

Week 8 Devotional

I. Prayer to enter the Lord's presence:

Be still for a moment. "Lord, I give the day that is now past to you. It is yours. I give the day that is to come to you; help me to see where you are working and to join you there. Speak to me during these moments. I commit them and myself to you."

II. Prayer of Confession:

"Lord, you are faithful to forgive me and cleanse me of my sin when I confess it to you. I confess my sin(s) of _____. Thank you for forgiveness." (1 John 1:9)

III. Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Choose to be thankful, speak out loud of what God has done.

"Thank you, Father, for _____. Fill my heart and my mouth with gratitude throughout this day."

IV. Scripture Reflection

DAY 1:

Read:

Amos 5:21 "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. ²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. ²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Micah 6:6 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸ He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Reflect

The prophets consistently outlined three ways that the people had broken the covenant. These were; idolatry, mistreatment of the powerless, and substituting ritual for relationship. God himself had instituted many rituals for Israel but these were intended to build relationship not substitute for it. The sacrifices, feasts, and celebrations of special days were all meant to remind Israel of who God was and what he had done. They had turned these into mere symbols without substance. They believed they could do whatever they wanted ethically and morally as long as they kept the rituals.

Respond

This time right now in reading, reflection, and prayer is a form of "ritual." It is a regular pattern designed to shape your thinking, believing and doing. However this time and the things you are doing now are not an end in themselves. They are not a "box to check" they are a means to growing in relationship with God. Tell God now that your desire for these times with him are that you would know and love him better.

DAY 2:

Read:

Isaiah 1:1 The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. ² Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. ³ The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” ⁴ Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. ⁵ Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. ⁶ From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness — only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. ⁷ Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. ⁸ The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege. ⁹ Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah. ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ “The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations — I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; ¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, ¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. ¹⁸ “Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; ²⁰ but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. ²¹ See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her — but now murderers! ²² Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. ²³ Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them. ²⁴ Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. ²⁶ I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.” ²⁷ Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones

with righteousness. ²⁸ But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish. ²⁹ “You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. ³⁰ You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. ³¹ The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire.”

Reflect

In this first chapter of Isaiah we see the core message of the prophets; 1. The people had failed to keep the covenant, 2. because of this judgment was coming, 3. but on the other side of judgment God would bring restoration. Read the chapter again, this time look for those three elements of the prophetic message.

Respond

You are blessed to be a participant in the New Covenant. This covenant has been kept forever for you by Christ. Have you become complacent in your gratitude concerning this fact? Rouse yourself right now. Tell your own soul to "wake up" and remember to be grateful for what God has done for you in Christ. Sure you have many concerns in your life...but one of them is NOT that will God reject you because of your sin. He has accepted you in Christ Jesus. Now choose to be grateful.

DAY 3:

Read:

Isaiah 39:1 At that time Merodach-baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. ² Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses — the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.

Is. 39:3 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, “What did those men say, and where did they come from?”

“From a distant land,” Hezekiah replied. “They came to me from Babylon.”

Is. 39:4 The prophet asked, “What did they see in your palace?”

“They saw everything in my palace,” Hezekiah said. “There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.”

Is. 39:5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: ⁶ The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. ⁷ And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

Is. 39:8 “The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,” Hezekiah replied. For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime.”

1Pet. 1:10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Reflect

Hezekiah was unconcerned with the warning of Isaiah because he would live out his life in peace and security. This shows his heart. In addition he was showing off all of his "stuff" to the Babylonian envoy with disregard for the safety of his own people or the glory of God who had provided all he had. This shows his heart. He was selfish and he was proud. Such was the story for all of the kings of the Northern Kingdom and most of the kings of the Southern Kingdom. Are you living for your own time or for generations to come? Do your choices take into account not just how they will affect your own life, or even the life of your "living family" but how they will affect those who come after you have gone? This "long view" is the view of the spiritually mature. The prophets lived for more than their own times. They served those they did not even know. They served you.

Respond

Repent of thinking mostly of your own life span. Repent of making choices with no regard for generations to come. Ask God to make you into a man or woman of such faith that your day to day choices would take into account the generations that might come after you. If you are able to gain and maintain this kind of perspective it will transform how you live day to day.

DAY 4:

Read:

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." ⁹ You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. ¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? ¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. ¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. ¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. ¹⁸ To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? ¹⁹ As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. ²⁰ A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. ²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ²⁵ "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. ²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"?

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Reflect

From Isaiah chapter 39 to chapter 40 there is about a 150-year time "jump." Isaiah is warning king Hezekiah in chapter 39 of the coming judgment from Babylon then in chapter 40 God is comforting his people now in a distant future exile in Babylon. Read the chapter again with this perspective in mind...God had given them ample warning and time to turn. Judgment had come because they had refused to turn. Now, in exile, God was offering comfort and a future hope for his people. As well as strength for the day as they trusted him.

Respond

Thank God for your future hope. Your eternal future (if you are a Christ follower) is secure. Now thank God for his present strength. Today may be filled with difficulties...let both your future hope and his ever-present strength shape how you go about dealing with today's difficulties.

DAY 5:

Read:

Isaiah 9:1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan — ² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. ³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. ⁸ The Lord has sent a message against Jacob; it will fall on Israel. ⁹ All the people will know it — Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria — who say with pride and arrogance of heart, ¹⁰ "The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone; the fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars." ¹¹ But the LORD has strengthened Rezin's foes against them and has spurred their enemies on. ¹² Arameans from the east and Philistines from the west have devoured Israel with open mouth. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. ¹³ But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty. ¹⁴ So the LORD will cut off from Israel both head and tail, both palm branch and reed in a single day; ¹⁵ the elders and prominent men are the head, the prophets who teach lies are the tail. ¹⁶ Those who guide this people mislead them, and those who are guided are led astray. ¹⁷ Therefore the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men, nor will he pity the fatherless and widows, for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks vileness. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. ¹⁸ Surely wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briars and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke. ¹⁹ By the wrath of the LORD Almighty the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire; no one will spare his brother. ²⁰ On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring: ²¹ Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

Reflect

The prophets spoke with a "near/far" perspective. They saw history as a mountain range and their message could concern a near mountain or a far mountain or both at the same time. They spoke to their own time "forth telling" and they spoke to a future time "fore

telling." But in either case they were serving us and all who have read them in history by pointing us to Christ. Christ is the Mount Everest of human and cosmic history. All things in heaven and earth revolve around him. Read verses 5,6,7 again. Lasting peace will come someday (a future mountain) because the Prince of Peace has come (a past mountain) and he will come again (a future mountain).

Respond:

Ponder God's sovereignty in bringing about his plans in history. Now ponder your own life...is he sovereign there are well? Can he not bring about his plans in your life? Will you trust him to do so?

V. Prayer for Others:

Pray specifically for the concerns of your life and the lives of others.

VI. Prayer of commitment:

“Lord God, I commit to love you with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my strength and with all my mind and to love my neighbor as myself. Empower me today to love you and others with everything that I am.” (Luke 10:27)

This Month's Scripture Memory:

Psalm 23:1-6

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.