

Monday: Rain or Shine

In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider—God has made one as well as the other so that man will not discover anything that will be after him.

-Ecclesiastes 7:14

Life is full of good days and bad days, there's no shocking news there, but did you know that God has a purpose for us in both? The good days are simple: they're meant to be enjoyed. When good days come, enjoy them! Maybe what challenges us more is the bad days; God wants us to use them as a time to stop and think. That might not help you appreciate them more, but it is helpful to know that when hard times come God is telling us to slow down and think about our life with him.

Now God does all of this so that we won't be able to know what tomorrow will bring, and while that might really frustrate us, it is a blessing. God teaches us to take each day as it comes and tells us that the day has value for us. We sometimes ruin good days by worrying about tomorrow, and often waste difficult days by complaining. The wisdom for us is to figure out what today's purpose is and appreciate it for what it's worth, because who knows what tomorrow will bring?

Thought for today: What is today's true value? Is for us to be happy, or is it for us to stop and think about our relationship with God again?

Deeper Question: Where else does God tell us to appreciate each day as it comes?

Prayer: Our God, thank you for giving us another day in your creation. Please help us to use today for the purpose you have given it.

Tuesday: Heavenly Mercy

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

-Luke 6:35-36

Our example for mercy is God, our father. Is that the standard that you are holding yourself to? It is really easy to forgive as much as we think is a good amount. We will be kind to a point but if somebody pushes our buttons past that point we feel like it's our right to get mad at them. When people, especially our closest relationships, don't act as we expect them to act, we tend to retaliate and often end up hurting them.

Jesus encourages us to love differently than that. He reminds us of God, who is patient and kind. Not only is God patient and kind when it's easy, but Jesus tells us that he is kind to those who are ungrateful and even those who are evil. What's more, Jesus promises us that if we love this way, lend this way, and live this way our reward will be great and that we will be sons and daughters of God. So, when you are pushed by those around you remember our father who is kind to all, even those who don't deserve it, and remember that he will beam with pride when we follow in his footsteps.

Thought for today: Is there somebody that you find it especially challenging to be kind to? What are two ways you could show them kindness?

Deeper Question: Find a story where Jesus shows kindness to somebody who doesn't deserve it. How can you show that kind of kindness?

Prayer: Our Father, thank you for always showing us kindness and mercy. Please help us to follow your example in how we treat other people.

Wednesday: The Joy of the Lord

Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

-Nehemiah 8:9-10

On the day that God rebuilt his relationship with these Israelites the law was also read to them. He was rebuilding their relationship through a covenant, or a set of promises. As God's greatness and holiness dawned on these people through the reading of his law it had an impact that might surprise us. The people all cried and wept. They wanted to grow closer to God, but their own shortcomings made them feel inadequate.

How does the Lord respond to this sadness? Amazingly God tells them that this day of reconnecting this relationship between God and man is holy to God. It's a holiday of sorts for him. So instead of weeping, he wanted them to feast and rejoice. When you find yourself feeling similarly to these people—like you want to be closer to God, but he feels far away—remember that the joy of the Lord is your strength. That means that you find your strength and motivation to push forward from God's overwhelming joy about having a closer and better relationship with you.

Thought for today: There is a lot of joy in God's heart when you grow closer to him—how will you draw strength from that today and what will that motivate you to do?

Deeper Question: Find another verse that encourages us to be joyful—how does it encourage us to joyful or where do we find that joy?

Prayer: Our God, thank you for wanting a closer relationship with us. Please help us to gain strength from your joy.

Thursday: Power, Love, and Self-Control

I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

-2 Timothy 1:6-7

Fear often stops us from doing what we want to do, or being who we want to be. So, what is the answer for fear? Lucky for us, God gives us his answer to our fears here in Paul's letter to Timothy.

The key to overcoming fear is remembering what God wants for us, where he lives, and who he is. Paul reminds Timothy of these things to help him with his timidity, or fear. First, God has given us gifts in the form of abilities and talents that we have. When Satan paralyzes us with fear we can't use those gifts the way God wants us to. Second, Paul reminds Timothy that God's spirit lives in him, and we have to remember he lives in us too! Finally, Paul points out to Timothy (and to us) that God's spirit living in him is a spirit not of fear, but of power, love, and self-control. Our problem when scary things come our way is that we focus on ourselves—and we're not strong enough, caring enough, or in control. Instead, when you feel fear knocking at your heart, remind yourself that God lives in you, and that he is mighty, he loves you, and he is in control! Holding onto this fact will carry us through and take away our fears.

Thought for today: What is one thing you can do today to make sure you remember God's spirit dwells in you when fear starts to creep in?

Deeper Question: Find another verse where God encourages us by reminding us that he will be with us—write that verse down on a post-it note and put it somewhere you will see often!

Prayer: Our God, thank you for dwelling in us through your spirit. Please help us not to live in fear, but to focus and rely on you.

Friday: Healer of our Hearts

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners. To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

-Isaiah 61:1-2

Good news! The God who created heaven and earth loves you. In fact, to show how much he loves you, he sent his son to live on this earth and die a shameful and painful death. He did all of this so that you could be free from sin and have a relationship with him. God's love goes further than that though, he cares about each of us so much that he wants to heal our broken hearts and comfort us as we cry.

This prophecy from Isaiah is talking about Jesus. Did you know that God sent him to fix your broken heart and to comfort you through your mourning? It's so easy to forget the depth of God's love for each one of us! As you go through today, especially if you're struggling with a broken heart, don't forget that God truly wants to comfort you and heal your broken heart. As you go through your day, listen to his word, think about it, and pray to him. Slowly, but surely, God will encourage you and fix your broken heart.

Thought for today: What comfort do you get from the fact that God cares about your sadness and your heartbreaks? What is one way you can remind yourself of God's love today?

Deeper Question: If you don't have broken heart or need comforting today think about this: If comforting broken hearts is this important to God how could you help somebody else today? Find an example of somebody in the Bible who was good at encouraging other people when they were down and learn from them!

Prayer: Our God, thank you for caring deeply about us, comforting us, and healing our broken hearts. Please help us through the sadness we face in the world and help us to comfort those around us

Saturday: No Jealousy, but Kindness

Love is kind and is not jealous.

1 Corinthians 13:4

We're considering two ways that our love needs to grow today, and the first way is in kindness. This may seem like an obvious part of love, but it is one that we can get careless about the closer we get with somebody. Sometimes we will also feel like we don't need to be kind if somebody is unkind to us. The fact that love is built with kindness, however, means that even when we may be upset with somebody, we still decide to extend kindness to them.

On the other side of the coin, jealousy has no part to play in the love we show for other people, but it is something we can slip into if we're not careful. At some points in life it can feel like everybody around us is getting what we wish we had, and that is challenging to deal with. Instead of focusing on everything you don't have that you wish you did, remind yourself that you care about those people and be happy for them.

Thought for today: What is one way that you can show kindness to those around you? What is one thing you can remind yourself of when you're feeling jealous of somebody?

Deeper Question: God's love is kind, but God also talks about being jealous in his love—what does it mean when God says he is jealous and how is that different from when we are jealous?

Prayer: Our God, thank you for showing us kindness in the way that you love us. Please help us not to be jealous, but to better show our love through kindness.