



GROW. PRAY. STUDY

Maple Grove United Methodist Church – Weekly Devotional Guide

February 10, 2019 – *Unafraid – Living with Courage and Hope*
“Fear of Change”

MONDAY	→	Psalm 46:1-3, 113:1-8 Praise to God, our dependable refuge and strength
TUESDAY	→	Psalm 23:1-3, 96:10-13 God’s ultimate purpose: unshaken goodness for all people
WEDNESDAY	→	Psalm 23:4-6, 46:4-7 God: our place of safety even in the darkest valley
THURSDAY	→	Psalm 46:10-11, Revelation 17:9-14 God: the unchanging “king of kings”
FRIDAY	→	Isaiah 40:27-31, 46:3-4 God—our support and strength at all ages
SATURDAY	→	2 Corinthians 4:6-10, 16-18 Hope in God’s unseen glory—greater than illness, age, death

MONDAY 2.11.19 – Praise to God, our dependable refuge and strength

Read: [Psalm 46:1-3, 113:1-8](#)

Sometimes we say, with a wry smile, that in today’s world “the only constant is change.” But many times this idea brings us, not a smile, but deep-seated fear. That didn’t just start. In the psalms (Israel’s hymnbook), we find mention of the world falling apart, mountains crumbling and the sea (an ancient symbol of chaos and disorder) roaring and raging. But we also find the confidence that God is high over all the changes that cause us fear. God is always our refuge and strength.

- The psalms were positive that God was present with us at any time of fear, “always near in times of great trouble.” That trust was based on the faith that God is eternal (i.e. outside of time), a God we can praise “from now until forever from now!” Have you wrestled with the mind-stretching idea that, unlike us, God is not limited by time or space, but can be with us any place and any time? In what ways is that a strong antidote to fear of change?
- What experiences have you already had that made it feel as though your world was falling apart? Did you allow your faith in God to provide you with a stable place to stand as everything else seemed to be crumbling? What makes it valuable to build your trust in God before the next time when everything seems to fall apart?

Pray: Lord God, I want to praise your name from sunrise to sunset because I genuinely trust that you are “high over all the nations.” Let my praise to you override my fear about any other realities. Amen.

TUESDAY 2.12.19 – God’s ultimate purpose: unshaken goodness for all people

Read: [Psalm 23:1-3, 96:10-13](#)

The familiar King James Version rendering of Psalm 23:3 is “he restoreth my soul.” Along with “still waters,” it may sound to us like a day at a peaceful spa. But “he keeps me alive” (the Common English Version’s translation) reflects the fact that for sheep, water and grass were not luxuries, but absolute necessities for survival. The Lord who ultimately rules over our world provides the things we need to keep our spiritual life always alive.

- Israel’s neighbors worshipped a “council” of Canaanite gods who, they believed, played favorites and ruled the world unjustly (cf. Psalm 82:5). Psalm 96:10 set the one creator God against that idea. “In contrast to the unjust rule of the gods.... God’s rule of justice and righteousness promises a stable and secure foundation.” * What helps you to trust that God’s eternal justice gives your life a stable and secure foundation?

- King David, who had been a shepherd (cf. 1 Samuel 17:34-36), likely composed Psalm 23. He described God as guiding him (and all God’s children) “in proper paths.” Living as we do in a culture that places great store on our freedom to choose our own path in life, how easy or difficult do you find it to trust God to point to the proper paths for your life? How can confidence that you are on the proper path reduce your fear of change?

Pray: King Jesus, truly, you rule! You rule the universe, including our world—yet you will rule my heart and life only if I ask you to. So please rule my life, and direct me in the proper paths. Amen.

* J. Clinton McCann, study note on Psalm 96:10 in The CEB Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 947 OT.

WEDNESDAY 2.13.19 – God: our place of safety even in the darkest valley

Read: [Psalm 23:4-6, 46:4-7](#)

The expression of trust in Psalm 23 did not promise that God’s people would never face painful, “dark valley” experiences. In fact, in common with other Biblical passages (e.g. Isaiah 43:3), it assumed that such times would come into all lives. The value the psalmists saw in trusting God lay not in being able to avoid pain and sadness, but in having God with us even in the darkest of times.

- Psalm 46:4 is poetry, not geography. “There is no river in Jerusalem. The river here is a symbol of life-giving power, in contrast to the threatening waters and waves of Psalm 46:3.” * How did that psalm set the stage for Jesus’ dramatic claim: “On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, ‘All who are thirsty should come to me! All who believe in me should drink! As the scriptures said concerning me, ‘Rivers of living water will flow out from within him’” (John 7:37-38)? In what ways has Jesus quenched your inner thirst?

- We most often think something “pursuing us” is bad. Psalm 23 reversed that, saying, “goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life.” Were there times when you, like so many of us, tried to ignore or avoid God’s presence? In what ways have God’s goodness and faithful love pursued you even if you were trying to get away from them?

Pray: Lord God, sometimes I forget you. Sometimes I try to ignore you. But I do not want to face this scary world alone. And I thank you for never giving up on me, but pursuing me with your goodness and faithful love. Amen.

* J. Clinton McCann, study note on Psalm 46:4 in The CEB Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 891 OT.

THURSDAY 2.14.19 – God: the unchanging “king of kings”

Read: [Psalm 46:10-11](#), [Revelation 17:9-14](#)

The traditional King James Version translation of Psalm 46:10 is, “Be still.” But the Hebrew did not refer to going to a quiet mountain retreat. It was a call to say “enough” to our noisy inner fears, and with them silenced, to recognize God as our place of safety. At the end of the Bible, in visions packed with symbols, Revelation proclaimed Jesus’ final triumph over evil. In the first century, for Christians, the persecuting Roman Empire (Rome—the city on seven mountains, or hills) was evil incarnate. The vision gave Jesus a double title— “Lord of lords and King of kings.” It echoed a title Caesar often claimed. Jesus was king, not just over “little people,” but over all other kings, even over Caesar. He was, and is, “our place of safety.”

- “The basis for the Lamb’s victory in 17:14 is that ‘he is Lord of lords and King of kings’.... Just as the Babylonian king [in Daniel 4] was addressed by this title, so the king of latter-day Babylon (Rome) in John’s day was similarly addressed.... The Lamb exposes as false the divine claims of the emperor and others like him.” * Rome was hardly unique. Human rulers have often claimed divine approval or status (e.g. Nazi soldiers wore belt buckles that said, in German, “God is with us”). Many rulers today, formal or informal, claim exalted status for themselves. Do you trust that Jesus is “king of kings” over all of them? In what ways is that trust the foundation for the peace and hope in which we can live at all times?

Pray: Lord Jesus, you are the King of kings, you are the Lord of lords. I cannot fully grasp all the reach of that, but I can and do ask you to be Lord of my life, to make me the person you want me to be. Amen.

* G. K Beale and D. K. Carson, ed. Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007, p. 1139.

FRIDAY 2.15.19 – God—our support and strength at all ages

Read: [Isaiah 40:27-31](#), [46:3-4](#)

Today’s readings likely came from a time when the Israelites were returning to their ruined land after decades in exile. There were no “Babylon to Jerusalem” flights—Isaiah 40’s references to “stumbling” and “walking” reflected the only way most exiles got home. So the Israelites were weary, and feared maybe God was too. But these prophetic texts said God never forgets his own. Israel (and we) could always hope and trust in God, because God has pledged to support us all our lives—and our God never grows tired like we do.

- Can you recall times when you have felt like the Israelites in Isaiah 40:27: “My way is hidden from the LORD, my God ignores my predicament”? Are there areas of your life that feel that way to you right now? In what ways can you reconnect with the Creator who “doesn’t grow tired or weary” of caring for you? What helps you trust God’s promise that “until you turn gray I will support you”?

- Isaiah wrote, “His understanding is beyond human reach” (40:28). Our need to control, our challenge with “letting go,” inexorably runs into our inability to control time. Even the best health and fitness programs cannot (honestly) promise to fully halt the aging process. How can really trusting in a God who’s vastly wiser than you are renew your strength by setting you free from the need to try to control life’s uncontrollable realities?

Pray: Lord God, when I’m worn out, you are still full of eternal energy. As I age, you remain the same creative, caring God you’ve always been. Help me learn more and more to trust your timeless love. Amen.

SATURDAY 2.16.19 – Hope in God’s unseen glory—greater than illness, age, death

Read: [2 Corinthians 4:6-10, 16-18](#)

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians after a painful time, when many Christians in Corinth, biased by a set of false teachers, had turned against him. Later in the letter, he cataloged the many challenges he had faced in carrying out God’s mission (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Yet Paul did not let any of that destroy him. In verse 10, he tied his struggles to Jesus’ death, which seemed the worst defeat of all and yet became a victory when he rose from the dead three days later.

- When did you last feel confused, harassed or knocked down? What resources helped you avoid being crushed, depressed or knocked out? Have you ever seen, in yourself or anyone you know, the truth of “even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day”?
- We often tend to feel shame about the realities of illness or aging. We see them as a sign of weakness or failure. Paul faced those realities, but saw them differently. Are there disciplines (e.g. Bible memorization, meditation, prayer) that help you access God’s strength to keep your inner self moving toward victory even when your outer self is breaking down? How has the Bible’s teaching that our eternal life starts now shaped your view of your limitations?

Pray: Lord Jesus, on the days when life feels dark, when nothing seems to go right, help me not to be crushed or destroyed. Remind me always that “the worst thing is never the last thing.” Amen.

Family Activity: Many people struggle with change, sometimes even fear it. As a family, name the four seasons, then invite each person to share what they like and dislike about each one. For example, the summer brings about more free time, but often high heat. The winter offers snow for sledding and snowball fights, but unsafe driving conditions. Take a moment to imagine what life would be like if you only experienced one season every day, all year long. What would you like about that? What would you miss? Remind one another that even though change can be difficult, we can often find good in the new experience or situation. Read [Lamentations 3:22-23](#) and [Hebrews 13:8](#) aloud, then thank God for being faithful through all of life’s changes. Pray for a heart and mind open to positive and healthy change.