UPC Family Devotional

July – Week 1

Memory Verse of the Week:

“The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.”

-Psalm 29:11

July 4 Monday Psalm 30:1-12

This song written for the dedication of the temple begins with David's recognition of God's mercies in lifting him up from the pit of despair. Although it is destined to be sung in the context of great triumph and rejoicing, the song refuses to ignore our hopeless condition before receiving God’s salvation. It models for us the need to continually rehearse our testimony- the story of our brokenness that was transformed by God’s spirit through the gospel. While we may mark many milestones and celebrate many victories during our journey on earth, we must remember that the only one that truly matters just to salvation of our souls, which God has graciously provided through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What is your testimony of God’s saving goodness in your life? How can you use it to encourage and bless others?

David’s Psalm continues to keep the human need for God's mercy in view. Even while enjoying the benefits of security and success, there's still lurks the possibility that we will once again experience the pain and hardship brought on by a sense of God's seeming absence. As citizens of this fallen world, we should expect to go through rhythms of both sorrow and joy. By faith, however, we have confidence that our trials will one day give way to eternal peace and rejoicing when darkness will no longer be a reality in our world. We now stand in anticipation of this joy, which gives our hearts cause to sing God's praises even when things do not go our way.

How do you cope with the seemingly endless rhythm of sorrow and joy in the Christian life? How do you praise God in the midst of pain?

July 5 Tuesday Psalm 31:1-8

We run to the Lord because He's a refuge, rock, and fortress. These images give a sense of safety and protection from the assaults of the enemies that pursue us. Just like David, we, too, should acknowledge that but God does not save us merely to preserve our lives but ultimately for His own sake. Therefore, David can commit his spirit into the hands of God- the same words that Jesus prayed on the cross as he drew his last breath. In both life and death, we completely belong, body and soul, to the Lord who has saved us for His own glory. Only when we see the bigger picture of God's purposes can we entrust ourselves fully to him.

In what situations do you need God to be your rock and fortress? What areas of your life do you need to surrender to God's will and purposes?

We may be somewhat surprised to see David expressing his hatred for those who cling to worthless idols. His harsh words seem unfitting for believers who are commended by Christ to love our enemies and turn the other cheek. While we often hear people say, “Hate the sin, not the Sinner,” how much do you really hate idolatry, deceit, and injustice when we see it? Though we are bombarded every day with the wickedness of this world, the truth is that we too easily tolerate it, make excuses for it, or, worse, join in without a second thought. As spirit- filled Christians, we must remember that we are at war with sin- a conflict that requires every ounce of energy and emotional commitment we can muster.

How do you feel toward your personal sins? How can you wage war on them?

July 6 Wednesday Psalm 31:9-24

David has found himself in an incredibly dire situation with no one in his life to whom he can turn. His enemies conspire against him, his neighbors despise him, and his closest friends have turned their backs on him. Like a piece of broken pottery, David feels discarded as worthless and completely irredeemable. Yet, in the midst of all this, David knows that God has not forgotten him; it is through God's mercy that he can be renewed and restored. There's no pit so deep that God's great love cannot find us and bring us hope as we patiently wait for him. He is our ever present source of comfort when everyone else has abandoned us.

What challenging situations have you experienced so far this year? How has God answered you when you called out to Him?

David’s dark lament gives way to shining hopefulness as he takes his eyes off his situation and onto his God. It is a testimony to the depths of faith David has that in spite of all he is going through, he continues to trust in God and His goodness. A major reason for David's confidence lies in his past experiences, where God has rescued him from otherwise hopeless situations. Reminding ourselves of God's past faithfulness often gives us courage and hope to face new and uncertain circumstances. David concludes with a word of encouragement to others, that they would continue to hope in the Lord. Let our endurance of faith be a testimony to others as they await God's victory.

Who are some people you know that are in need of encouragement? Take a moment to pray for them, then reach out to them with an encouraging word.

July 7 Thursday 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

The opening sentences of Paul’s letter shine a spotlight on the fact that God is both the source and center of every aspect of our faith journey. Paul is an apostle by God's will; The church in Corinth is God’s church. The grace, peace, and comfort that all believers experience ultimately come from God, and all praise and glory will return to God. God is the main character of all of our stories, not us. With this in mind it becomes essential for us to never lose sight of the fact that everything we do must align with God's heart for His people and mission. May our greatest priority be to see His name exalted in all things.

How is God the main character in your life story? How can you better align your life with God's will?

The power of God to deliver us is most clearly revealed and circumstances that seem tragic. Paul has come to know the saving power of God through the many hardships he has endured, which took him to the limits of his own abilities and taught him to rely on God rather than himself. But God also worked in tandem with those who interceded through prayer on Paul's behalf. There is a special and mysterious relationship between our prayers and God's action. While God can surely act without our prayers, he invites us to pray to participate in His work. Let us be diligent and fervent in prayer as we trust God to move powerfully.

Why do you believe God allows us to endure hardship? How can our faith be strengthened by them?

July 8 Friday 2 Corinthians 1:12-22

A major purpose of Paul's letter is to deal with a handful of complaints that have been brought against him by the believers in Corinth. This must have been painful for him in light of all he endured and sacrificed on their behalf and how he considered them his children in the faith. The first complaint has to do with his character, to which Paul responds that he has always acted in godly integrity and sincerity while relying on God's grace. Within complex communities, it is all too likely for some people to have an inaccurate or unfair view toward us. But let us be patient, gracious, and unashamed, always seeking to center our lives around the gospel and God's will for us.

When has anyone held an inaccurate or unfair view of you? What steps can you take to orient your attitude around God?

Paul now addresses another complaint, this time regarding a cancelled visit to Corinth. He begins by first providing a theological backdrop to the whole idea of making promises: when God conveys a message, it is always faithful and true. This is an important point in Christian leadership. Christian leaders bear the responsibility of leading God's people in a way that reflects God's character. This does not mean they must be perfect, but they are held to a higher standard. Anyone who seeks to lead others must make every effort to lead in such a way that they are viewed as reliable and trustworthy. Let those of us who lead others do so by setting a godly example.

Who are some Christian leaders you respect? What are some things you can learn from them?

July 9 Saturday 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11

After defending the trustworthiness of his apostolic ministry, Paul now dives into the specifics of why he did not return to Corinth as originally planned: to spare the believers from what would have been a painful visit, possibly full of disciplinary action. Had Paul visited at that time, the morale of the church might have been profoundly damaged. His genuine love for those he leads, even though they rile him, shines forth beautifully! He wants his visit to be filled with joy and expressions of love rather than wrath. We do well to learn from his example how to address the criticisms of others with patience and grace. Within the church, we should fight not to be right, but to be one.

How do you typically handle criticism? What lessons can you learn from Paul's example?

In the same way Paul demonstrated patient care to the Corinthians, he requests that they, too, extend grace toward those who have sinned against them. Had Paul not shown such genuine grace, he would have no cause for asking them to do the same. Forgiveness not only reflects the heart of God, it is a weapon in the spiritual arsenal of the church. Satan would love nothing more than to tear apart God’s people from within the community, and a spirit of unforgiveness gives him a solid foothold. By forgiving and restoring those who have sinned, we prevent Satan from being interpersonal grievances as a weapon against us. Let us forgive others as Christ forgave us.

Is there anyone toward whom you harbor forgiveness? Ask God to give you the strength to forgive them.