
Every Day is a Good Day

Read Psalm 118:19–24

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24 (NIV)

It began as a normal day and continued to be normal. It was about as routine as any of my recent days had been. For almost four months, circumstances brought about by the illness of my wife of 54 years had determined the course of my days and the activities in them. So, throughout the day, I followed the usual routine. Among the many things I wanted and needed to do, I gave my attention to what I had to do.

At the close of that day, I reflected upon its events. Although I thought of it as an ordinary day with little more than routine events, an inescapable thought formed in my mind and would not go away: *Above everything else, this has been a good day!*

As those words rushed into my mind, the words of a Hebrew poet joined them: 'This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it' (Psalm 118:24).

No day is ever ordinary, for every day is a good day—a valuable gift given to us by the Maker of days. Therefore, each day is to be used wisely, enjoyed fully and appreciated genuinely.

Prayer: *Giver of this good day, thank you for this gift. May we use it wisely. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*

Thought for the Day: Today is a gift from the Maker of days. I will rejoice in it.

Howard Coop (Kentucky)

A Call to Pray

Read 1 Timothy 2:1–4

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone.

1 Timothy 2:1 (NRSV)

In an effort to make myself and my family more aware of the needs of those around us, I have made it my habit to pray for those affected by pain or tragedy when we see an ambulance pass. My children have earnestly latched on to this idea and remind me if I do not notice.

One day my three-year-old saw a police officer by the roadside speaking to someone he had pulled over. 'Mummy, we need to pray for them!' she exclaimed.

I was poised to say, 'No, darling, that person isn't sick or hurt. He just broke a rule', when I realised that the driver also needed our prayers. For that matter, so did the police officer! I realised in a fresh way that there isn't a soul on earth who does not need to be lifted up to God in prayer. I inwardly shifted my perspective and said, 'You are right! Let's pray.'

Prayer: *Gracious Father, open our eyes to the myriad opportunities we have each day to pray for others. In Jesus' name. Amen*

Thought for the Day: Who needs my prayers today?

Link2Life: *Today, let signs of distress remind you to pray.*

Heather Davis (Tennessee)

My Sheep

Read John 10:11–15

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

Psalm 23:1 (NIV)

When on holiday in Cyprus we watched a shepherd taking care of his sheep. It was a calm and memorable moment for us. The shepherd watched over his sheep; he walked slowly in front of the sheep—looking back at them constantly—and the sheep followed him trustingly. He didn't need to push or shove them; he didn't hit them with his staff. This reminded me of the words from Isaiah: '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' (Isaiah 40:11).

In Spanish the word for shepherd is *pastor*, and I like that image. I see my pastor as a caretaker for the flock, the people of our church. In this role he imitates Christ the Good Shepherd. I trust my pastor as my shepherd, and I recognise the authority God has given to him. It is not an easy role to fill, so I pray for our pastor daily, that he will lead the flock in the ways that God would have us go.

Prayer: *Good Shepherd, lead us to refreshing waters and good pasture, that we may live safely in your care. Strengthen all those who lead your people, that they may guide wisely and well. As Jesus taught us, we pray, 'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen' (Matthew 6:9–13, KJV)*

Thought for the Day: We can trust God, our Shepherd, to lead us.

Josephine M. Sherard (Canary Islands, Spain)

A Different Standard

Read Amos 7:7–9

[God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

I love gadgets. So you can imagine my excitement when I saw the newest laser spirit-level on sale. Having just moved, I had pictures and wall hangings to be hung. This tool would do the trick! Minutes later, I was at home shooting the laser's little red beam on every flat surface of my house. (It even curved around corners.) I had confirmed within the hour that everything in my house was level. Content, I put the gadget on a shelf—where it still sits. The pictures and wall hangings remain unhung.

In today's reading from Amos, the prophet talks about a different levelling tool, a plumb line. The plumb line, a piece of string with a metal weight, is hung to see if vertical lines such as walls are straight (plumb). If they are not, with time walls may buckle. Amos says that a time is coming when all people will be measured according to God's standards. God is no longer content with the way the people have begun to buckle and sway.

God calls us all to be ready, to examine ourselves by the standard established through scripture and Christian tradition. Even if we leave these tools on a shelf to collect dust, God is faithful. Each of us is a project that God will see through to completion.

Prayer: *Holy God, give us courage to look at ourselves in the light of who you call us to be. Then help us to open ourselves to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Thought for the Day: Make a list of the things God values. How do you measure up?

Bill Lazor (Tennessee)

Lighthouses

Read Matthew 5:13–16

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

1 Peter 2:9 (NRSV)

Lighthouse keepers have to be a sturdy breed. It can be wearing and lonely to be stationed where they are. The work is generally heaviest when and where conditions are the worst. A lighthouse might be more comfortable stationed inland. But those in the riskiest locations—out there where the wind blows—have the most opportunities to rescue lives.

The glow of a lighthouse isn't meant to illuminate the inside of the building. It's meant to pierce obscurity when darkness descends and storms arise. The noise a lighthouse makes isn't for the keeper's entertainment. It's for cutting through fog too thick for light to penetrate, for raising an alarm, for guiding the lost.

When I see a lighthouse planted at the far edge of safety, I think of our call to be light to the world. Like the beacons that guide ships to safe harbour, we are the hope of the Lord made visible. We drive our light into the darkness and our voices through the fog of life. 'See! Hear! Come! Christ is where chaos ends.' Let us shine boldly so that those still tossing in the storm may find their way to the safe harbour that Christ offers.

Prayer: *Lord, give me your courage to be a light when darkness is overwhelming. Amen*

Thought for the Day: God calls us out of darkness, and makes us into light for others.

Teresa Murphy (Oregon)

The Fifth Voice

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Jesus said, 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

John 13:35 (NRSV)

Our minister was away today, and our local high-school music teacher preached. He spoke about 'the fifth voice', which I had never heard of. He drew the concept from the singing of barber-shop quartets. 'The fifth voice' refers to the one harmony created by the four voices as they join together in song. The unified sound becomes like a fifth voice.

Just as a group of singers can be more than each of them is alone, Christians living in love create something more than they could on their own. The day before Jesus was crucified, he told his disciples that the world would know that they were his followers by the way they related to one another. They were to cherish and care for one another.

1 Corinthians 13 describes the characteristics of this Christian love. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to be patient and kind, to turn aside from jealousy, boastfulness, pride, rudeness, selfishness and irritability. Love forgives and lets go of hurts and offences of the past. When Christians live together in love, the world hears a voice it needs to hear: the fifth voice that reveals the presence of the Saviour.

Prayer: *Dear God, fill us with love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen*

Thought for the Day: The church is more than the sum of its parts.

Ted De Hass (Iowa)

Broken and Restored

Read Isaiah 61

Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:3 (NIV)

I am an antique dealer, and I'm always energised by the process of rescuing and restoring a once-treasured article to its former condition and usefulness. Some of my projects need only a good cleaning or thorough polishing to bring them back to life, while others are cracked or broken and require major repairs. Each time I am able to restore an old treasure, I think about God's joy in directing the process of our restoration. As promised, God is making us and the entire creation whole (see Revelation 21:1–7.)

For me, restoration is the one-word message of the entire Bible. God is revealed as the absolute, divine Saviour. We less-than-perfect human beings with a tendency to continue living in our damaged state are the same as the antiques that I find—flawed, broken and in need of a new start.

Through God's compassionate work, we are given new life by faith in Jesus Christ, who was 'delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification' (Romans 4:25). By faith in Christ, we become new creations, able to become all that God created us to be.

Prayer: *Thank you, Father, that through faith in Jesus Christ we are made whole. Amen*

Thought for the Day: God's one-word message to us is 'restoration'.

Sandra Bartz (Ohio)

The Widow's Offering

Read Mark 12:41–44

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3 (NIV)

My church's annual gift-day appeal had come in the post and sat on my hall table for about a week. Each day as I came and went to work, I saw the envelope and thought about all the bills I had to pay and the conflict I felt about the spirit of my giving to the ministries of my church.

One morning I read the Bible story of the poor widow who gave generously in spite of her poverty, contributing all she had to live on, in faith that God would sustain her. Jesus recognised this gift as more precious than the offerings of the rich who gave out of their abundance.

I realised that we all come to Christ in spiritual poverty. We have nothing to offer in return for the gifts God gives us; we can only offer ourselves as servants to the will of God. God receives us and welcomes us into fullness of life. While supporting my church is an important part of my Christian calling, God does not desire offerings given out of obligation or ritual but out of my heart's love. Acknowledging my spiritual poverty before God has made me deeply grateful for all that I have and has opened my heart to support the work of my church and others in need.

Prayer: *Loving God, accept us in our spiritual poverty, and lead us to love and serve you with our whole heart. Amen*

Thought for the Day: How can I use faithfully the gifts that God has given me?

Michael Albanese (New York)

I Am with You

Read Psalm 130

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.

Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

The doctor entered the room where I was keeping vigil over my son. An infection was raging through his body and had damaged his internal organs and heart. 'We're pumping in antibiotics; but if the infection reaches his brain, he won't make it through the night.'

I sat in shock. My 18-year-old son was going to die? I had never felt so alone or so helpless. My heart cried out to God. I willed God to speak to me. Gradually, peace and resolve came over me. Alone in the darkness, I trusted that no matter what happened, God would see me through it. I sat by the bed all night long, knowing that God was beside me.

My son made it through that night, but his recovery was slow and painful. He has a permanent disability because of his illness, but he is now finishing college and moving on with his life. Through it all, God has been with us.

That dark time in my life made me stronger. Now I realise that when I am weak, God will hold me up and walk with me through the valley.

Prayer: *O God, help us to know in our hearts that you are walking beside us at all times, seeing us through our lowest moments and answering our prayers before we speak. Amen*

Thought for the Day: God waits with us through our darkest nights.

Sue Constantinides (Maryland)

Where are the other nine?

Read Luke 17:11–19

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NRSV)

We are taught from childhood to say thank you when we are given something or helped in some way. Yet having thanked someone once for a kindness shown us does not release us from responsibility to express our gratitude again for future kind acts. Even so, we often forget to thank family and friends for their help, concern, affection and attention, or for a tasty meal and a tender embrace.

We sometimes behave in a similar way toward God. In the Bible story about the ten lepers healed by Jesus, only one thanks his Healer. The other nine healings go unacknowledged. Perhaps that percentage applies to us. Maybe we forget nine times out of ten to notice and give thanks for the gifts of love in our lives. I can imagine Jesus standing before me, saying, 'You have thanked me for one miracle, for one answer to your prayer. But what about the other times?'

I don't want to take my blessings for granted. I want to have a sensitive and grateful heart; I want the people around me to know and hear that I value their part in my life, each small kindness that they show me. And I want to remember to thank God, too, for each good gift in my life. Each day we can pray to live with gratitude.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, forgive us when we do not thank you for answering our prayers. Open our eyes to see your gifts when they come to us. Amen*

Thought for the Day: For what do I thank God today?

Julia Jefimtsuk (Harjumaa, Estonia)

Faithful Tentmakers

Read Acts 18:1–4

We are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Ephesians 2:10 (NRSV)

Like other rabbis of his era, the apostle Paul was expected to support himself independent of his teaching in local synagogues. Paul's profession was tent making, and through that work he came to know people such as Aquila and Priscilla, who would become leaders in the early church.

Today we think of Paul as an extraordinary person—not because of his tent making but because of how he called people to follow Christ. Certainly there must have been days for Paul when making tents came first. I think of this sometimes when my everyday duties become priorities that seem distant from my focus on faith.

Paul's experience reminds me that in any good work I can find Christ and others who can be a part of my Christian experience. God can be glorified in how I handle the simplest chores and the most troublesome tasks. We can all be faithful in the work of helping others know, love and serve Christ.

Prayer: *Lord, may we glorify your name in all that we undertake each day. Amen*

Thought for the day: We can serve Christ in our daily tasks.

John Blossom (Connecticut)

Prayer Champion

Read Psalm 71:1–14

O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!

Psalm 71:12 (NRSV)

My grandmother was a champion at praying. She could pray for 20 minutes without taking a breath, and she seasoned her prayers liberally with unfamiliar-sounding words from the King James Bible. Her prayers were intimidating in scope, scale and content. However, when she suffered a series of strokes, her prayers became simple and direct. I held her hand in the hospital as she whispered, simply, 'O God, help me; O Jesus, comfort me.'

Like my grandmother, the psalmists model both eloquent praying and how to cut through fancy language to the heart of the matter. In the midst of lofty verses in the psalms, we often find the song of the heart: 'save me,' 'rescue me', 'hear me', 'do not forsake me'. God is the source of salvation, protection, comfort and victory in times of great need.

Psalm 71 shows us how Jesus might have prayed in his last week, knowing the great trials he would endure and finding solace and comfort in God's great power and grace. Jesus needed to feel God's presence and guiding hand that week in Jerusalem (see Luke 19—23). And when we struggle in uncertainty or pain, we can remember that for us as for Jesus, God is still 'a rock of refuge, a strong fortress'.

Prayer: *O Lord, be our refuge when the pressures and demands of life grow too great. Receive us, rescue us, and restore us, that we may share your praise and good news. Amen*

Thought for the Day: God wants us to tell him whatever is in our heart.

Dan R. Dick (Wisconsin)

Time Well Spent

Read Luke 10:38–42

[Jesus] said to [his disciples], 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'

Mark 6:31 (NRSV)

A friend listened patiently as I rattled on about my busy day and my never-ending list of things to do. I felt I had used my time wisely, but her response surprised me.

'Where did God fit in?' she asked. Embarrassed, I realised I had expected to be praised for all my accomplishments. Her question made me re-evaluate my busy schedule.

Most of us want others to see us as industrious. Do we dare admit that we spend time praying or reading the Bible or that we simply sit and ponder God's blessings in our life?

Jesus wanted his disciples to serve; but more than that, he wanted relationships with them. In addition, Jesus invited them into times of rest to renew their minds and bodies for the work they were called to do.

We can easily fall into the trap of trying to impress others with our doing and overlook the importance of 'resting' time with God. With God on our daily calendar, we will find renewed energy to accomplish all that lies before us each day.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, forgive us for trying to please you with our achievements. Draw us aside that we may be renewed by spending time in your presence. Amen*

Thought for the Day: How often do I rest in God's presence?

Link2Life: *Schedule time with God this week.*

Connie Coppings (Kentucky)

Growing Together

Read Romans 12:3–8

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12:11 (NIV)

I had doubts about accepting the invitation to join a men's Bible study group. I was busy enough already. Besides I did not know half the men in the group. All my reasons for not getting involved seemed justified and rational.

At first I felt reluctant to speak honestly and personally within the group. I felt vulnerable and lacked self-confidence. On my drive to the meetings, I wondered whether I was really supposed to be in the group. I left thinking that we only scratched the surface of certain issues, and I regretted that the group had not gone deeper.

But as our meetings continued, I found that I looked forward to going. I sensed that God was nudging me to change my perspective. When I heard others talk of challenges to their faith, I had a greater understanding and appreciation for their experience. I realised that I had a responsibility to talk about my experience and to be understood, challenged and loved.

Each member of the group brought different perspectives to our discussions. In many ways this group of men could not have been more diverse, yet God built for us a foundation of friendship, trust and spiritual growth.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for drawing us into new situations and relationships to help us grow in our faith. Grant us the ability to trust and encourage one another. Amen*

Thought for the Day: Growing in faith with others is part of God's plan.

Bruce W. Bunce (North Carolina)