

Prayer and Study Guide

Daily Scripture Readings – 4/29/18

Prayer - Use this prayer to begin your time with God each day.

Lord Jesus, you have given us a vision of how we can live our lives, not as a stress-filled, competitive race, but governed by you and focused on living into your purposes.

We want to find ways to slow down, hear your voice, and more truly become your people.

We freely yield ourselves to your transformation and welcome your peace and salvation. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Monday – Read Exodus 20:8-11, Mark 6:30-32, and Matthew 11:28-30. **Intentional Times of Rest.** The fourth commandment helps us remember that God rested on the seventh day of creation. What does this teach us about the rhythm of life that God intends for us to have? Jesus promises to give us rest, and in Mark's Gospel we see him telling his disciples, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." When we work hard we need times of rest and retreat, and when we have experienced great loss we need time away to be with loved ones and to receive God's compassion, mercy, and grace. In what ways do you take time for rest and retreat in your life? What hurts do you need God to heal? Ask God to heal your hurts and to help you carve out the time you need for rest and retreat.

Tuesday – Read Matthew 11:28-12:14. **Rest Stop.** For devout Hebrews in Jesus' day, keeping the Sabbath was a key way to let God govern life's pace, but at times, the spiritual point of the Sabbath got lost in a blizzard of regulations. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and he hated that. Jesus said that the point of Sabbath rest was not busily following *the rules* but resting in his grace and caring. Matthew seems to have wanted his readers to see the contrast between Jesus' *easy* yoke, and the burden of a system that censured a kind act of healing. What can make the integrity and convictions of your faith a well-fitting yoke, easy and light to bear? How will you open yourself to God, and let God's living presence transform your life from *duty and works* to *joy and peace*? Pray for God to give you the rest that you need.

Wednesday – Read Luke 5:15-16 and Matthew 6:33; 14:22-23. **Intimate Time with God.** The more Jesus ministered to people by sharing God's word with them and offering them healing, the more people wanted to spend time with him. However, over and over again, we see Jesus withdrawing to deserted places to pray. Prayer was essential to Jesus, and it was in these quiet times that he experienced intimate time with God. How is your prayer life? Did you spend ten minutes each day this week quietly being in God's presence? If it was this important for Jesus to spend intimate time with God, then it is equally necessary for you to spend intimate time with God. As you pray, spend some time just listening for God's still, small voice to speak to you. What is God trying to tell you?

Thursday – Read Exodus 18:13-26. **Are you trying to do too much?** Moses' task was to lead a throng of ex-slaves safely through the Sinai desert. They weren't organized and couldn't work out minor conflicts. Moses found himself ironing out every little problem the people had in person until his father-in-law wisely told him, "What you are doing is not good." It was good that Moses took his role as leader seriously, but God used his father-in-law to remind him that he wasn't called to be a solo act and handle everything himself. What solo tasks do you carry right now? Look prayerfully at what parts of them you could share with others. Are you open to God's wisdom even if it comes through a source you didn't expect? Pray for God to give you wisdom.

Friday – Read Psalm 46:1-11. **Be still and know that I am God.** In *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly wrote, "People now a days take time far more seriously than eternity." This psalm focuses us firmly on eternity. Running faster and trying to keep up with the busyness of our lives is not the answer. Instead God invites us to "Be still, and know that I am God." When was the last time you created a time and space of stillness (no computer, radio, TV, cell phone, other people, etc.) in which to "be" with God? How might you build short times of stillness into your everyday routine? Can you identify what fears or inner resistance causes such stillness triggers? In what ways do you think it could deepen your friendship with Christ, and make you a greater blessing to others? Spend some time listening to God.

Saturday – Read Hebrews 4:1-16. **Enter God's Rest.** The writer drew on Genesis 2 and Psalm 95 to say that living in the physical Promised Land did not fulfill what God had promised. God's rest is inward, and transforms "the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." We find rest as we release our need to control every outcome, and trust God to rule the universe better than we could. As we trust Christ, "we...receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Can you trust, down deep, that if you live at "the will and pace of God" you will be more productive? *Hebrews* says God's word "is alive... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." How can the Bible help you more clearly see the inner drivers that keep you trapped in a frenetic life pace?

Lectionary Readings: Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; I John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8.

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