



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 4:4, Colossians 1:25-27, 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, James 1:1-8, Matthew 6:25-34, Ephesians 4:1-6

REFLECTION AND STUDY

DAY 1: Read Matthew 4:4

What does it look like for you to dig deep into the Word of God? The writer of the Gospel likens this to the metaphor of bread. Bread was a staple to one's survival in the ancient world and therefore was something each person knew they needed each day. Without it, there would be the chance of physical death.

- When you think of those things you need to survive, what comes to mind?
- The author uses the metaphor of bread, which was needed to live. Why do you think the author bridges the physical sustenance of bread alongside the spiritual consumption of God's word?
- What are some of the challenges you experience in creating space and time for you to read, relate to and reflect upon the Word of God? What steps are you willing to take to carve out more time?

DAY 2: Read Colossians 1:25-27

The Apostle Paul wrote most of his letters while being imprisoned by Rome. One of the things we learn about Paul is he did not allow his personal circumstances to hinder his desire to champion the growth of one's faith. His words reflect what he interprets his role to be: *"I am the church's servant commissioned by God who gave me to present the Word of God in its fullness to you..."*

- Not many of us think of ourselves as being one commissioned by God to present His Word to others so they would grow spiritually. Usually we think of this person being a pastor or someone on a church staff. What if you saw yourself as one who is indeed called by God to spread His Word of love, reconciliation and grace with others?
- One of the things we notice about Paul's life is he had courage when it came to letting others know about the faith in which he believed. What steps are you taking to grow in faith so you have that same kind of courage?

DAY 3: Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Growing in Faith allows us to have the strength and the perseverance to overcome the challenges that so often come in life. Having faith does not eliminate our fears or concerns; having faith reminds us to have the courage to face our problem and, instead of saying, "God, I have a big problem" to have the strength and courage to say, "Problem, I have a BIG God!" Paul reminds the people of Thessalonica they are to go deeper in their faith and when they grow in faith, something even greater happens - they can not only face their greatest challenges, but also love one another more deeply.

- Recall a time in your life when you were afraid. What was it you feared? Why?
- When we are in fearful moments it can seem as though the world is ready to end. What can a disciple do to grow through these tough times?
- Having an abiding faith also lends itself to growing deeper friendships. When a group of believers come together they are reminded that when one falls down, there is another there to lift them up. Describe a time when this was true for you.
- As you continue to reflect, think about what it would look like if you made yourself available to help someone else grow in their faith? What if you took the next step and allowed God to use you to do that?

- Showing love to one another is a sign of fruitful faith. The Bible teaches us to care for one another, struggle together and to be reminded of the faith that binds us as one for the greater good. What if you took time to become a mentor in one of our partner schools? If you did, you could demonstrate this picture of loving another through faith.

DAY 4: Read James 1:1-8

Life is funny. It can bring about so many good things. There are seasons when everything seems to be going well and there is nothing to complain about. But what happens when life takes one of its turns in the opposite direction? What do you do when the wheels seem to fall off the bus?

- James talks about believers having “honest doubts”. What do you think he means by this? How is it possible to have an abiding faith and also doubt?
- Reflect on this statement: “Faith isn’t faith, unless it’s the last thing you are holding onto.” In your own words, what does this mean?

DAY 5: Read Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus instructs us to keep our focus on the main thing. He reminds us God takes care of everything. He cares for flowers, birds, and every living creature. So then, why do we wonder if God will take care of us? Our faith is instrumental in helping us along the journey of life. The goal is to understand that seeking God’s Kingdom’s purpose is primary and everything else comes in a distant second. If we are seeking God’s Kingdom, it opens the door to a whole new way to see what faith is all about.

- A Faith community is so important. Everywhere you read in the Bible it is loud and clear that we are not solely to have a “Jesus and me” kind of faith, but one that embodies the lives of other believers. Reading Scripture is important to our spiritual growth but when we live that faith in unison with other believers something beautiful happens. Who are your friends in the faith? How are you spending time with them?
- When we focus on Jesus’ words to “*seek the kingdom of God*” there is an important message behind those words. What does this mean to you? How are you sifting through “kingdom” work versus “my own personal work?”
- Take a moment and reflect on your own spiritual journey. As you walk closer with God, how does Scripture come into play? How is your walk in faith influenced by other believers and friends?

DAY 6: Read Ephesians 4:1-6

Throughout history there have been schisms, movements calling for God’s people to move away from the church, which ignited trouble within the Body of Christ. As believers are pulled by differing doctrines, belief structures and personal preferences, Paul found it healthy to remind the new believers what the truth looks like. In this letter to the church of Ephesus he shares some foundational truths about the faith we confess: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, keep unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. He goes on to remind us: there is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

- What do you see as the challenges for today’s Christian church?
- What must the faithful body of believers do to ensure the purity of the church and to help usher in a Spirit of hope and peace?
- What if God was calling you to be a person to bring peace to your local community? How would you respond?

DAY 7

Today is your “Sabbath” and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God’s voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life’s demands do not squelch the whispers of God’s language of love upon your heart.