



GROW. PRAY. STUDY.

The Church of the Resurrection – Weekly Guide

May 19, 2013

5 Habits for Living Well

Scripture:

[Moses said to them,] Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. – *Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

A lawyer asked [Jesus] a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment.’ – *Matthew 22:35-38*

MONDAY 5.20.13 Psalm 100:1-5 “Thank him! Bless his name!”

Psalm 100 is called “A Psalm of Thanksgiving.” The psalm’s five short verses are rich with praise-filled language and images that celebrate God. Although we sometimes say, with sorrow or resignation, “Nothing lasts forever,” the psalmist didn’t see life that way. He was confident that one vitally important truth is eternally durable: “The Lord is good, his loyal love lasts forever.”

- ❖ The psalmist surely went through life’s ups and downs. Trusting that “the Lord is good, his loyal love lasts forever; his faithfulness lasts generation after generation” (verse 5) helped him focus his life on worship and gratitude. Spend time today memorizing verse 5, so that during today’s (and every day’s) inevitable ups and downs, you can remind yourself to always trust God’s eternal love.
- ❖ The psalmist encouraged readers with action words: “Make,” “Know,” “Enter,” and “Give.” Author and speaker Andy Andrews said, “God has created people with a will that is stronger than emotions” (some unwilling medical conditions are an exception). Despite the uncertainty and hardships we all face, what in your life can you choose to be grateful for? In what ways have you found that “the Lord is God,” and that you are a “sheep of his pasture”?

Prayer: Father, thank you for offering all of us eternal love and hope. Help us to remember that you are good and your love lasts forever, and to use that truth to shape our perspective. Amen.

TUESDAY 5.21.13 Ephesians 5:18-21, Isaiah 12:1-5 “Always give thanks”

In the ancient world, as today, some people tried to numb themselves against life’s pains with alcohol (as well as, of course, other escape mechanisms). To Christians in the city of Ephesus, Paul wrote that psalms, hymns, spiritual songs and always giving thanks to God were a better way. He no doubt had praise songs like the one in Isaiah 12 in mind.

- ❖ *The Message* paraphrased Paul’s counsel in verses 18-19 with these words: “Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs!” Can gratitude to God be “intoxicating,” even habit-forming? Have you ever been in that condition, and if so, what was the experience like? What are some of the life benefits of having a “gratitude habit”?

- ❖ Isaiah, in the midst of a set of messages warning Israel of judgment, offered hope for the future. To people who lived in the often-arid Middle East, he wrote, “You will draw water with joy from the springs of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). What people, places or practices help you to draw water from the springs of salvation, even in the dry times of your life?

Prayer: Living Lord, life in this world sometimes leaves me parched and thirsty inside. Help me remember that, in the end, only you are a reliable, never-ending source of living water. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 5.22.13 Colossians 3:15-17 “Be thankful people.”

It’s easy to read a passage like today’s and think, “What lovely, uplifting devotional words.” But remember: the apostle Paul was not writing abstract devotional thoughts. He and the early Christians lived in a world as cruel and unsettling as ours, and one that often turned its hatred and scorn particularly on them. His counsel about peace, praise and gratitude was a survival manual for a spiritual combat zone, not just a set of nice, uplifting pleasantries.

- ❖ How many times, in these three verses, did Paul mention the importance of gratitude? As we reach the mid-point of this week, where is your heart on a “gratitude meter” as you face this day? What inner choices can you make that would move you higher on the scale today?
- ❖ Verse 17 takes in a lot of ground: “Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.” What does it mean to you to do whatever you do “in the name of the Lord Jesus”? How can you “give thanks to God the Father through him” as you work, shop, drive the freeway, react to today’s headlines or cheer for the Royals or your kid’s soccer team?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of this day. Thank you that whatever happens today, you will be with me. Thank you for clearing my vision so that I can see reasons to say “thank you.” Amen.

THURSDAY 5.23.13 2 Corinthians 4:6-9, 16-18; John 16:31-33 “The things that can’t be seen are eternal”

Jesus saw beyond this world. He taught about “the Kingdom of heaven,” not as a vivid way of imaging some spiritual values, but as the defining reality he lived in (cf. Matthew 5:1-16, John 18:33-36, 19:7-11). When facing death on a cross the next day, he said, “I have conquered the world.” It’s little wonder that his follower Paul wrote, “We don’t focus on the things that can be seen... the things that can’t be seen are eternal.”

- ❖ Jesus never denied the reality of this world. God created it and loves it. He did insist, however, that the kingdom of God is, if anything, more real and important than this tangible world. When have you had glimpses (or perhaps more than just a glimpse) of the reality of God’s spiritual world? (If this is a new idea to you, consider getting Phillip Yancey’s readable books *Rumors of Another World* or *Soul Survivor*.)
- ❖ When did you last feel confused, harassed or knocked down? What resources did you draw on to try to keep from being crushed, depressed or knocked out? Have you ever found it true, in yourself or someone you know, that “even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day”? Are there disciplines (e.g. Bible memorization, meditation, prayer) that help you access God’s strength to renew the person you are on the inside?

Prayer: Lord God, I don’t want to forget the truth expressed in the old hymn: “I need Thee every hour.” Draw me ever closer to you, so that your presence becomes more and more the air my spirit breathes. Amen.

FRIDAY 5.24.13 Philippians 4:4-12 “The peace of God that exceeds all understanding”

The apostle Paul’s statement that God’s peace “exceeds all understanding” may make more sense when we remember that he sent this letter from a dank, dreary Roman prison cell (cf. Philippians 1:12-14). Even in those conditions, he had that peace. He shared three of the keys he’d found for God’s peace: to give worries to God in prayer, focus on the good in life and practice contentment.

- ❖ Paul’s counsel on avoiding anxiety was “Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks” (verse 6). He went on to talk about the importance of focusing on things that are excellent, admirable, pure, lovely and worthy of praise. Do you find that certain kinds of entertainment, and even news, direct your attention to bad, ugly, anxiety-producing thoughts? How can you incorporate Paul’s wisdom more fully into your daily life?
- ❖ Paul, contented and at peace even in prison, did not say “I was lucky to be born with a contented heart.” He said, “I have learned to be content.” Under what conditions, good or bad, do you find it a struggle to stay contented in God’s peace? What experiences or examples have helped you learn to make choices or take actions that lead you toward accepting God’s gift of contentment?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to turn my worries into prayers. So right now I lay before you all the things that worry me today, and I open my heart to your gifts of peace and contentment. Amen.

SATURDAY 5.25.13 Deuteronomy 6:4-6, Matthew 22:34-40 The greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God”

The vital habit, the central key, to living a good life is to trust in, love and serve God. Ancient Israel believed this truth—Deuteronomy 6:7 ensured its continuity with the words “Recite [these words] to your children.” Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that Jesus, asked what is the greatest commandment, quoted that same simply life-changing call: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind!”

- ❖ Scholar William Barclay wrote that Jesus’ words called us to love God “not with a nebulous sentimentality, but with that total commitment which issues in devotion to God and practical service of men.” What are some of the signs you look for in your life that show you are committed to a task at work, to your mate or your kids, or to other important parts of your life? In what ways is your commitment to trusting in, loving and serving God adding meaning, joy and peace to your life every day?

Prayer: Dear God, count me in! I want to be a fully committed citizen of your unseen, yet very real and life-changing kingdom. Transform me day-by-day into the person you are calling me to be. Amen.

Family Activity: Read John 14:27. Jesus was a person of peace and desired for his followers to also be people of peace. Choose to spend some quiet time together with your family. Maybe you want to take a brief walk. You might each want to spend some time reading. Maybe you prefer listening to music. Encourage everyone to ask God to calm their hearts and to fill them with peace during their quiet time. Also ask each person to find a word or an item during the quiet time that will help him or her carry that peace every day. Share your experiences as a family and pray God’s peace for one another. Move toward beginning each day asking God to help you be a person of peace.