

Devotions for January 3-9, 2011

Monday, January 3, 2011: Daily reading: Isaiah 25:6-9; Revelation 21:1-4

This text looks forward to the day when God's promised restoration will be fulfilled. No longer will God's people need to hide in walled cities for fear of war. Instead, God's Kingship will be celebrated with a feast on God's mountain. The poor, the needy, and the alien will be special guests. God will be a faithful refuge for his faithful people, and God will restore all that has been broken by sin. Just as in John's revelation, death will be swallowed up and every tear will be wiped away. God's people will be restored. This is one of many texts that portray the consummation of God's work of reconciliation and recreation as a wedding feast. There will be abundance for all people, provided free from God's gracious hand. Think of the most fabulous feast you've ever experienced. We simply can't imagine the greatness of this feast that God has planned. In your life, look for ways that you can experience a "foretaste" of the feast to come. Pray for God to open your vision of the future to what God has in mind.

Tuesday, January 4, 2011: *Manna* Daily reading: Exodus 16:31-36; Revelation 2:16-17

We cannot pray these simple words, "give us this day our daily bread" without being catapulted back into the story of the exodus. God's people wander through the wilderness, crying out in hunger, "Why did God drag us out of Egypt just to starve us to death?" God responds by sending bread from heaven. Manna, a white flaky substance, covers the ground each morning. God commands the Israelites to gather enough manna to make enough bread for one day. Here the story gets interesting, because some of the Israelites gather more than they need for the day, perhaps to ensure they have enough for tomorrow. But what was left over rotted. When we pray "give us this day our daily bread," we're not only asking that God would provide just what we need for this day, we're also asking that we might learn to live one day at a time, trusting in God's daily provision. Are you trusting that God will provide just enough for each day? Ask God to help you trust in God's provision for today.

Wednesday, January 5, 2011: *Foretaste* Daily reading: Leviticus 23:4-8; Matthew 26:26-29

The Bible often talks about God's vision for the future as a great banquet in which there is abundance for everyone. Perhaps this isn't so much a prayer for whatever we need to sustain us today. Perhaps it's actually a request for a "foretaste of the feast to come," a nibble, an appetizer to keep our faith alive and whet our appetite for the future. For Christians, the Lord's Supper is one form of this "foretaste" of the coming feast. When we gather at the table we get just a glimpse of the coming reality of the Kingdom. We are God's people who know the promise of God, that one day God's Kingdom dream will be fully revealed. What things in your life give you a "foretaste" of the feast to come? In your prayers, ask God to remind you of this coming feast in the small and ordinary things of life.

Thursday, January 6, 2011: *Prayer* Daily reading: Matthew 6:5-15

Jesus' teaching about prayer falls in the middle of his Sermon on the Mount, his teaching about life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus focuses on our hearts more than the outer form of prayer. Prayer is not about performance, but relationship with God. The number of words matters less than our heart's inclination. In your prayers, do you ever struggle to find the right words? Don't worry. You don't have to use the right words. Incline your heart toward God and trust that God listens to your prayers and, in time, will answer them.

Friday, January 7, 2011: *Prayer 2* Daily reading: Psalm 39:12; Matthew 21:21-22

Jesus says two core things about prayer. First, it's a matter between you and God. While Jesus isn't forbidding public prayer, he is saying that God is the recipient of prayer, not other people. How often do you get hung up on your words when you pray? Some who pray in public try to impress others with their smooth words, and some refuse to pray publicly because they are afraid that they aren't articulate enough. The question is, "articulate enough for whom?" The second thing Jesus says about prayer is that we don't need to pray with an endless amounts of words. The "pagans" that Jesus refers to could be those who prayed magical incantations, repeating the same words over and over, in an attempt to get God's attention. But we already have God's attention. Our prayers need to be honest, heartfelt, and to the point. God wants our prayers, and we need to pray. Today, talk to God in an honest, heartfelt, to the point way.

Saturday, January 8, 2011: *Persistence* Daily reading: Matthew 6:7-8; Acts 2:37-42

You might ask: "If God already knows what I want and need, why should I bother to pray at all?" It's a logical question! One answer is that words affect relationship. For example, your wife knows you love her, but it's important for her to hear it from you, and it's important for you to say it. Prayer also opens our hearts to give God access. What's unspoken is not as available to God because God won't forcefully engage us in conversation. And prayer is more about allowing God to change us than about us changing God. This tension is a mystery, but it explains why Jesus is so persistent about teaching persistence in prayer. Do you pray with persistence? Ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking.

Sunday, January 9, 2011: *Framework* Daily reading: Matthew 6:5-15 again; Luke 11:1-4

Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer to serve as a framework. Notice the core topics that the Lord's Prayer addresses: It begins by reminding us who God is, and therefore who we are. It reminds us of what God's primary agenda is, and what ours is to be. We are invited to pray about our needs and the needs of the world. It addresses the need for healthy relationships and reconciliation. We are encouraged to pray for protection. It ends with a doxology in later manuscripts. Allow this framework to shape your conversation with God.