’s name. In that name, I also pray for...

Tuesday. In Athens, Paul taught about the danger of putting other gods before our God. He said, **“...if we are God-created, it doesn’t make a lot of sense to think we could hire a sculptor to chisel a god out of stone for us, does it?”** People in Ephesus heard about such teaching and one of the silversmiths who made shrines for the goddess Artemis said, **“...you’ve seen how Paul has barged in and discredited what we’re doing by telling people that there’s no such thing as a god made with hands. A lot of people are going along with him...”** (from Acts 17:29; 19:26, *The Message*).

Father, I thank you that we have gone well beyond such things as making icons or shrines to other gods. We’re so far past such foolishness. Well, I think so anyway. But do I put other interests, even other people, in places of importance above my relationship with you? Do I put that relationship in second or third place, perhaps not meaning to but doing it anyhow? If that is so, I pray for forgiveness and I pray that you give me unavoidable ways to think about that. I want to “go along” with the Good News of the Gospel. No, Lord – much more than that! – I want to *embrace and be embraced* by it. I pray also for...

Wednesday. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus, **“I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested...I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”** (from Acts 20:19, 24)

God, do I have such devotion to you? Is my chief aim to glorify you and enjoy you forever, as the old catechisms say? Do I see my own life as worth nothing in comparison to that? Do I place such high value on completing the task of witnessing to the Good News? I know I should answer with a strong “yes” but I cannot do so on my own. I must have you to guide and remind me that I am not alone but am blessed by your Holy Spirit on my journey. So I ask for reassurance today. Lift me up to your presence, away from the mundane and the mistakes. Let me enjoy you fully, my Lord. I pray also for...

Thursday. In his farewell talk to the Ephesian elders, Paul recalled: **“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”** (Acts 20:35)

Writing to the Christians at Rome, he also said: **“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.”** (Rom. 15:1)

Dear Lord, you have borne me up in my failings. I thank you. You have given me strength far beyond my abilities. I thank you. You have worked through others to encourage me when I was down. I thank you. It was all about your love at work. But I don’t want to be only on the receiving end. Direct me in ways I might give to others, support them when they are weakened by life’s misfortunes, and in so doing, demonstrate your Gospel of love. I pray also for...

Friday. In Jerusalem, Paul was arraigned before Jewish leaders who refused to accept Jesus and wanted to charge Paul with high crimes. He **“looked straight at them”** and said, **“My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.”** (from Acts 23:1)

Eternal God, what a marvelous testimony to be able to proclaim! Have I always fulfilled my duty as your child, as a witness to the work of your love in my life? Can I say such a thing with a clear conscience? O God, I do believe in your powerful love. I do believe you guide me to *your* way. I do believe that if I bring all my burdens and seek you first, you will work your will in me and give me peace. But I often need help like the father of the sick boy who once cried out to Jesus, **“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.”** (Mark 9:24) For sometimes I do falter as if my belief were failing! Save me from myself. Restore me to a good conscience, I pray this in Jesus' name. And I pray also for...

Saturday. Toward the end of his life, Paul preached in Rome and reached back through the centuries to quote the book of the prophet Isaiah: **“For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.”** (Acts 28:27)

Dear Lord, I pray today that in ever-increasing ways, our church will become a stronger, mightier beacon proclaiming your love to our community and beyond. You have shown us your favor in obvious, wondrous ways. We must make that known to all who need to see and hear, even those – *especially* those – with calloused hearts. You have shown us the power that comes through the Holy Spirit at work among your people. We must carry that glorious Good News in real and clear messaging to those who might turn so that you may heal their lives. Undergird us. Enhance all we do in our church with an urgency as never before. We need to be your witnesses. I pray also for...

Week 2

"The desert is the place where you did not want to go. It is not flowing with milk and honey. It is a dry and barren place. Life is bleak there." ... "But sometimes the desert seems to come for no discernible reason at all."... "In the desert, all we have to cling to is the promise. God has not forgotten you. You have not been abandoned. He leads his children in roundabout ways. He is not in a hurry. God is at work in the roundabout way of the desert, in ways we do not see and cannot understand. God's way is rarely the quickest way. It is seldom the easiest way. But it is always the best way." (from *Love Beyond Reason*, by John Ortberg)

Monday. "God didn't put angels in charge of this business of salvation that we're dealing with here. It says in Scripture: 'What is man and woman that you bother with them; why take a second look their way? You made them not quite as high as angels, bright with Eden's dawn light; then you put them in charge of your entire handcrafted world.'" (Heb. 2:5-8, *The Message*)

O God, how great you are and how insignificant I am! Even so, you gave me your world, then your Son to demonstrate your love; then you turned me loose to enjoy it or mess it up as I might choose. How can I ever think I can manage on my own? Leaning on my own self is such a foolish risk that it's downright embarrassing to presume such a thing. I must have you in all my days, in all my ways. Let me stay in your presence this day as I begin another week in my journey with you. I pray now also for...

Tuesday. "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (from Heb. 2:1, 3)

Dear Lord, the salvation you planned for us – for me! – is the finest gift in the history of humankind – thank you, my God. To ignore it is a crude presumption that we know better ways to live – forgive us. To know about it and then drift away from it makes no sense at all, but that's what we do – forgive us. It's the sure

thing for meaningful living, and passing it by is just fooling ourselves, the height of inanity – forgive us when we do it. So I pray this never happens to me: I don't want to escape you, my Lord; I want to escape the failed and pointless life that doesn't have you in it. I ask that the joy of salvation through you will be my chief impetus for living every day. I pray that in your plan for me, a testimony of this great salvation will shine forth from my own private relationship with you. How fine that others would find out about the salvation which awaits them too! I pray also for...

Wednesday. Hebrews, chapter 2, tells how Jesus used some Old Testament texts as he explained that he sees us as family. From Psalm 22:22 (*The Message*) he said, **“I'll tell my good friends, my brothers and sisters, all I know about you.”** Further putting himself in the family circle, he quoted from Isaiah 8:17,18 (*The Message*), **“Even I live by placing my trust in God,”** and **“I'm here with the children God gave me.”**

Father, you showed just how much you love us when you sent your Son to be our Savior. He died for us, then he takes us all unto himself as family – his brothers and sisters, his children. Have we heard about it so much that we take it for granted without giving it much thought – when the fact is that it is utterly astounding? If that's true of me, forgive me for such a cavalier attitude. Teach me to *think*, for surely I will learn humility and gratitude. And teach me to *love*, for surely that is your will. I pray also today for...

Thursday. **“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”** (Heb. 2:18)

Dear God, thank you for making it clear that I am not left to deal with temptation all by myself. For I am indeed tempted to sin in ways that you and I alone know about. Now and then, it just gets too easy to give in to temptation. And what about this: do I even know about all the times I yield to sinning; have I gotten so used to it that I don't even recognize my own wrongdoing? If so, I pray you will heighten my awareness by keeping my mind and my heart centered on the Savior who, as a human person on this earth, was tempted too and thus knows how hard it can be. If I

stay tuned in to you, I'll see the temptation coming and will be able to turn to you for the kind of help you know how to give. Help me to open my life up to you more completely. I pray also for...

Friday. Paul reminded the Hebrew Christians that Jesus, as the Son of God, actually became human and truly did die to show he knew about human sin and death. But he conquered death in his resurrection to **“free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** (from Heb. 2:15).

God, there are so many things in this world to be afraid of that it's no wonder we are sometimes overcome by a spirit of fear. Two things that scare us most are illness which cannot be cured and death which we cannot control. The fear of what happens after that can consume us if we try to think about it without letting you into those thoughts. Keep me from falling into that trap. You made it clear that *because* Jesus won over death, we have the promise of life eternal with you. So help me to accept that promise and be joyful, unencumbered by fear of death and, indeed, by fear of any other kind. Help me to keep my trust in you *in all things*. Now, I pray for...

Saturday. **“So, my dear Christian friends, companions in following this call to the heights, take a good hard look at Jesus. He is the centerpiece of everything we believe... Every house has a builder, but the *Builder* behind them all is God... *Christ as Son* is in charge of the house.”** (from Heb 3:1-6, *The Message*)

Father, you do help us to follow your call to soar with you – all of us who are companions in your church. What a great thing to know that we are real companions. And not just here, but everywhere in the world. Thank you. The highest place is where we want to be. Keep directing us to center on Jesus individually so that we will do the same in our togetherness, especially here in your house at Fifth and Dewey. Keep it a house of prayer where all the rooms are filled with your presence. And I ask that this will be especially obvious as we meet together tomorrow. I also pray now for...

Week 3

"God simply wants us to know him. He wants to be in communion with us. He wants to talk to us, to have us share our hearts with him. When you are in a human relationship, it will not grow without regular communication. If you do not spend time with each other, talk to each other, share what's on your hearts and minds, then that relationship will go nowhere. So it is with God." (from *The Power of Personal Prayer* by Jonathan Graf)

Monday. "So watch your steps, friends. Make sure there's no evil unbelieving lying around that will trip you up and throw you off course, diverting you from the living God . . . keep each other on your toes so sin doesn't slow down your reflexes. If we can only keep our grip on the sure thing we started out with, we're in this with Christ for the long haul." (from Heb. 3:12-14, *The Message*)

Eternal God, as I begin this week, I know from experience that staying on my toes, fully mindful of my journey with you, doesn't always work because there are so many distractions. Some are small and simple things but enough to keep me from having communion with you. Some loom large and frightening. As I deal with it all, if I can always have a lightning-quick return to your presence, I'll never really be off course. Only you can help me do that, Father. Then, in whatever ways you lead me, I need to be your tool to help others connect with you also. I ask for these things from my heart and in Jesus' name. I pray now for...

Tuesday. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Heb. 4:12)

O God, if I am to follow you, really follow you, I must read and heed your word. Why don't I read my Bible? Is it *because* it penetrates, gets down to the basics of who I am, makes me look at myself and how I live my life? And do I shy away from doing that? If this is true, help me be at ease with your word so I'm not afraid of facing the facts that my Bible lays out. Help me make

Bible reading a habit, a joy, something I look forward to doing. This is *your word* ! Amazing gift! But for reasons that won't come clear somehow, I take your gift for granted when I should be relishing it. You can help me change. Do that for me, I pray. And I pray too for...

Wednesday. "...you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again." ... "Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings...go on to maturity..." (from Heb. 5:12; 6:1)

Lord God, I ask once again for your loving patience. For years I have had unlimited opportunities to learn and grow in Christ. I have my Bible, my church, my Christian friends, and writings and preaching from dedicated people who seem to have sped along on their journeys, while I sometimes seem just to flounder along on mine. Help me to get beyond the basics and to grow in the knowledge of your love. There is much to learn, and I think I may be way behind. Whatever is keeping me from that, I ask that you show me and guide me in how to change. I also ask you to instill in me a desire to share what I learn about your love with other people – even be a teacher in ways you'd want me to be. I pray too for...

Thursday. "...dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case – things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

(from Heb. 6:9-12)

Dear Lord, this clearly affirms that constancy is the key. Thank you for showing this to me. Teach me more about the meaning of steadfastness. Show me how I can achieve faithfulness on every step of my journey, not just now and then as I happen to think about it. These marks of maturity as your child won't come from my efforts alone. You make it happen because you love me

– thank you, gracious God. I await your presence and your leading in ways that are clear and certain. I pray also for...

Friday. **“We who have run for our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It’s an unbreakable spiritual lifeline, reaching past all appearances right to the very presence of God where Jesus, running on ahead of us, has taken up his permanent post as the high priest for us...”** (from Heb. 6:18-20, *The Message*)

God, those of us who actually do give our whole lives over to you have learned from your word and from the experience itself about that spiritual lifeline. It connects us straight to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I praise you and I thank you! Help me never to let go of that lifeline. It is the source of the only real meaning in this life, and it is the way we are assured of life eternal in your presence. I praise you and I thank you! I pray now for...

Saturday. Paul told the Hebrews they had to realize that Jesus was not like the old Jewish high priests whose domain was in a manmade temple. **“The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.”** (Heb. 8:1,2)

O God, how great and mighty is your majesty! You have given us our beloved Savior who demonstrated your love in ways the human mind can understand: he took our sins to the cross. And you removed the old system of how people come to you: your true tabernacle is in the hearts of us all. You have also given us a place to meet together as we will do tomorrow. Make all our hearts alive with your presence so that all we think and say and sing will rebound to your glory among us. I pray today also for...

Week 4

There is no such thing as a wasted prayer. Prayer is, after all, a conversation with God. How could time spent with the God of all humankind – the God of all history, the God who invented love for His world – be anything but your noblest endeavor?

Monday. Paul told the Hebrew people that there was nothing wrong with the old law of Moses and the Jewish ancestors. But, he said, “...**the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.**” (from Heb. 8:6)

Father, thank you for your word which tells us about the seemingly endless and oft-repeated promises you made to your people of old. You used your prophets and saints to give the message of your love over and over and over. And you make it clear that because too many spurned those promises and turned from your gifts of love, you gave us Jesus. My heart must surely overflow with gratitude. Help me to accept your love more perceptively. Help me to believe and honor your promises more openly. Cause this to happen in my life in new and profound ways as I begin this week, as I step forward into all my future. I pray also for...

Tuesday. “**For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.**” (Heb. 8:12)

Dear God, when you made that promise to your people so long ago, you made it to me too. But “wickedness”? Must I see myself that way? I think of “wicked” people as so morally depraved, so disgustingly bad, so excessively reprehensible, as to be without any redeeming qualities at all. But then, you have made it clear elsewhere in your word that when we fail to put you first, love you first and, likewise, fail to love our neighbors “as ourselves,” we are breaking the most important commandments of all. I admit that I have not always put you first in my life, and I wonder how often I’ve ever loved others that much. That surely does qualify as “wicked,” and I ask that when it happens, *make me see*

it as it happens. For I need to entreat you for forgiveness and get back in touch with you without delay. As you forgive me, you remember my sins no more. What a promise! Thank you, my God. I pray now also for...

Wednesday. Paul reminded the Hebrews (chapter 9) about the complicated worship under Mosaic law, whereby only the high priest entered the inner room of the tabernacle. But, he said, the shedding of blood by Jesus became the symbol through which we are cleansed of sin. **“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant...he has died as a ransom to set them free from sins...”** (from Heb. 9:15).

Dear Lord, that you should go to such lengths to demonstrate how much we are loved is a concept too hard to comprehend – even when I really put my mind to it. I’m afraid I dismiss it too easily most of the time because the story is so familiar. I think you want me to accept it with ease, but only after really understanding the grandeur of your gift of love. Give me reminders, I pray, for that’s when I can understand more fully, when I can draw more closely to your side. I really do love you, Lord. Help me to love you more. I pray also today for...

Thursday. In describing the old system of sacrifices made by priests in the temple, Paul pointed out that this had to be done repeatedly – but not so any longer. **“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.”** (Heb. 9:24)

Father, my human mind can’t imagine what heaven might be like. Only with your help can I learn to accept that the ultimate demonstration of your love actually did take place, and that I too am included in that circle of love you have for us all. Help me to keep learning that in new and convincing ways as I go along my journey with you. Help me to see that it’s not so important for me to explain the mystery of your being, your heaven, or even why you should love me so much. Just reach into my finite mind and set up a firm, unshakeable conviction about who you are and how limitless is your love. And as you teach me, help me to love as I have been loved. I pray now for...

Friday. “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people...” (from Heb. 9:27,28)

God, I can, but only with your help, mentally grasp how Jesus came as a man and made the ultimate sacrifice of death so we can see how our sins are forgiven. But it is harder to learn about dying. It makes me afraid. So I ask that you teach me not to dread death; because it is part of your plan, it is part of life with you. I ask too for reassurance about your judgment. Help me to see that it is just the final statement about the guidance you give as I live out life with you. For truly, if I walk as you lead, judgment will merely be the way you welcome me into your presence. Guide me, O great Jehovah, through the good days and through the bad, through the fears and the dreads, to a constancy in the peace which you alone can give. I pray also for...

Saturday. “So, friends, we can now – without hesitation – walk right up to God, into ‘the Holy Place.’ Jesus has cleared the way by the blood of his sacrifice, acting as our priest before God. . . So let’s do it – full of belief, confident that we’re presentable inside and out. Let’s keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshiping together as some do, but spurring each other on. . .” (from Heb. 10:19-25, *The Message*)

O God, thank you for this Scripture. It says so very much about what you have done for us and what we’re to do in response. As we meet in worship services tomorrow, cause us to come with confidence because we know your promises are true. And create in the heart of each of us a strong desire to love and support each other – not just tomorrow, not just when we have extra trouble in our lives, but at all times. Help us to keep a spirit of worship and of togetherness, whether or not we’re in one place at one time. Make that happen at our church, in this special body of Christ, so that it will then extend beyond our walls. I pray, as always, in Christ’s name, and I pray further...