

Week 51 Daily 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

Acts 17:16-33 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) **Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.** "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Reflect

Paul was deeply disturbed by the idolatry of the people of Athens. He walked around and looked carefully at the idols, wanting to understand what was in the hearts and minds of the people. He was disturbed because of his concern for the lives of these people. Paul knew the truth of God and he knew of the devastating impact of living for false idols. He applauded their spiritual hunger and yet pointed out their ignorance of who God is. Paul's ministry was always marked by grace and truth, they are flip sides of the same coin. The gospel is God's grace and it is God's truth revealed in the person of Jesus. Paul's heart for God's glory and the good of these people compelled him to share the truth of God's self-revelation.

Respond

It is likely that all of us could/should have hearts that more consistently hurt for people who are far from God. Ask God to soften your heart to the plight of those who do not have relationship with Jesus. Ask him to strengthen your resolve to faithfully make the good news of Jesus known to others.

Day 2

Read

Acts 17:16-33 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. **"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.** From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Reflect

The prevailing views held by the Athenians in Paul's time were called Epicureanism and Stoicism. You can google the views if you are interested in learning more about them but here is the bottom line. Although the two views were very different in their perception of ultimate reality and the place and purpose of man they were alike in that they were both "human-centric." They both placed humanity at the center of things. Any view that places "us" at the center cannot hold up under the weight of reality. God made all things and he needs nothing from us. These two truths are foundational for understanding what is true at the very core of reality. God is everything, God needs nothing. This is also foundational for understanding our own importance and place in the universe. We have no importance on our own, none. Our value is derived...we matter because God has made us and he has assigned value to us. Human pride is utterly out of place in the real world. It is insanity...unreality.

Respond

If you are able, kneel before God. Confess that he alone is great and you have no reason for pride. Ask him to forgive your pride. If you can think of specifics, confess that to him. Now after having spent a few minutes gaining that perspective...how do you view other people in your life differently now than before your time of humbling yourself? Do you feel more prone to give others grace? Do you feel less inclined to be annoyed or judgmental of them?

Day 3

Read

Acts 17:16-33 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. **From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.** 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Reflect

A common, and difficult question that is often asked is "What about those who have never heard the name of Jesus?" "How can God be just if he judges people who have never had the chance to respond to him?" It is, of course, a much bigger question than can be addressed in a single paragraph. But a part of the answer is in these two verses highlighted for today. Other parts of the answer are found in other places in Scripture but here we see some of God's heart for humanity. He has, in his sovereign goodness, chosen the exact times and places where each person would live. He has done this with a common purpose...that all people would know him. This sounds strange knowing that some people live and die in lands where the gospel is not widely known. But God has made himself known to people in many ways and he is not far from anyone, anywhere, anytime. We must trust God that he is good and he is just especially when we are thinking through hard questions. It is not irrational to trust God with things that are difficult to get our minds around. It is irrational to think that just because we can't figure something out in our minds it doesn't fit perfectly in his great mind.

Respond

We can sit frozen with questions or move out faithfully with answers. The gospel is the answer to the greatest need of all people. We have many questions about many things...but we have the greatest and most important answer for everyone, everywhere. Ask God to help you trust him with unknowns and be faithful with the knowns. Ask him to make himself known to others through your life and witness.

Day 4

Read

Acts 17:16-33 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. **'For in him we live and move and have our being.'** As some of your own poets have said, **'We are his offspring.'** **"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.** In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Reflect

Notice that Paul didn't use Scripture in the Areopagus but rather used some of their own thinking to direct them towards the gospel. The Areopagus was named for the Greek god of war, Ares. Paul stood in the intellectual center of the Roman empire, in the place where people would go and discuss their thoughts about what is real and important and he sought to understand them before he sought to be understood by them. He was not trying to win arguments he was seeking to win souls. He didn't want to look smart even though that was what many of them had as their controlling ambition. Paul wanted to lead people to Christ not to impress them. He was willing to look like a fool in order to demonstrate the wisdom of God. Earlier in this passage we see Paul being mocked, he was called a "babbling." This term of derision literally meant "seed picker." It was an image of a little bird mindlessly pecking at seeds on the ground. The truth was Paul was brilliant, but as you read his letters and learn of his life his brilliance was not something he leaned on or took pride in. That way of life was a silly game he was not interested in playing. He had experienced the glory of God in Christ and was captivated by that vision in his life. He had lost interest in the childish game called "human pride."

Respond

Ask God that as you move through this day and the remainder of the holiday season that he help you have a heart, mind, and mouth to "bless others not to impress others."

Day 5

Read

Acts 17:16-33 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. **In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.**" When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Reflect

A key interpretative guide to all of Scriptures is succinctly called "Already/Not Yet." This means that the Kingdom of God has come but it is also still coming. All time between the first coming of Christ and his return is the end times or the last days. During these days we experience the peace of Christ but yet there is still turmoil and war. We experience the healing of Christ yet we still become sick and we will die physically. We experience the joy of Christ yet we still weep in sadness. There are promises made for the times we are in and there are promises made for the end of this time. It can be difficult to know the difference at times and therefore be careful to not look down on people who try to claim promises that are not for these times. Do be careful to do your best to know the difference. To not miss the very great and precious promises that are for these times. In addition do not miss the power of knowing and believing the promises that lie ahead of us.

Respond

What are the promises of God for you now? What are you sure of and what are you not sure of? Talk to him and tell you trust him with the "secret" things and that you will obey him with the things you know for sure.

Deut. 29:29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

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:

Isaiah 53:4-6

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid him the iniquity of us all.