

LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

JAMES 2:1–10

A Neighborhood of Equals

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

James 2:1

If you pay attention to Jesus, you can't help but notice that Jesus pays attention to rich and poor folks alike. He speaks with and touches those others avoid (Luke 5:12–13). He eats with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:2) but also with Pharisees and scribes (Luke 14:1–24). He heals the sick without first asking if they can afford to pay or if they qualify for his charitable acts. He shares his teaching stories with both the educated and uneducated.

The early church maintained that same commitment to diversity. In Christ, external differences don't matter, and people from a variety of backgrounds and social classes are invited to see one another as beloved brothers and sisters.

Reading James, we discover that this sort of diversity is not easy to create or to maintain—even in a church. It is far easier to allow our fellowship to be defined and shaped by money, power, and social standing instead of by the radical love of the God who made us all and loves us equally. That's a major misunderstanding of God's plan—and a sin too.



Lord, help us to love our neighbors as our equals. Amen.

Jennifer Vogt Newell, Chattanooga, Tennessee

LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

PROVERBS 22:8–9

Don't Be a Bad Neighbor

*Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity,
and the rod of anger will fail.*

Proverbs 22:8

When I am in a hurry or feel overwhelmed by everything on my to-do list, I look for a faster, easier way to get the work done. Often, there is such a shortcut—but sometimes those faster options have less integrity. They may involve cutting corners, skipping steps, bypassing safeguards, or ignoring important information. In my rush to finish a project, I may choose not to get the permission I need or not to communicate with others who might be affected by my work. Sometimes, cheating and dishonesty come into play as well.

I may work hard and have the very best of intentions, but a corrupt process seldom leads to a good result—and no matter how much effort I put into it, unfair, unjust, dishonest work is always a waste of time (which is another translation of the word, *calamity*).

In any project (preparing a sermon, building a porch, baking bread), we make many choices along the way. Those choices impact the final outcome but also have the potential to strengthen or weaken our relationships—with coworkers, clients, neighbors, and God.



*Lord, may the work of my hands reflect your justice.
Amen.*

LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

SCRIPTURE: PROVERBS 22:9, 22–23

Sharing Is Caring

*Those who are generous are blessed,
for they share their bread with the poor.*

Proverbs 22:9

Do a word search in a Bible app or concordance for the word *poor* in Proverbs. You may be surprised by how often it appears. Proverbs teaches that people of integrity will treat the poor with integrity, and people who are wise will address their neighbor's needs with compassion.

Concern for the poor isn't limited to Proverbs: the issue is woven throughout the Old Testament laws and serves as one of the main ways that the prophets evaluate Israel's commitment to God too. In Scripture, we learn that a community shaped by its relationship with God has an obligation to protect and to provide for those who are least able to care for themselves as well.

And then along comes Jesus, not to do away with the Old Testament witness, but to fulfill it and deepen it. When he talks about the kingdom, it sounds like better news for the poor and powerless than for the wealthy and well-connected. When we are generous with the poor, we serve Jesus too (Matt. 25).



*Lord, open my eyes, heart, mind, and hands to the
needs of the poor. Amen.*

Jennifer Vogt Newell, Chattanooga, Tennessee

LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

MARK 7:24–30

Of Families and Neighbors

But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Mark 7:28

I love this mom’s determination: she crosses cultural and religious boundaries; she bows (v. 25), she begs (v. 26); and, when Jesus says no, she pushes back (v. 28) and gets what she came for.

However, Jesus’ initial response to this mother’s request seems out of character, at least with the way I understand Jesus. In reply to her request, Jesus spells out his priorities—and she’s not at the top of the list. It’s odd because, while he’s shared those priorities before (see Matt. 10:5–6, 15:24), he’s never treated anyone else who sought his help with this sort of hostility.

The mother, though, persists. She doesn’t argue with Jesus’ priorities (Mark 7:28) but insists that honoring her request won’t interrupt (or invalidate) them. And she’s right. Healing her daughter does not constitute the sort of mission creep that derails so many ministries. On the contrary, it’s a natural extension of Jesus’ mission.

Prioritizing the needs of my own family doesn’t mean that no one else matters. Serving others doesn’t have to change my devotion to my family.

Lord, make room in my heart for my neighbors. Amen.

Jennifer Vogt Newell, Chattanooga, Tennessee

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

PSALM 19:7–10

Two Roads Diverged

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear.*

Psalm 19:7–8

As a child, I loved the Choose Your Own Adventure books. The narrative pauses, and the reader is given two choices: whichever page you turn to determines the course of the story. I found it both thrilling and safe, because I could always flip back and choose again. As I watch my son navigate choices during his first weeks at university, I try to ease the pressure by reminding him that he can always change his mind. The option to choose again is always there.

This week's reading reminds us that some decisions are irreversible. Sometimes choosing one road over another truly does make all the difference. Psalm 19 praises the Law—Torah—as a sure guide to a flourishing life. There is something compelling about the idea of a trustworthy map that directs our choices—not only individually but also collectively—toward health and life.



Guide us, Lord, in the way that leads to life. Amen.

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

PSALM 19:1–6

The Book of Nature

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims [God's] handi-
work.*

Psalm 19:1

When I was in grade six, our class went on an outing in a park near the ocean. We spent the day in the woods, learning about photosynthesis by crawling through leaf-shaped tents, making art out of moss and twigs, and sitting still and listening. At the end, we gathered in a circle around a model of the sun and heard about our cosmic journey. What I remember most about that day is the feeling of awe—a sense of belonging to the cosmos. The older I get, the more this sense deepens. Knowing that the iron in my blood and calcium in my bones were formed in the cores of stars—that we are *all* made of star-stuff—makes me want to sing, or at least find words to tell of my astonishment and wonder.

The cosmic praise that opens Psalm 19 is the setting in which praise of the law is embedded. This matters. Our way of being in the world—choosing the right path—depends on our awareness of how deeply all things are connected. Wonder and astonishment come first; attentive and compassionate living flow from them.

*Source of all things, open my mind and heart to awe
and wonder. Amen.*

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

PSALM 19:1–6

The Song of Creation

*There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

Psalm 19:3–4

We all have favorite sounds. Mine are the ocean, especially after a storm, and rain on the roof at night. Recently I learned about stellar sound waves, a phenomenon of stars that produces sound waves at frequencies beyond the range of human hearing but detectable by telescopes. Essentially, the stars pulse and ring like bells. How marvelous to think of the whole universe vibrating with music!

Psalm 19 imagines the natural world having a voice that declares the glory of God. But what other songs does nature sing? Long before we fully understood our impact on the environment, Paul wrote about creation groaning. The anguished sounds he heard are amplified today as species disappear, habitats are destroyed, and all kinds of creatures suffer, largely to satisfy human appetites. There are choices to be made. Joining creation in its song of praise is a joyful thing. But will we also allow its song of lament to break and reform our hearts?



*Maker of all things, may the songs of creation—both
praise and lament—move us to act. Amen.*

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

PROVERBS 1:20–33

I Want You to Panic

Wisdom cries out in the street;

.....
*“How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?”*

Proverbs 1:20–22

Outside the Swedish parliament, a young woman stands alone holding a sign that says “School Strike for Climate.” Ignored and ridiculed by some, hailed as a hero by others, she holds out the possibility of two ways: one leads to life, the other to death. Greta Thunberg is one of a growing number of young activists who are boldly calling us all to account for choices that affect not only our own future but also the fate of our communities, nations, and our planet.

Those who say Greta should get back to the classroom where she belongs might ponder this text from Proverbs. Woman Wisdom is a street preacher. She makes people uncomfortable because she refuses to stay quiet and speaks out in public: in the courts, the stock exchange, the marketplace. Wisdom warns of coming disaster, loudly condemns foolishness and ignorance, and insists that she belongs wherever big decisions are made. She is a holy troublemaker. Can you hear her voice today? What is she saying?



*Divine Wisdom, may we know and listen to your
voice. Amen.*

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

MARK 8:27–30

Walk This Way

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi: and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

Mark 8:27

Although the Gospels provide us with many sayings of Jesus, they offer few glimpses into private conversations. These verses are an exception. On a journey with his closest friends, Jesus brings up his identity and purpose: “Who do people say that I am?” And what do you think? Implied here are deeper questions: Why are you following me? What do you expect from me? Where do you think we’re going?

When Peter (with more enthusiasm than understanding) announces that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus sternly orders his friends to tell no one. Why? Perhaps because Jesus knows that their assumptions about the Messiah—who he is and what he will do—are painfully out of sync with how Jesus sees his own purpose. They are not yet ready to absorb the truth about Jesus—that his way is not one of conquest but of radical love and its consequences. So, like the best teachers, Jesus embodies the lesson. On that slow trek toward Jerusalem, Jesus begins to show his friends what it looks like to choose the way of love, trusting that in life and death, he belongs to God.

Divine Love, walk with me along the way. Amen.

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

MARK 8:31–33

Cake or Death?

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering . . . and be killed, and after three days rise again. . . . And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Mark 8:31–32

In a comedy sketch, Eddie Izzard imagines what might have happened had the Church of England run the Inquisition. Always proper and civilized, the inquisitors offer every victim a choice: Cake or death? They quickly run out of cake. Who would ever choose *death*?

Two years ago this month, a dear friend chose death—sort of. Diagnosed with a fatal neurological disease, she seized hold of the *when* and *how* and chose medically assisted death and organ donation. She also poured the last drops of her energy into sharing her own experience with doctors, medical students, and palliative care workers. As a doctor, she had spent her life healing and teaching. She wanted her death to serve this same purpose.

Maybe some people rebuked her, as Peter did Jesus. It seems improper to talk openly of one's own death. But if you choose your way of living, does it not make sense that you would also choose your way of dying?



God of all consolation, give us courage to live and die with integrity. Amen.

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

MARK 8:34–36

Stay with Me

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Mark 8:34b

On this somber anniversary, I am still thinking of my friend. While she was dying, she agreed to be followed by a filmmaker who would tell her story to a wider audience. The result was a documentary called *Her Last Project*. In one scene, three friends push Shelly around the public gardens in a wheelchair, laughing and eating ice cream. On camera afterward, one of her companions blinks back tears and admits how hard it is not to let grief spoil their time together. I catch a glimpse of what it costs to be present, not just on sunny afternoons in the garden, but in all those other scary places no one wants to be. Why do they stay? Because they love Shelly.

This simple truth illuminates the theological complexity of this passage from Mark. Choosing the way of love hurts. It often leads us where we do not want to go. When Jesus urges us to take up our crosses and follow him, it is not an invitation to sprint toward martyrdom. Perhaps it simply means *stay with me*—even in the scary places—because you love me.



Ever-present friend, stay with me. Amen.

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

PSALM 1

Happy Are Those?

*Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.*

Psalm 1:1–2

Misery often has roots in unfulfilled expectations. People disappoint us. So do jobs. Online purchases. Most painful of all is when our expectations of God disintegrate. One phone call shatters our world. There is no healing. All our prayers seem fruitless. *Happy are those who delight in the law of the Lord.* Is this an invitation to shattered expectations? Faithfulness is not rewarded with bliss. The story of Jesus confirms it; the cross lays bare the lie at the heart of the prosperity gospel.

So what do we do with this psalm? Perhaps there is a clue in the contrast between the green plants and the insubstantial chaff. One endures; one does not. Maybe happiness is not about prosperity at all. Maybe it is about *groundedness*—the equanimity that flows from knowing we are connected to a source stronger and more resilient than anything that seeks to harm or destroy it.

—♦—
*Divine Source, flow through me and keep me
grounded. Amen.*

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

PSALM 1

Garden of Redemption

*They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.*

Psalm 1:3

My daughter has been tending to her heart garden—a project she began one summer as a living memorial to children lost to the residential school system in Canada, to their families, and to those who survived. The garden includes plants of symbolic significance to indigenous people and hundreds of stones, each one painted with the name of a child who died in one of the church-run schools. My daughter noticed that many of the names on official records had been anglicized—the children’s indigenous names stripped away along with so much of their identity.

What was done to these children again calls into question the connection the psalm makes between faithfulness and flourishing. But what if we exchange the image of the individual tree for the vision of a garden as collective space? Prosperity can never be limited to a privileged few. Truly delighting in God means tending to the health of the whole community. Just imagine the garden that could thrive!



O God, may our delight in your ways produce a harvest that all can enjoy. Amen.

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

PROVERBS 31:10–18

Are You Still Awake?

*She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household*

.....
Her lamp does not go out at night.

Proverbs 31:15a, 18b

One of the hardest things about being a parent is the loss of sleep: years of nursing babies through the night, sitting up with sick children, watching the clock and listening for the footsteps of teens who have been out too late. Not sleeping may be an occupational hazard for parents, but it makes me cranky, and I do not celebrate it.

This proverbial woman who burns the midnight oil to maintain her perfect household makes me want to growl, “Just turn out your light and go to bed!” Is she a driven overachiever? Or a so-called godly mother who pours herself out in service to her family? Both are idols. Worshiping them lures too many women into the dual trap of perfectionism and self-sacrifice. So I am wary of her but also intrigued. Like Woman Wisdom, she is strong, generous, shrewd, and practical—the sort of woman I would vote for if she ran for public office. Torn between admiration and suspicion, I can only watch to see what she does next.



*Gracious God, help me remember that you call me
not to perfection but to faithfulness.*

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

PROVERBS 31:19–31

Off the Pedestal

*Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*

Proverbs 31:25–26

Here she is again—the capable wife. Now she is laughing at the time to come. This kind of confidence eludes me. There are not sufficient canned goods and toilet paper on earth to make me feel secure enough to laugh in the face of an uncertain future. But maybe her merriment bubbles up from the calm center of someone who has learned to make what plans she can and then release what she cannot control. That would make her wise indeed.

Again I notice the family resemblance between her and Woman Wisdom in chapter 1. Both are outspoken and active in public. Both temper boldness with kindness and concern for the vulnerable. Both seek public justice, not simply domestic bliss. Both speak words of wisdom and are associated with Torah—the ways of God. Perhaps this capable woman also embodies the divine spirit that calls us to a better way of being in the world. If that is the case, even I might choose her as a beloved companion and life partner—if she would let me sleep in sometimes.



Holy Wisdom, be my beloved companion. Amen.

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2021

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

MARK 9:30–32

The Oldest Pear Tree

“The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”

Mark 9:31

Four hundred years ago a pear sapling crossed the Atlantic from England to America, where it was lovingly planted and tended. *The Very Oldest Pear Tree* by Nancy Sanders follows the fortunes and misfortunes of the tree as a nation takes shape around it. Not only does the tree live through momentous political and social changes, it also survives such personal blows as fires, hurricanes, and vandalism, including having most of its branches chopped off.

This horrified my daughter, who could not comprehend *why* anyone would want to harm such a precious tree. But as the disciples discovered when Jesus bluntly told them he would be handed over to be destroyed, sometimes there are no answers—only grief and incredulity. When attempts to graft back its branches failed, the old pear tree proved astonishingly resilient, sprouting new shoots that eventually produced fruit of their own. What a symbol for the Christian story: betrayed and destroyed by human hands, that old pear tree was rooted in a source of life more powerful than anyone had imagined.

Source of life, I trust in you. Amen.

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

MARK 9:30–32

Afraid to Ask

*But they did not understand what he was saying
and were afraid to ask him.*

Mark 9:32

I am hardly in the door before my daughter's questions begin: What is for supper? Is there meat in it? How were the animals treated? Why did I bring so many plastic bags home from my last trip to the grocery store? My head is starting to ache. I just want to drink my coffee. I know the truth will make demands on me, and I am not ready for that right now. In my own small way, I feel for the disciples. When Jesus tells them yet again of the suffering that is coming, they do not understand but are afraid to ask questions. Why? I suspect they avoid the question because they fear the answer and what it will require of them.

Pondering this, I put down my mug and ask my daughter to show me her vegan cookbook. We choose a recipe, and I promise to bring reusable glass jars the next time I visit the bulk food store. It is only one tiny step. But I wonder what else might change if we stopped hiding behind silence and dared to face good questions and scary truths.



*Strong Spirit, give us courage to seek and speak the
truth. Amen.*

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

MARK 9:33–37

Welcome the Child

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Mark 9:37

A few days ago I met Christ in the train station. He was wearing a mask—a public health requirement—but the security guards who approached him did not realize it at first. When he turned around and saw them he said, “No worries. I always wear a mask. You know why? What’s your priority? To protect your family, right? They’re the most important. Well, the way I see it, *everyone* is my family.”

When Jesus overheard his friends bickering about who was the greatest, he could see their priorities: status, prestige, power. No wonder they had such trouble grasping what it meant to follow him. So he brought a child into their midst. This was more than a reminder to make room for the vulnerable. Look, Jesus seems to say. This is *your* child, *your* family, *your* flesh and blood. This child is *you*. And *me*. Now look closer. Do you see God in this child? Do you see that we are all one? This is how you must see all the time—and the seeing will determine the way you choose to live.



May I see the face of Christ in everyone I meet, and may they see the face of Christ in me. Amen.

Laura Alary, Toronto, Ontario

PRAYERS TO A GOD WHO PROVIDES

ESTHER 7:1–6

The Restorer of Our Lives

Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request.”

Esther 7:3

Everywhere we turn, we see threats to our welfare; be it our physical or mental health, spiritual life, relationships, employment, or finances. Jesus made it clear that we will have trouble in this world (John 16:33). These trials can leave us in despair, questioning what to do or how we will make it through. When life feels out of control, remember this: God is always in control. Will we try to use our own strength to save ourselves, or will we trust and depend on the Lord?

God has the power to bring forth life in every situation we face. This power raised Jesus from the grave and transformed our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. Nothing is too hard for God. Like Esther, we can humbly go to the king and make our requests known. We can confidently approach the throne of grace and find help in our time of need. Take heart, my friend! God stands ready to move on your behalf.



Lord, grant us health and wholeness, for you are the restorer of our lives. Amen.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

PRAYERS TO A GOD WHO PROVIDES

PSALM 124

Who You Know Matters

*Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.*

Psalm 124:8

Every so often we find ourselves needing to call in a favor. If we have a relationship with the person, we feel pretty confident that they may help us out. Even if we do not, we might try something else that I've found can be quite effective: you mention the name of a person they know. Names carry a lot of weight, especially the right name. If the name of a person can move hearts and open doors, just imagine the power that exists in the name of the Lord.

God is the one who created the heavens and the earth, whose word pierced the darkness and introduced wondrous light, whose breath established life from the very ground we walk. God is the one who meticulously planned and carefully crafted every living species, plant, and animal. This is who we call on and from whom our help comes. We have every reason to call on and bless the name of the Lord who is worthy to be praised.



*Thank you, Lord, for the privilege to know the name
that is above every name. Amen.*

Tieler Giles, Washington, DC

PRAYERS TO A GOD WHO PROVIDES
NUMBERS 11:10–16

Lighten the Load

I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me.

Numbers 11:14

At times, life can feel heavy. To withstand the challenges, our first inclination may be to increase our strength. We like to believe that we can do anything through hard work and determination. It doesn't help that we live in a world where self-reliance, overwork, and over-responsibility are lifted up and praised. But getting tougher or trying harder is not the answer. The truth is that we are inept and inefficient, and that is OK.

God is not asking us to grow stronger to carry the load but to admit instead that we are incapable and to hand over the matter. We are to surrender what troubles us and trust in the One who is able. Let us remember whose power and ability know no limit. Let us cease with the striving and the anxiety it brings. My friend, you were not meant to carry the weight of the world. God already knows what you need. All you have to do is ask.



Lord, help us to depend less on our abilities and trust more in yours. Amen.

PRAYERS TO A GOD WHO PROVIDES

PSALM 19:7–14

God Sees the Heart

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation
of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

Psalm 19:14

We live in a world that judges the book by its cover. Because the outward appearance means so much, we can be tempted to overlook or disregard our hidden flaws. Unlike people, however, God is foremost concerned with what is on the inside: our hearts and our minds. After all, every action begins as a thought or emotion. Thankfully, God has the power to govern and guard them both. As a campfire unchecked can consume a forest, an unchecked heart can be equally dangerous.

We are quick to avoid the sins of murder or adultery, but are we as troubled by anger, lust, or pride? We may play the part and impress others. We may be in good standing with people and the law. But if God is not pleased, our good behavior means nothing. Take heart; the Lord offers forgiveness of our sins and graciously renews and redirects our hearts, if that be our prayer.



*May our hearts desire what is pleasing and good,
inwardly and outwardly. Amen.*

PRAYERS TO A GOD WHO PROVIDES

JAMES 5:13–20

The Power to Set Free

Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

James 5:16

No person is an island. We need people to thrive. When we receive the gift of salvation, we gain a community of believers who help us grow spiritually. We become part of the body of Christ, each member dependent on and responsible for one another. While society may value individualism, we cannot follow Christ faithfully while going it alone. We must rely on our spiritual family to help us overcome life's struggles, which involves acknowledging our sins. Confession, though uncomfortable, is liberating.

God desires that we be free from the guilt and shame that accompany sin, which jeopardizes our relationships and our very well-being. Confessing our sins and praying with one another brings healing and restores our fellowship with God and those we have offended. Hardened hearts are softened, proud hearts are humbled, and heavy hearts become light. With clean, faith-filled hearts, we can be sure that God hears us and moves mightily when we pray.



Thank you, Lord, for the love, support, and healing we find in our spiritual family. Amen.

Tieler Giles, Washington, DC

PRAYERS TO A GOD WHO PROVIDES

JAMES 5:13–20

Believing the Impossible

Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

James 5:17

We have the privilege to take part in God's sovereign plan through the gift of prayer. Our prayers can move the One who moves the world. When we partner with the divine, connecting our faith with God's power, supernatural things happen. Through prayer, we are strengthened, shaped, and transformed from the inside out. Do you believe that God is able to do the miraculous when you ask, and do your prayers reflect that level of confidence?

There are times in life when we get to the end of our rope. Still, we continue to strain and struggle because prayer feels passive. We think, *something must be done, and I have to do it*. Prayer is one of the most powerful and active things we can do. Fervent prayer moves beyond our fears and limited expectations and engages our whole heart, mind, and spirit. It is prayer offered up with the belief that what we ask for will be done. Dare to pray the impossible with radical, rain-stopping faith.



Lord, help us to not limit our prayers or what you can do in response to them. Amen.

PRAYERS TO A GOD WHO PROVIDES

MARK 9:38–50

A Purifying Presence

“Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Mark 9:50

Salt is an essential element on the earth, known for its healing and preservative properties. As people of God, we are called to be the salt of the earth, purifying and healing an ailing world. We are to make a positive difference in our families, workplaces, and communities as a result of God’s saving power and grace in our lives. In order to do that, we must be vigilant against the influence of sin on the body of Christ and the ways in which we relate to and treat one another.

We are not immune to the conflict and contention that plagues the world. We do, however, belong to the One who brings order out of chaos and unity where there is division. The Holy Spirit will work in us, but we also have a role to play. We must continuously abide in the truth by consuming God’s word, prayer, worship, even thanksgiving. The church must look different from the world. That is how we draw those who are hungry to the sufficiency and satisfaction of Christ.



May we reflect the joy and peace of Christ in all that we do. Amen.

WALK WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING

JOB 1:1

Called to Holy Reverence

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Job 1:1

There is perhaps no greater enemy of the soul than fear. We fear a lot of things: failure, rejection, poverty, sickness, and death. While it may be common, fear is anything but harmless. What we fear has power over us and interferes with our living as God intends. Except one fear, that is: the fear of God. Scripture tells us “the fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death” (Prov. 14:27).

We are not to fear God in the sense of fright or worry. When we read about fearing the Lord, the Bible is referring to holy reverence. The very air we breathe is in God’s hands. God gives life and is life itself. We are to behold this consequential truth with admiration and awe. This healthy fear leads us to keep God’s commandments and turn from evil. The fear of God saves us from anything and everything that stands to separate us from the giver and sustainer of life.



May the fear of the Lord free us from every destructive and soul-disturbing fear. Amen.

Tieler Giles, Washington, DC

WALK WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING

PSALM 26

Called to Faithfulness

*For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.*

Psalm 26:3

The fundamental truth of the Christian faith is that God loves us. The Bible tells us that God is the essence of love (1 John 4:16). This love saves, heals, and transforms us. Never will there be a more pure, perfect, and enduring love. In response to this love, the only reasonable action is complete and utter devotion to God. Yet our love wavers. We commit wholeheartedly, but when our hearts change, we do as well.

To be faithful is to be loyal, steadfast, and true. When we walk in faithfulness to God, we love, trust, and submit. We put God first in our priorities. This is not a battle of strength or willpower but a willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us. God will grow our obedience, confidence, and zeal. Our part is to keep God's love before our eyes and at the forefront of our minds. We can never take for granted how good God is and how much we are loved.



Lord, forgive us for wandering and help us to be more faithful each day. Amen.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

WALK WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING

PSALM 8

Called to Be Humble

*Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.*

Psalm 8:2

Jesus of Nazareth taught that humility is essential to righteousness: “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4). Then, as now, the self-righteous seek power. However, humility is a major distinction between God’s people and the world. God often works through those who are unfit and unlikely to accomplish the exceptional. Just look at Israel’s greatest king, David.

David was the overlooked son. While his brothers were being scouted for their potential to be king, David was out in the fields keeping sheep. He didn’t appear to be a ruler or a hero. But God chose David to defeat Israel’s enemies. David was not confident in his own abilities, but he knew God’s power was unmatched. Like David, we do not need to be qualified. God will get the glory, not in spite of our weaknesses but because of them. Let us take the position of little children, looking not to ourselves for help but to our great provider.

—♦—

*May we look beyond ourselves to God’s power and
might. Amen.*

Tieler Giles, Washington, DC

WALK WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING

PSALM 8

Called to Rule

*You have given them dominion over the works
of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet.*

Psalm 8:6

God created humankind to rule over every creature and the earth itself. Submitted to God, the task was well within our reach. When we choose rebellion over obedience, however, we are cut off from God. The state of our planet presents convincing evidence of this disconnection: polluted air and oceans, contaminated drinking water, deforested land, and global climate change. Redeemed by Jesus, we have the responsibility to reconcile creation back to the Creator.

We must not destroy or exploit the earth but care for and tend to the works of God's hands. By God's grace, we can be good stewards of earth's resources, for the good of humanity and for the glory of God. If that is our desire, we must first and foremost submit ourselves to God's ultimate authority. We cannot lead unless we are led by God. In doing so, we honor God and advance the well-being of humanity and every living thing.



*Help us, Lord, to care for creation as you care so
deeply for us. Amen.*

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2021

WALK WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING

HEBREWS 2:5–12

Called to Be Brothers and Sisters of Christ

For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

Hebrews 2:11

One of the most astounding truths about our Savior is that Jesus was fully human. The Messiah emptied himself and put on our flesh and finiteness. Jesus had a mind that questioned, a heart that grieved, and a body that bled. Through his blood, we are set apart or sanctified to be used by God. Jesus made us holy, righteous, and worthy to be sons and daughters of God. We are beloved children, and the Son of God is our beloved brother.

Like a good big brother, Jesus sets the example for us. During his earthly life, Jesus sanctified himself by praying, living on the word of God, walking by faith, and submitting to the will of his Father. Let us follow the leader! We have a brother who understands what we face and is compassionate when we fall short. He does not condemn us but welcomes us with open arms. As younger siblings, let us imitate our brother so that we may be used for the glory and honor of God.



Thank you, Jesus, for showing us the way and calling us your own. Amen.

Tieler Giles, Washington, DC