

Prayer and Study Guide

Daily Scripture Readings – 7/1/18

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

We are reluctant, O God of Love, to set aside our hurt, our anger, our disappointment. Heal us with your tender touch, that we might be cleansed of all unclean thoughts, all schemes of revenge, all hope of vindictive retribution. Open our eyes to the power of love shown to us in the unselfish sacrifice of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday - Read Genesis 4:1-7 and Psalm 133. **Born to Be Brothers.** Both brothers worship Yahweh by bringing their best gifts to God. Both had reasons to expect acceptance. There is no hint of rivalry or hostility. This is simply a family at worship. We are not told why Yahweh accepts Abel's gift and rejects Cain's gift. The story is more about how we deal with our failures. God does not give up on Cain and tells him, "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" There will be another opportunity for Cain to seek and receive God's approval. God believes in Cain's ability to manage his anger and live a faithful life. As you pray, consider: "How do I respond when life is unfair?" Ask God to help you overcome anger.

Tuesday - Read Genesis 4:6-7; Romans 7:14-25; and Ephesians 6:12. **Anger Management.** Sin is waiting like a hungry lion to leap. Sin is not a breaking of rules. Rather, sin is an aggressive force ready to ambush Cain. Sin is larger than Cain and takes on a life of its own. Sin is lethal. Sin lusts after Cain with an animal hunger. There is an animal yearning for destructiveness that will destroy both the victim and the perpetrator. God's human creations must be on guard for themselves. There is danger to the life of Cain in how he handles his rage and depression. The looming figure of sin suggests something important about human persons. The stakes are high in how we handle conflicts with siblings, but the animal lusting for death need not have its way. It can be ruled. God gives Cain and us the capacity to tame the beast at the door and choose to do well.

Wednesday - Read Matthew 5:21-26 and Mark 12:28-34. **Reconciliation.** The terror of having a brother and being a brother is explicit in Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5. Jesus says that a brother killing a brother violates God's command to not kill, but Jesus moves underneath the prohibition and comes very close to our narrative. Anger in and of itself leads to judgment. Such anger appears even at the altar. When we face the Lord of life, the juices of death flow in our body. As for Cain, so in Matthew 5 at the moment of religious sacrifice, Jesus turns our attention to the brother. Jesus says that we are to turn from the things of God to get the brother/sister matters settled first. Until that happens, there will be a paying of the last penny. The only alternative is reconciliation. God called Cain to do well by turning to his brother to be reconciled. Cain chose not to do well, and his life was forever skewed. Ask God to help you seek reconciliation in broken relationships.

Thursday - Read Genesis 4:8-16. **Crime and Punishment.** Life is perpetually skewed when the one thing required of us seems too much. It seems too much to turn from the things of God to the things of the brother/sister, too much to give up our anger and be freed in reconciliation. The story reveals the fearfulness of the unreconciled. Cain is sentenced to be a fugitive, consigned to farm land that has no life in it, and yet God does not give up on Cain or stop caring for him. God gives Cain a mark of guilt and grace to protect him. As you pray, consider the way God has offered grace and protection to you.

Friday - Read I John 3:11-18. **Love Conquers Hate.** The daily estrangement of brother and brother has come to seem ordinary, routine, and accepted. Estrangement seems to be our common lot, and the world wants to keep it so. The world hates those who practice forgiveness and reconciliation, but that conventional estrangement is turned into the ultimate issue of life and death in the context of the gospel. By joining *brother-love to resurrection* and by linking *brother-hate to death* John reveals that the issue of the brother or sister is the ultimate theological crisis. Rather than murder our brothers and sisters with our words and actions, Jesus teaches us to lay down our lives in love for our brothers and sisters. Pray for the persons in your family who have experienced estrangement.

Saturday - Read Luke 15:11-32. **A Man had Two Sons.** Why must a man always have two sons? Why not only one? Why not only me? But two sons are essential to the reality of the plot. In Jesus' story, the older brother is not quite a murderer, but he senses the same realities. He smells his brother's blood, and the father knows. Like Cain, the older brother is "in the field," an exile away from the house, from security and joy, away from the father, unprotected. For that brother also, sin waited in lust. The story of Genesis 4 is reenacted in Luke 15, only the father deals differently. We are left to wonder: will the older brother embrace his anger and remain in the field, or will he forgive and join the party? As you pray consider: "How would my life be different if I forgave the person who has hurt me?"

Lectionary Readings: II Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Psalm 130; II Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43.

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