

DAILY READINGS

Summer Stories

January 7 - 11



Due to the holiday season, the January Daily Readings were prepared far in advance of the Summer Series, and so therefore are not connected with the content of the Summer Series.

The readings for the next four weeks will take us through the two New Testament books of 1 & 2 Peter. The readings will still follow the same format as before.

Enjoy.

Day 1 – Gifts for the Journey, Gifts for Others

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 4:7-11

God does not give gifts for 'sole use owner/occupiers' only. He is very much into gifts for the whole community, gifts that are meant to be used for others, gifts that show the true nature of our transformed lives in Christ. The gifts that God has given us are to be used willingly to serve others. Peter's letter makes this quite clear. We are stewards of God's grace, his agents of hope and love in the world. God has planned for us to have a major part in spreading his grace to people everywhere and he has made sure we have sufficient resources for the task. We know that if we ever find ourselves lacking in our ability to serve others, or struggling to live out the new life we have in him, we can ask our good and perfect king to supply our needs. Our personal experience of God's love and forgiveness and his words to us in the Bible are key resources we have. He has also given us the gift of belonging to his community.

Even more, God has showered us with gifts and abilities—time, personality, money, possessions and expertise, even things that we might find it hard to even see as being gifts. All that we have is a gift from God, and can be prayerfully and thoughtfully used in serving others. Everything we have is given to us to help us share the gift of Jesus and bring the possibility of new life to all. We are God's ambassadors of freedom and forgiveness. Everything we have and are is to be used in serving others and demonstrating God's tremendous love for his world.

Question to Consider

What gifts has God given you? How are you using them to serve others? How could you use them in new ways?

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for the gifts you have given your people. Help me remember that I myself am a gift for others. Help me serve faithfully with all that you have given me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 2 – Sharing in His Sufferings

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 4:12-19

Suffering cuts at the heart of the very way we believe the world should be in two particularly egregious ways. Firstly, nobody wants to experience pain and suffering, and we know that God does not delight in suffering and does not want anyone to suffer. That is not what we were created for. We were created for a life of intimate, loving relationship with God and with others, a life of meaningful purpose, edification and worship. Suffering cuts against the way things should be. Secondly, especially for Christians, suffering doesn't seem to match up with the ultimate victory over sin that Jesus won on the cross. Why is all this pain and death still happening? Hasn't he defeated all the powers of death and evil?

Yes, he has, but even so there will be a time of trial and testing for his followers in the wake of his victory. The outcome is certain; God will vindicate his people. We can absolutely trust in God's ultimate saving, restorative power, that will come in all its undiluted fullness at the consummation of all things, in the final judgement and restoration of all creation – a final judgement, says Peter, that will actually begin with God's own people, as the extent of our faithfulness to God is weighed and assessed. In the meantime what is required from us is faith and patience, and that, despite what we face each day from a world that refuses to turn to God, we continue to do good to all. This is how we show God that we still trust him: no matter what our circumstances we are still his people and we will act as such.

Question to Consider

When you see or experience pain and suffering, what thoughts go through your mind about Jesus' victory on the cross?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, give us strength to hang on to your promises when it seems they have no hope of happening. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 3 – Shepherd Leadership

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 5:1-7

What makes a good leader? In order for someone's leadership to be seen positively, what needs to happen? What are the qualities a person needs in order to be a good, effective leader? And whose definition of 'good, effective' are we using? Do leaders of different groups and organisations and teams need different skills and traits depending on the group, organisation or team? Or are there common things all leaders need? The word Peter uses to sum up and describe leadership is 'shepherd' – probably not a word that many of the leaders in our world would think of when trying to describe what they do. Authority, strength, command – these words seem more indicative of today's leaders. Why shepherd?

A shepherd looks after the sheep. The sheep are the primary focus. A shepherd doesn't think about him- or herself, planning and dreaming about what to do to be a better shepherd. A shepherd simply asks, 'what is best for this flock?' Peter, the disciple Jesus told to 'care for my sheep', had Jesus himself as his model of what being a shepherd meant. It meant to serve. It meant to love, unconditionally. It meant to put the needs of those in your care ahead of your own needs and to serve them with love and in humility. Jesus is model against which all other shepherds will be judged. We can do this because of the intimate bond that such leadership builds between shepherd and flock – the same bond that exists between our shepherd Jesus and us, his flock.

Question to Consider

How have you experienced being led by a shepherd? How are you modelling this type of leadership yourself?

Prayer

Loving Father, you are the one who leads us and loves us through the life of the Good Shepherd, your son Jesus. Help us to be good shepherds of others, the way you are of us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 4 – Live Well, Love Well, and Hold On

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 5:8-14

“The whole letter has been insisting....that the way to respond to attacks of whatever sort is with a firm but gentle faith, treating non-Christians with respect, living within the law (except, as in Acts, when it tries to force you into denying Jesus), behaving with humility and patience in all circumstances....you will find that courteous and civil behaviour, acting with respect and gentleness, will again and again win an answering respect from outsiders, even if they don't understand what makes you tick....

[T]he real point of interest in the closing verses is the one Peter highlights at the end of verse 12: ‘this grace, in which you stand, is the true grace of God.’ Using the letter as an angled mirror in which to glimpse what was going on in the churches to which it was addressed, it's safe to say that the small groups of believers in ancient Turkey must have been very concerned that the persecution which was now increasing meant that they were on the wrong road; that they had taken a false turning; that they had given their allegiance to Jesus as a false Messiah. Otherwise why would these things still be happening? Peter's solid reassurance has been based on scripture, based on his sense of how God's purpose was always going to work out, and based above all on Jesus himself. Hold on to his death and resurrection, he says. That's the sheet-anchor. He is the true Messiah, and one day he will be publicly revealed as such. This is the true grace of God; stand firm in it. And – the note that we all need, especially when the going is tough: peace. Peace to you from God. Peace to you in the Messiah.”

N. T. Wright, *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone*, p.96-7, 98.

Question to Consider

What have you learnt most from reading through 1 Peter?

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for your promises and for the presence of your Spirit with us as we live into those promises in tough times. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 5 – What God Has For Us

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 2 Peter 1:1-11

Wondering what God expects from us is not a bad thing. He has expectations of what he wants us to do with our lives, expectations of how we should behave as his people, things that he actually wants us to undertake and achieve. There are things that God wants from us. But this is only one side of the coin, the side that we quite often find ourselves focused on, especially in our tendency to see God as a moralist always demanding perfection from us. The other side of the coin is what God wants *for* us. This entire opening passage reveals the heart of what God wants for his people. He wants us to know he has given us everything we need, that he wants us to share in his divine nature, and he wants us to know that he has called and chosen us to be his people.

God has given us all that we need. We need to remember that all that we do happens, first and foremost, within the framework of God's grace. Even the 'moral effort' that Peter exhorts us to in this letter only happens within the scope of God's grace poured out upon us. Lest anyone think that by saying this Peter is claiming that we need to (or even can) make ourselves good enough for God, it is only through the gift of faith and the grace that enables us to respond to God in the first place – and to respond by fleeing from sin and choosing to develop the Christian character laid out in verses 5-7.

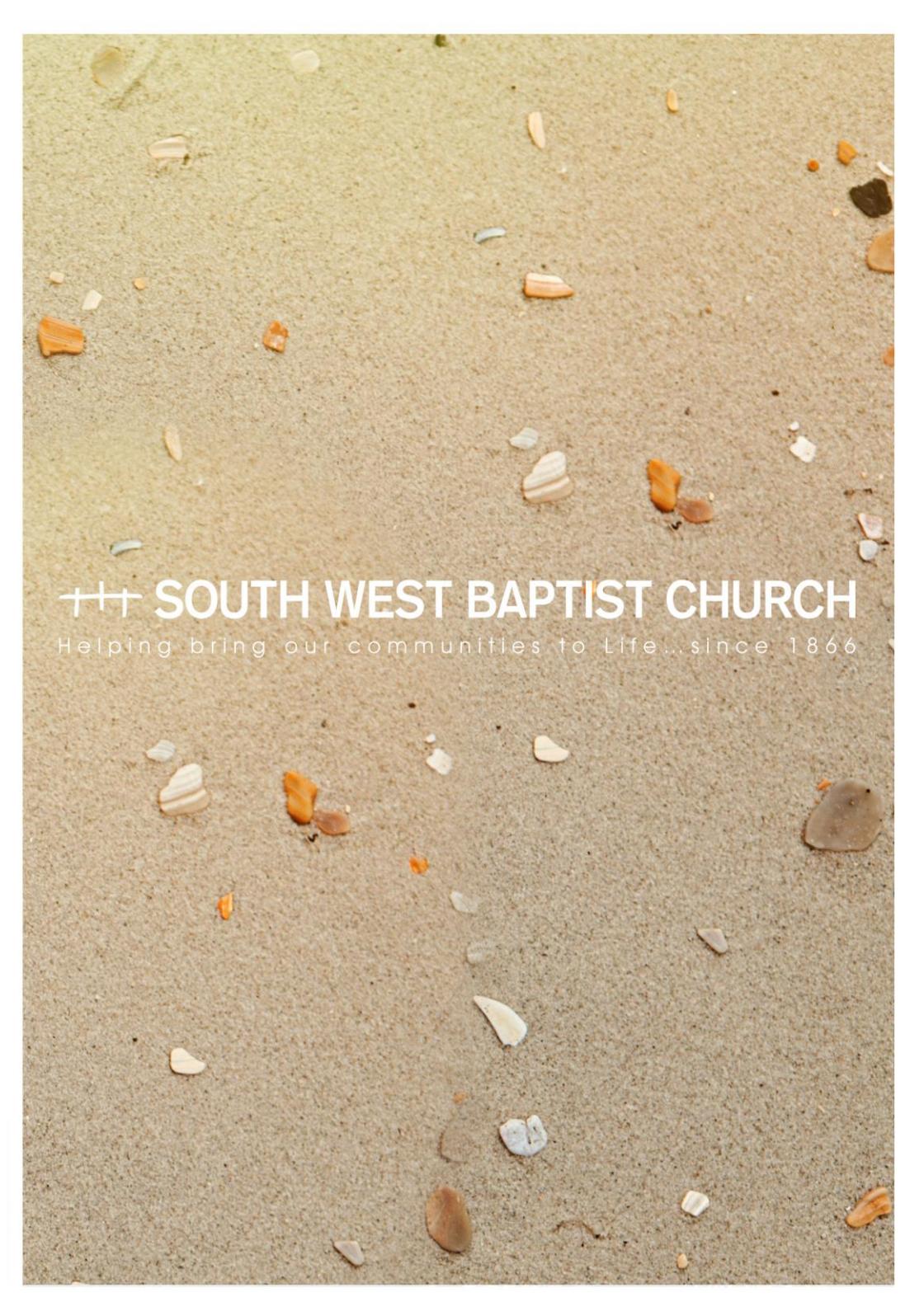
Question to Consider

Why do we often focus only on what God wants from us? What can we do to remind ourselves of what God wants for us?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are a good and gracious God, always wanting the best for us, always generous in your love to us. Help us see both sides of the coin of your will for our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)



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