

# Nourishment for the Spiritual Pilgrimage

## Daily Devotions for Christian Disciples

**Vernon T. Jones**

*"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed" Mark 1:35*

Jesus taught by his words and actions. He went by himself to pray when he was tired, when faced with upcoming trying events, or when he just wanted to be alone in the presence of his Lord. He gave us guidance about what to pray, how to pray, and why to pray, and was very familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, if we want to become Jesus' disciple we should follow his model and invest time and emotional energy into prayer, Bible study, and reflection. *Nourishment For The Spiritual Pilgrimage* provides an aid for those who want to participate in the spiritual pilgrimage of becoming a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ. It offers insight and support for those who daily want to turn their hearts, souls, and minds to God's will in their lives, as they strive to help in bringing about God's kingdom in this present time. There are countless other devotionals, but hopefully this can offer something that many of the others may not, a specific focus on the concept of discipleship.

**VERNON T. JONES** after a lengthy insurance industry career, earned his Master of Theological Studies Degree from Trinity Lutheran Seminary. His business world experience combined with his theological insight and personal spiritual pilgrimage has enabled him to assist people with incorporating the discipleship practices in this book into their faith journey. He is also the author of *Discipleship—A Lifelong Spiritual Pilgrimage* (2013).



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"Vernon Jones provides a unique devotional resource designed to enable its users to become more fully-developed, life-long disciples of Jesus. He is a mature and experienced disciple who invites others into spiritual discipline by opening his own life of faith. Replete with specific suggestions that are realistic and encouraging, the book will be an excellent resource for people beginning their spiritual pilgrimage as disciples, as well as for veteran disciples."

—**WALTER F. TAYLOR JR.**, PhD, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio

"In *Nourishment for the Spiritual Pilgrimage*, Jones gives us practical and personal guidance for growing as a disciple. From the depth of his own experiences and reflection upon Scripture, he gives us daily handles on connecting with God, knowing and doing the will of God, and becoming an effective witness for Jesus."

—**JIM STUCK**, Bishop Emeritus, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA

"Jones's travelogue of the spiritual pilgrimage toward discipleship quickly becomes a trusted guidebook for our own journey. Touching on the pilgrimage's major themes—repentance, prayer, the Holy Spirit, discernment, hope, trust, and discipleship—this daily devotional keeps before us that ours is not a solitary journey by helping us recall the treasured 'cloud of witnesses' that surrounds and supports us. In fact, Jones becomes such a companion himself."

—**CRAIG ALAN SATTERLEE**, PhD, Bishop, North West Lower Michigan Synod ELCA

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VERNON T. JONES

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NOURISHMENT FOR THE SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE  
Daily Devotions for Christian Disciples

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# Introduction

## HOW THIS BOOK CAME ABOUT

The purpose of this devotional book is to provide an aid for those who want to participate in the spiritual pilgrimage of becoming a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ. It offers insight and support for those who daily want to turn their hearts, souls, and minds to God's will in their lives, as they strive to help in bringing about God's kingdom in this present time. There are countless other daily devotionals of one fashion or another, but my hope and prayer are that this one can offer something that the others may not, a specific focus on the concept of discipleship.

My first book, *Discipleship—A Lifelong Spiritual Pilgrimage*, was written for the same purpose. In that book certain aspects of becoming a disciple on the spiritual pilgrimage were outlined and discussed. It was written to offer encouragement and new ideas for those who are actively involved in some spiritual practices and also to give suggestions to those who want to begin this journey and need help in starting. The material for that book came from my experiences in working with churches on a discipleship and small group basis.

Generally those who have read the *Discipleship* book have found it to be helpful because it presented them with some new aspects about this walk or gave them a different viewpoint of how to approach this topic. A main focus is the importance of getting involved in the spiritual practices of prayer, Bible study, and reflection. It can be extremely challenging to deepen one's relationship with God, and along the way become a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ, without investing one's emotional and physical energy, time, and effort into these spiritual habits.

Just prior to the *Discipleship* book being published I was encouraged to design a web site as a way to publicize the upcoming book and my ministry services. I set up a web site and a Facebook page outlining my services along

with giving updates about when the book would be published. The web provider suggested doing a blog to periodically give the audience something fresh to read. I started doing scripture reflections in order to minister to those who viewed it. I didn't know it at the time but those early reflections were to become the foundation for this devotional book.

After writing a number of reflections I felt the Holy Spirit leading me to begin writing a devotional book. It seems essential that every day as we take part in our spiritual pilgrimage we should turn our hearts and souls to the Lord, and a devotional book is a helpful tool to assist in that. As noted this book is somewhat different from many devotional books because its principal focus is on the reader becoming a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught by his words and actions. He gave us guidance about what to pray, how to pray, and why to pray. He also was very familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, if we want to become a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ, we should follow the model of his life and teachings.

## THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

The use of prayer, study, and reflection are found in all of the world's major religions. All of them in some form stress the importance of taking the time and energy to pray and reflect on their faith's teachings. In addition to Christianity, four of the largest world religions are Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism.

The followers of Islam are referred to as Muslims and they face toward Mecca when they pray five times a day. Prayer is the main method of worship in the Islamic faith. The basis of their faith is the Qur'an, the holy word of God.

For those who practice Hinduism, the home is where many families pray daily. Their hope is that the study of the texts of Hinduism, together with prayer, and meditation will bring peace to the faithful.

Buddhism teaches that enlightenment comes while one is meditating. Worship includes giving honor to the Buddha and reading sacred prayers.

In Judaism the Hebrew Bible is the foundation of faith. Prayer is an important part of daily life, and some Jews pray three times a day. Prayer is seen as a way to talk with God.<sup>1</sup>

These four religions are just some of the faiths and practices in the world today. If one were to study the other world's religions, prayer and worship would most likely be a part of their rituals as well. They all are

1. See Philip Wilkinson, *Illustrated Dictionary of Religions* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1999).

based upon sacred writings, prayer, and contemplation as a way to enrich the spiritual lives of their followers.

Christianity, as one of the major world religions, also has many forms of prayer and worship. Like those who practice Judaism, prayer is communicating with and building up a relationship with God. As with the other religions, many Christians also use prayer in the home today in addition to communal worship. The Holy Bible is the text that is the foundation of the Christian faith and the Lord's Prayer is prayed throughout the world.

I have been fortunate enough to attend overnight retreats at several Christian retreat centers. In one case the religious community worshiped seven times a day, besides having other times of personal prayer. Thus, various Christian denominations, as well as many of the desert mothers and fathers, have expressed the need to pray and worship throughout the day or at least several times during the day.

The enduring aspect of the prayer life of faithful Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and others is that it helps individuals, families, communities, and nations cope with the many challenges that are facing humankind today. Prayer doesn't exempt one from the trials of the day, but it aids in centering people and opening them to the divine will. I believe that whenever people of any religion or faith hear about natural disasters, war, violence, disease, poverty, or the inhumane treatment of other humans, the first thing they frequently do is to pray to God for those who are suffering. The United States has a Judeo-Christian foundation. However, many of the non-Christian religions are being practiced throughout America and in fact are growing in number.

Some of the practices of the Christian spiritual pilgrimage are also demonstrated in these other world religions. What is being expressed here is universal and has been practiced in one form or another for thousands of years. These rituals are both ancient and become new every day when used faithfully.

## THE BOOK'S FORMAT

This book has a devotion written for every day of the year and the overall subject matter concerns the disciple's spiritual pilgrimage and all that it entails. The months of the year are broken down into the same chapter topics as my *Discipleship* book. Thus if you have read the *Discipleship* book you may be familiar with the themes used for each month; however, if you haven't read it, this book can still be used as a daily devotional for each reflection stands on its own and, hopefully, will encourage readers on their spiritual journey.



*Nourishment for the Spiritual Pilgrimage: Daily Devotions for Christian Disciples* is heavily based on the word of God. The daily meditations are written from my viewpoint, my life experience in both the joyful times and the times of challenge, and reflect how I have felt the guidance of the Holy Spirit during this entire process. If you were to ask ten people what they glean from the scriptures cited, you would likely get ten very different answers. Those responses wouldn't necessarily be right or wrong, just the viewpoints of those reading them. Thus, you may disagree with some of these reflections, but my prayer is that many of them will aid you in your spiritual pilgrimage.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Please read and meditate on the daily reflections and allow the Holy Spirit to guide your contemplation and your spiritual practices, and if you only use this book for your daily devotions that would be a good start. However, if you haven't already begun some additional daily spiritual practices I would encourage you to continue and this book would then become one of the additional resources you use.

Before reading a selection consider praying for guidance regarding what you are about to reflect on. Starting your meditation time with prayer is a good habit to get into for it opens your inner being to be receptive to what comes next. You could start your prayer with something like, "Gracious Lord, please guide my study of your word and this reflection and help me to be open to where the Holy Spirit may be leading me. . . ." Be creative and develop some type of introductory prayer that is comfortable for you.

Most of the meditations in this book have a short scripture at the beginning. One way to use the daily selection is to read the verses preceding and following the biblical passage selected, so that you can get a sense of what the writers were trying to say overall. Also read any footnotes or study notes pertaining to the verses, so that you can obtain some understanding of the background and context on the passage. If you don't already have one, consider purchasing a good study Bible that gives additional insights on the various books.

Meditate on the devotional entry and the scripture passage, and see if it touches some aspect of your life, someone you know, or some situation of which you are aware. Be open to what the Holy Spirit may be saying to you through these words. Are you being given a new way to approach certain aspects of your life; are you being asked to step out in faith in some manner; or are there some areas in your life that need to be resolved or forgiven? Allow

the Holy Spirit to enter deeply into your spirit to direct, change, support, and bring you closer to becoming the person that God created you to be.

At the end of each reflection is a prayer; think of using this prayer as a springboard to pray for other aspects of your life, your family, vocation, career, community, or issues in the nation or world. Let prayer become a habit that can be done at any time or place. Also try to get into the routine of praying the Lord's Prayer daily, as this is the one prayer given to us by Jesus. When you use this prayer you are joining countless others who have come before you, and many throughout the world are saying it even as you are praying it. It has been called the perfect prayer in that it covers so many areas of our daily lives. Additionally remember that many different peoples and religions around the world practice a prayerful and reflective life just as you are attempting to do.

Occasionally in this book, the practices and/or wisdom of the "desert mothers and fathers" are mentioned. These individuals were searchers who, in the second and third centuries, moved away from the established Christian church and the cities in which they were previously connected. They believed that society and the church had created too many barriers to living the Christian life to which Jesus had called his followers. They wanted a space and environment where they would be able to grow into a closer relationship with God.

These pilgrims felt they were following the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures in order to have lives of solitude and prayer. They would often go far out into the desert areas to practice a more prayerful life and thus acquired the name of desert mothers and fathers. Often, they wouldn't see other humans for years. However, they were well known for their wisdom, love of God and neighbor, and for their highly-disciplined and prayer-centered lives.

If you would like to know about this movement, there have been many books written about that time in the church's history. Here are three books I have read that would be a good starting point to learn more about this period: *In God's Holy Light: Wisdom from the Desert Monastics*, by Joan Chittister; *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, translated by Henry L. Carrigan Jr.; and *Journeying into God: Seven Early Monastic Lives*, translated by Tim Vivian.

During the year my hope and prayer are that this book can support you through every phase of your life and that it helps you to trust in the promises of our gracious and loving God, who will be with you no matter what you are going through at the moment. May you experience God's love all around you as you strive to become a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ!

# January

## Striving for the Kingdom of God— Repenting / Turning Around / Conversion

### JANUARY 1

#### The New Year

One of my favorite spiritual writers is the late Henri Nouwen, who was a Catholic priest, and a very important writer in the last century. In his book *Bread for the Journey* he writes about having light for the next step. As we begin a New Year, we can become concerned about what this year holds for us. He notes that generally we only have enough light for the coming hour or the following day.

He writes, “The art of living is to enjoy what we can see and not complain about what remains in the dark.”<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say that when we can take the next step with faith, our life can be filled with joy. May you be able to trust the Lord about the future and live today with that faith. Blessings on your spiritual pilgrimage throughout the New Year!

*God of light, help me to trust the next step in my life to you, and take it knowing that it is all that is needed for the moment! Amen.*

1. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), entry for January 8.

**JANUARY 2**

## Striving First for God's Kingdom

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

MATTHEW 6:33–34

This passage is part of what has become known as the *Sermon on the Mount*. Jesus is teaching those close to him about how he wants them to live. This message wasn't for everyone, but only for those who were willing to follow him and risk going against the culture at that time.

This message offers all of us who are attempting to become a disciple of Jesus Christ guidance about where our focus should be. By stating that we are to strive first for the kingdom of God, it reminds us that our daily decisions should be made through the lens of God's kingdom and not the lens of the world or on long-term plans. That is hard to do especially when there are so many worldly voices crying out for our attention. May the Holy Spirit assist you in striving first for the kingdom of God before anything else!

*Lord of all creation, please give me the focus to daily strive first for your kingdom, versus the many competing worldly voices that are all around me! Amen.*

**JANUARY 3**

## Repenting

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

MATTHEW 3:2

In this passage John the Baptist is in the wilderness near Judea announcing that because God's kingdom was near the time for the people to repent was upon them. People from the Jerusalem and Judea areas were attracted to his message and were baptized in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. John the Baptist may have seemed strange to those around him, but his message was what he was guided to give, and people listened and repented. This message is reported to have come before Jesus started his public ministry.

This aspect of repenting on the spiritual pilgrimage is sometimes overlooked as something that is not needed. However, it is essential and repenting is not just a once in a lifetime event, but could be looked at as a daily one. Each day asking for God's forgiveness acknowledges the fact that we are all imperfect human beings with shortcomings and faults. John's message continues to speak to us today, and hopefully we are able to listen and repent!

*Forgiving Lord, help me to daily repent of those things in my life that prevent me from becoming the person that you want me to be! Amen.*

## JANUARY 4

### Turning Around

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

EZEKIEL 14:6

In this verse the Lord God wants the prophet Ezekiel to tell the Israelites to not just repent from their past sins, but to actually turn away from the idols and abominations that they had been facing. Repentance is the attitude of the heart and is the first step in seeking God daily, but turning around is the next step. God knew that they were worshiping idols and not the Lord, and things needed to be changed. We repent with our hearts, but some physical action is needed as well.

On our spiritual pilgrimage doing things differently, forming new spiritual habits and practices, staying away from aspects of our lives that once caused us harm, and turning away from idols in our lives and facing toward God's will for us are all action things. May you be able to understand the importance of this aspect of your spiritual walk!

*Today Lord, help me to take some action to turn away from those aspects of my life that are a barrier to my spiritual growth and relationship with you, and turn toward your loving arms! Amen.*

**JANUARY 5**

## Good News

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

MARK 1:14–15

This is apparently Jesus' first public message, and he is basically saying the same thing that John the Baptist and some of the Old Testament prophets declared, that it was now time to repent. Jesus went on to talk about how the *good news*, or the *gospel* had to be proclaimed and also noted that the kingdom of God had come near. John also talked about God's kingdom being near. In these two short verses a lot is being announced for the people in Jesus' time and of course for us.

Today no matter how you say it, repenting, turning around, or conversion, are important aspects of this spiritual pilgrimage. All three terms involve letting go of the things that may keep us from having a closer relationship with God. As all aspects of the spiritual walk, it requires self-discipline, struggle, and change. Believing in the *good news* or *gospel* means that Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, and we look to his life for direction in ours. Today may you believe in this *good news* and that God's kingdom is near, which allows you to daily repent, turn around, and become his disciple!

*Holy Spirit, guide me today to believe in this good news and believe that God's kingdom has come near to me, which will encourage me to repent of everything that is a barrier to my spiritual growth! Amen.*

**JANUARY 6**

## What if We Resolved to Be Like the Shepherds and the Magi?

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

LUKE 2:15

May the spirit and peace of God be truly with you during the New Year! As we tell the birth story of the baby Jesus, the shepherds and Magi often get forgotten. Following Jesus' birth, they were never mentioned again in

Scripture. However, they were chosen by God to become the living birth announcements to Mary and Joseph.

Now, what if we resolved to be like the shepherds and the Magi? Would we be willing to follow directions given to us by God? Would we be willing to venture out in haste not knowing where or why we are going, but going anyway because of the guidance given to us? Blessings on your spiritual pilgrimage throughout the New Year!

*May I be open to following God's guidance in small and large ways on a daily basis throughout this New Year! Amen.*

## JANUARY 7

### Setting One's Mind on the Spirit

... to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace, ... for all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

ROMANS 8:6B, 14

The book of Romans is a powerful letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome. This chapter has a number of verses that are frequently quoted for many different reasons. The basis for these passages is a life lived in the Spirit. Paul wants his readers to set their mind on the things of the Spirit, which provides life and peace, versus having their mind be on things of the flesh that lead to death.

For those on this spiritual pilgrimage it is so important to keep our minds and hearts on the things of the Spirit, on the love of God for the world, on the life that Jesus lived for us, and on the things that allow each of us to become the persons that God wants us to be. Read all of Romans 8 and reflect on the many words of wisdom that are there. May these words and lessons support and enrich your spiritual practices!

*Lord of the Spirit, give me the courage and strength to set my mind on the things of your Spirit, and allow that Spirit to comfort and guide me and give me your peace! Amen.*

## JANUARY 8

## Listen to Him

This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him!

MATTHEW 17:5B

In this story from Matthew, Jesus is with three of his closest disciples, Peter, James, and John, on a mountaintop experience, which is normally called the *transfiguration*. At this time, Jesus' face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. However, with all of this excitement, God wants the three disciples to just *listen* to Jesus.

Listening is an important step on our spiritual journey. After we listen—really listen and focus on what we have to learn—this knowledge may cause us to change. This change will continue as long as we are on this path, and will allow us to see life differently. Blessings on your spiritual pilgrimage as you try to listen!

*During this walk, may I be open to listening for the voice of God through the Holy Spirit in many and varied ways and in the process, be prepared to change! Amen.*

## JANUARY 9

## God Restores Our Souls

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

PSALM 23

This is one of the most loved and quoted psalms, used for many different occasions. Take time to read and reflect on it. It can help us through many stages of our earthly journey. The image of God being our shepherd could help us to realize how God loves and cares for us and how the Lord is



interested in every detail of our lives. Just as the shepherd looks out for the sheep, God looks out for us.

Looking at the verse where God restores us is especially powerful for those on a spiritual pilgrimage. If we want to be restored and led into right paths, we have to do our part, to be in a position to listen to God's voice and hear the instructions that are given. On this walk we can position ourselves to be restored by the Lord when we engage in spiritual practices, in that manner we can condition our hearts and souls to be made into the persons that God wants us to be. While on your spiritual journey, may you be restored in your heart and soul!

*Good shepherd, help me to be open to your voice and guidance so that I may be restored in heart and soul! Amen.*

## JANUARY 10

### A New Heart and a New Spirit

A new heart I [the Lord God] will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you.

EZEKIEL 36:26–27A

In this Old Testament book, we have the priest and prophet Ezekiel outlining what the Lord God directed him to tell the Israelite nation. Their hearts that were like stone would be turned into hearts of flesh. In Ezekiel 37 we have the story of the “Valley of Dry Bones” and how God puts a new life into something that was dry and dead. This is an excellent story for those who want to engage in spiritual practices, for it gives us all hope about what can come from it, a new heart and new spirit.

However, some of us may feel that obtaining a new heart and spirit is an extremely difficult thing to do, depending on what is going on in our lives. One such time for me was when my late wife, Judy, died in late January 1999. After her funeral and all of the related activity calmed down, I can remember how depressed, lonely, and sad I was. Up until her death, I had been busily caring for her at home, and then life suddenly slowed down. During that time of the year the days were short and having to be alone during those winter evenings was especially challenging for me. There were many stressful moments for me then. It took a long time, but spring did come, and by July my energy level began to improve. My heart and spirit were renewed over time.

Think about reflecting on these chapters from Ezekiel as an example of how we can also be reborn. Being on our spiritual pilgrimage isn't always a bed of roses, but we can daily be given a new heart and spirit when we are open to God's love, grace, and mercy. Blessings on your spiritual travels!

*Lord of new life, guide me to be open to receiving a new heart and new spirit that can then be shared with those I will be meet today! Amen.*

## JANUARY 11

### Born from Above

Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit."

JOHN 3:3-6

In this passage a Pharisee leader, Nicodemus, visits Jesus and Jesus tells him about having to be reborn from above in order to see God's kingdom. This of course confused Nicodemus and Jesus had to repeat himself, and Nicodemus still didn't get it. Being born from above, or born anew (as some translations read) was a hard concept to grasp for this religious leader. Nicodemus probably thought that he knew all of Moses' written law and how it was interpreted, but he failed to envision what Jesus was talking about.

It appears, however, that what Jesus is talking about centers on the repenting / turning around / conversion discussion. That is, changing one's life in order to become part of God's kingdom. In this passage, being born from above suggests being baptized (water) and having the Holy Spirit (spirit) become part of one's spiritual essence.

This concept may be challenging to comprehend today, however, as you strive for God's kingdom in your daily life, and become involved with spiritual practices, may you see the importance of being born from above or being born anew!

*Lord of the Spirit, please give me the insight and guidance to be able to seek your kingdom on a daily basis by being born anew, and may I bring that understanding to those that I come in contact with today! Amen.*

## JANUARY 12

### Kingdom Divided

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I [Jesus] cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

MATTHEW 12:28

In the section from Matthew 12, the Pharisees had been saying that Jesus could only cast out demons because the ruler of demons, Beelzebul, allowed him to do it. Jesus goes on to tell them that if a kingdom, house, or city is divided against itself it can't stand, also Satan can't cast out Satan. Additionally, if what Jesus was doing was by God's Spirit, then the kingdom of God had come upon them.

This is another case where Jesus teaches that God's kingdom had come near to them because of his life and actions. This is also a valuable lesson for us today, for when we are following Jesus' teaching we are also taking part in bringing God's kingdom into this time and place.

Maybe we can't cast out demons as Jesus did, but we can love others, and walk this spiritual pilgrimage by the power of the Holy Spirit to bring God's kingdom here today. For us personally, this is also done when we take part in the spiritual practices of prayer, Bible study, and reflection!

*May I strive for God's kingdom every day, and look to God's Spirit for guidance, support, and encouragement! Amen.*

## JANUARY 13

### The Heavenly Call of God

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-14

This passage is often quoted and has a lot of powerful messages in these three short verses. The Apostle Paul is writing to the Christians in the city of Philippi and in this passage, wants them to keep pressing toward the goal of their heavenly call. Paul acknowledges that his spiritual race isn't finished, he

wants the goal to be his own like it was for Jesus. He wants to stay focused on just one thing—to let go of the things of the past and focus on what is ahead, as he moves on toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

As we talk about striving for God's kingdom on this spiritual pilgrimage, Paul gives us guidance for our walk. In our spiritual practices, we too should try to let go of the things of our past that hold us back from becoming the person that God wants to be. We ought to attempt to stay focused on just one thing and that is God's kingdom and this heavenly call. Our spiritual travels can move us on toward this goal. Blessings on your journey as you let go of the past and reach forward toward this prize!

*Today may I be like Paul and forget what is behind that is holding me back, and reach forward to what lies ahead, and stay focused on this heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus! Amen.*

## JANUARY 14

### Broken Vessels

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. . . . I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. . . . But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

PSALM 31:9–10, 12, 14–15

Many of us have had times when we have felt like what was expressed in verses 9–10. These verses outline a life that is filled with distress, grief, sorrow, declining strength, and a body that is worn down. For those of us who have gone through periods like this one, it is extremely difficult to function or to maintain any hope.

The writer goes on to note about having a body that has died, and feeling like a "broken vessel." A broken vessel can't do what it was made to do, that is to hold something liquid, thus the owner has no use for the vessel any longer. For it to be of any use it must be repaired or it will have to be thrown away.

This relates to the spiritual pilgrimage in that as imperfect human beings, we too are broken and need to be repaired. One way that this can be done is by asking God for the forgiveness of our sins and trespasses. As we attempt to strive for the kingdom of God, an important daily step is the act of repentance, turning around, or conversion, however you state it.

Those on this spiritual journey can often overlook this because it can be viewed as a once-in-a-lifetime action, rather than a daily one. When this is done, we can then repeat the words in verse 14 that we can trust in the Lord whose hands we are in!

*God of repaired vessels and humans, help me to daily repent and to be made whole again, so that my new life can be shared with those I meet today! Amen.*

## JANUARY 15

### Old Self into a New Self

... seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

COLOSSIANS 3:9B-10

Two months after my high school graduation, I started working in a steel mill's open-hearth department. I continued to work full time for nearly nine years until I earned my undergraduate degree. I had many different jobs during my time there, and some of the jobs required me to either get really dirty, or be around a lot of heat causing me to perspire quite a bit.

Thus, I normally had to take off the work clothes and shower before putting on my street clothes. It was a wonderful feeling to remove the dirty and smelly work clothes after my shift was over. After the shower and putting on the clean clothes I felt almost like a new person.

In this passage from Colossians we have the image of being stripped of the old self (old clothes) and being renewed into a new self (new clothes). We are encouraged to leave behind the old practices that we were once involved in, and to be renewed with the knowledge of a new life in Christ.

As we take part in the spiritual pilgrimage, the practices of the old self (old clothes) may become something we don't feel like wearing any longer. Somewhat like when I couldn't wait to get off my dirty clothes after my shift was over. While striving to become a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ, may you leave behind those old things that prevent you from being renewed. May you be clothed with your new self (new clothes) in the image of Christ!

*Lord of new life, please clothe me with a new self in Christ, and may that new self be a witness of the good news to those I meet today! Amen.*

## JANUARY 16

## God's Kingdom in Our Daily Lives

And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his [God's] kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

LUKE 12:29–32

The beginning of this passage begins with the words, "He said to his disciples." Thus, it is implied that the message that followed was for those who were his closest followers and not specifically for the crowds who were mainly interested in following Jesus because of the miracles he performed, or the religious leaders who wanted to be there when Jesus did something wrong in their eyes.

As he tells his disciples, they were to strive first for the kingdom of God in their daily lives and trust that the Lord God would provide for whatever else was needed. This is a very challenging concept in our modern world that places a lot of emphasis on being overly concerned about one's stock earnings, retirement nest egg, status in society, etc. Striving first for God's kingdom before anything else is not for the faint of heart.

This is a lesson that I have had to learn over and over again in my life, and it continues to be a challenge for me. One of the first major times that I encountered this was when I was working full time in a steel mill and going to college part time. Twice during that time, I was forced to sit out a term because my grade point average was too low compared to the number of hours I was taking. I kept thinking that I could do more than I was capable of and couldn't pull up my grades fast enough, and thus was forced to sit out and think about what was going on.

I was able to get off probation for a number of reasons, but the major one was that I consciously tried to strive for God's kingdom while taking my classes. I had to try to put God's will and kingdom first in my life, versus anything else. This focus didn't happen overnight, but slowly my heart and mind tried to strive for God's kingdom in my life on a daily basis and it impacted how I prepared for my class work, and how I saw my college experience.

Throughout your spiritual pilgrimage, may you recognize the importance of striving first for God's kingdom on a daily basis, versus anything else that you may encounter on your earthly journey!

*Lord of life, please help me to focus on your kingdom and will in my life before anything else, and allow me to share this understanding with those whom I meet today! Amen.*

## JANUARY 17

### God Is Light and Is Ready to Forgive Us

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. . . . If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 JOHN 1:5, 8-9

For most of us, admitting our sins or shortcomings is tough to do. We generally don't want other people to know where we have failed or come up short. We may even attempt to put up a facade which prevents those around us from knowing what is actually going on with us. The ironic part about this is that very often we will feel better once we are able to let go of what we have done, and are then able to move forward being freed of our past thoughts and actions.

The other issue about this is that God already knows what has happened. Once we come to believe the Lord is truly light and that there is no darkness at all and that light will shine on everything we have done. We can't hide from God those things that we may try to hide from other humans. When we can just trust that the Lord loves us no matter what situation we are in and wants us to come and seek forgiveness, we may be more inclined to do so.

On your spiritual pilgrimage, may you daily ask for forgiveness for those things in your life that are keeping you from becoming the person that you were created to be. God is faithful and will forgive our sins and shortcomings, and in the process, cleanse us from all unrighteousness!

*Lord of all love, help me to have the faith and confidence to come before you with everything that I have done, and give me the trust to believe in your grace, love, and mercy! Amen.*

## JANUARY 18

## The Secret [Mystery] of the Kingdom of God

When he [Jesus] was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret [mystery] of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables."

MARK 4:10–11

Jesus talked about the kingdom of God more than any other topic during his earthy ministry. He proclaimed that God's kingdom was now near, and that it was the time to repent and to proclaim the good news. However, the secret or mystery about the kingdom seemed to be for those who were closest to him, or those who were willing to become his disciples. Here he says that those who were outside, which evidently means those who weren't around him all the time or one of the twelve, would receive his message as a parable.

Apparently, the parables were very difficult to grasp, for even Jesus' closest followers had a hard time understanding them. In Mark 4 Jesus goes on to explain to his followers what they actually meant, which is done when he is alone with them, and not with the crowds.

Being able today to read a printed account of the parables and Jesus' explanation allow us to have a better perspective of what they mean versus the people around him at that time. However, unless we are willing to take part in the spiritual practices of prayer, Bible study, and reflection on a regular basis, it is more difficult for Jesus' words to become part of our inner being and impact our spiritual pilgrimage. As we change from year to year, so does the meaning of Scripture for our lives and for the situations and the environment around us. Time and study are needed on an ongoing basis to continue receiving the new messages that Scripture has for us.

May you be given the emotional and physical energy needed, so that you can better comprehend God's kingdom, and be able to apply its meaning to your spiritual walk in your efforts to become a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ!

*Lord Jesus, may your words about God's kingdom become part of my very being and may that presence encourage me to share this message with those whom I meet today! Amen.*



**JANUARY 19**

## Praying for the Coming of the Kingdom

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

MATTHEW 6:10

This passage is from what has come to be called the “Sermon on the Mount” where Jesus talks to his disciples about a variety of topics. In the beginning of chapter 6 Jesus gave instructions about how and what to pray. He gives the words to what is known as the Lord’s Prayer. This passage gives those wanting to take part in a spiritual pilgrimage quite a bit of direction about prayer, while chapters 5–7 of Matthew give us so many important points about how to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The Lord’s Prayer is often thought of as a perfect prayer because it covers so many areas that we should be concerned about in our prayer life. I would encourage you to include the Lord’s Prayer at some point in your daily prayer time, and if you can’t do anything else during the day, at least take some quiet time to pray this prayer.

Some of the first words that Jesus spoke as he began his public ministry was that the kingdom of God had come near. In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus wants us to pray that God’s kingdom comes to us today, and that God’s will be done on earth as in heaven. When we sincerely pray for that in the Lord’s Prayer, it becomes part of our essence and helps direct how we daily live. We bring the kingdom of God about when we strive to do God’s will in our lives, and the lives of those around us.

When we attempt this, it isn’t something that brings glory or fame to us, but our lives become a reflection of the love of God shining through us to those around us. The kingdom of God coming into our lives is often something that can’t be seen with the human eye. However, in most cases it can be witnessed best with a spiritual eye and soul that can see and feel the Holy Spirit flowing through and around situations in our lives. As you daily pray the Lord’s Prayer, may you be open to the Holy Spirit showing you how to bring about God’s kingdom into your life and the lives around you!

*Holy Spirit, today please guide me about how to seek God’s kingdom in my life, and then help me to do my part in bringing it to those around me! Amen.*

**JANUARY 20**

## Turn, Then, and Live

Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O House of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

EZEKIEL 18:31–32

In this chapter from Ezekiel, God is the hope of justice for all individuals. God is saying that everyone will be accountable for their own actions, and will live or die based on what they do versus the deeds of their parents.

The instructions are fairly modest: “Turn, then, and live.” They are simple words but so very demanding for most of us on a daily basis. Each day we have to decide whom we are to follow, our own self-created gods or the Lord of all creation. The gods we create are made in the image of things that we are comfortable with, and allow us to grow in the eyes of the world. However, the God of the universe may cause us to turn away from our need to be praised by the world—seeking its approval, and instead strive for God’s kingdom in this time and place.

Turning toward God’s kingdom and will may require us to leave beyond aspects of our lives that we may not want to give up. However, in the process, God knows that we will be richer and fuller as it relates to becoming a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ. May you be willing to turn from yourself, and turn toward God, to become the person that God wants you to be!

*Lord of new creation, help me to know that each day I must turn from myself and the world toward you, and then live and embrace this new life that has been given to me! Amen.*

**JANUARY 21**

## Removing Oneself from Evil

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

ISAIAH 1:16–17

Please read this entire passage, especially starting with verse 10. The Lord God doesn’t want a lot of ritual offerings without a real change in one’s

behavior. This section is letting us know that God wants to forgive us, but we should also ask God to help us in removing ourselves from the evil that is all around us. We are to cease from doing evil and to learn to do good, seek justice and help the oppressed, orphans, and widows.

This is an aspect of any walk of life that is always a challenge to improve upon. Old habits die hard, especially those that are ingrained in us for many years. Some of us may have things in our lives that probably control us more than we care to acknowledge. I don't have the time or space to note many of the personal aspects about me that I have had to struggle with over my life. Needless to say, I still struggle daily with doing God's will. That will always be the case because all of us are imperfect humans.

But, the Lord wants us to continue to sincerely strive to ask for help and guidance to remove ourselves from the evil that is all around us and, in fact also inside of us. When we do this, we are in a better position to cease from doing the evil that we do, and seek to learn to do good and justice for those who are less fortunate than we are. Please remember that God is always willing to grant forgiveness when we come with a humble and contrite heart!

*Lord of all love, help me to strive for your will in my life, and in the process, help me to turn away from the evil that so easily comes my way. May I be a reflection of your infinite grace, love, and mercy! Amen.*

## JANUARY 22

### God's Grace

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10–11

Think for a moment about events in your life when you have been given something that you didn't expect, or been given time to complete a project or assignment that you didn't think you would be granted, or allowed to move ahead with something that you didn't think you would be permitted to finish. All of these examples and many more that you can probably think of, are all forms of grace in one way or the other. Grace is about getting something unexpected or undeserved.

In my own life, I have been shown grace countless times for various reasons, and hopefully I was aware of this and able to acknowledge how fortunate I was then. I remember when I was going to college part time and working full time that I was shown my share of grace. Several times I took more classes than I should have taken and had a very hard time keeping up with all of the course work.

At the same time my grade point average was lower than it should have been and I was about to be put on probation. At one point one of my professors showed me tremendous grace by working with me to keep my grade point average high enough to continue in school. However, I didn't learn my lesson then and later on was put on probation. Over time I realized that I had to slow down and deal with what I could handle. I did get off of probation and completed my course work to earn my degree. But a lot of people helped me and grace was shown to me in many different ways.

Please be encouraged that the grace that was described in this passage is still very much available to us today, when we come before the Lord with a sincere and contrite heart. May you, like the Apostle Paul, be able to state that the grace from our Lord was not given in vain!

*God of love, help me to come before you asking for forgiveness for all my shortcomings, knowing that your infinite grace will be given me and that your love will surround me! Amen.*

## JANUARY 23

### Prophets Testify about Forgiveness

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

ACTS 10:43

In this chapter from Acts, Peter is talking to a man named Cornelius and others in the city of Caesarea. This passage indicates that the mission of the early church community was now extended to the Gentiles. Peter was telling them about the life of Jesus and about the good news of his ministry. This group then received the Holy Spirit and was baptized after hearing this message.

One of the key points that Peter declared was that the prophets had told about Jesus' coming and that those who believed in him would receive forgiveness of their sins. Jesus' purpose for coming to earth was foretold long before he came and his life was expected by those who were aware of what was written.

Those of us who live in this present time don't have to rely on a prophet's message to learn of the Messiah's coming. Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we are able to come to God through Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and trespasses. We have scriptures like this one that informs and enlightens us about how Jesus still interacts with us today. On this spiritual pilgrimage know that when we come asking for forgiveness with a contrite and sincere heart we will be heard and forgiven!

*Lord of all time, help me to understand the importance of daily repentance, and may I faithfully believe that my pleas are heard and accepted! Amen.*

## JANUARY 24

### Peace with God

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

ROMANS 5:1-2

Peace can mean various things to different people depending on the circumstance. It could be the end of friction between parties who were once at odds. The peace could be temporary or permanent, a period when everyone takes time to communicate without any strife. There can be peace between warring nations and countries, between communities, between family members or between friends.

There can also be peace in a person's mind, heart, and spirit depending upon where their focus happens to be at the moment. When our inner being is filled with hate, doubt, and fears, peace is probably impossible. By being hung up with things that can easily stop us from being the person that God wants us to be, it can be more challenging to receive the peace and hope that are ours through Jesus Christ.

Once we can truly believe that we are justified by faith, and that when we come before the Lord and ask for forgiveness God will indeed accept our pleas of repentance, then we can have peace about whatever comes our way. When we have hope that no matter what happens in this life or the next, that God's grace and love will surround us and comfort us, we can have peace in our mind, heart, and spirit. May you be able to embrace this inner peace in your daily spiritual pilgrimage!

*Grace-filled Lord, help me to be open to the peace that you have for me when I come before you with my prayers of repentance, and may the peace that is in me reflect God's love to those that I meet today! Amen.*

## JANUARY 25

## True Mercy Comes from God and Not Human Effort

What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.

ROMANS 9:14–16

There are so many aspects of this spiritual pilgrimage that run against the dominating thought in today's modern culture. Becoming a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ carries a mind-set and motivation with it that at times may seem to be the direct opposite of worldly intentions. The Lord wants us to strive first for God's kingdom in our lives before anything else. In our society, we are encouraged before anything else to seek and work for those things that will make us more successful, better looking, able to live longer and better, and to improve our overall life with our own efforts and careful planning.

However, being forgiven of our sins and trespasses and looking for God's mercy comes about not so much because of what we do, but rather through God's infinite mercy and love. We do have to come seeking this mercy with a humble and contrite heart, but after that the forgiveness comes from the Lord and not because of our own will.

This may be hard for some of us to understand or grasp because of the many and varied signs that are all around us and coming to us through mass media stating just the opposite. That is where our spiritual practices of prayer, Bible study, and reflection may help us. With the comfort and guidance that we can get when we are involved in these rituals, we may be in a better position to accept the mercy from God versus believing that we have to do more to be forgiven. On this journey, may you have the faith to trust in these promises about God's mercy and love!

*Lord of infinite love, help me to come before you knowing that your mercy and compassion are freely given to those who are open to receiving them! Amen.*

## JANUARY 26

### Words of Repentance

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, "Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips."

HOSEA 14:1-2

The prophet Hosea is encouraging the nation of Israel to return to the Lord and to ask for forgiveness for the things that they have done. The implied message is that God doesn't want their sacrifice, but, rather for them to express their need of repentance in words and actions. In my life, I have found that unless I could share my feelings with someone, and then show them how I felt, nothing else seemed to matter in trying to renew or build up a relationship with them.

During the first few years of my marriage to my late wife, Judy, one of the really hard things that I had to learn was that of sharing my feelings and thoughts, versus keeping them inside of me. Judy had a very outgoing personality and found it easy to express what she was thinking and how she felt about most anything. I, on the other hand, was more reserved and had not learned how to share my emotions with others. This was an area where we struggled quite a bit in those early years.

Thankfully she was patient with me, loved me, and was willing to walk with me through that period, as I slowly became comfortable in sharing with her and then over time with others. It took a lot of prayers, love, and persistent effort but things did improve. Today, I am still somewhat reserved, however, I am better than I used to be, but it is something at which I have to constantly work.

No matter what your personality is, according to Hosea, God wants to hear the words from our lips about how we see ourselves, about our shortcomings, and where we need to ask for forgiveness. Part of our spiritual pilgrimage is to daily talk to God. Today return to God and strive to share all areas of your life, your prayer requests, and your shortcomings!

*Lord of grace, may your Holy Spirit give me the courage and confidence to share all of my feelings with you that are on my lips and in my heart and soul! Amen.*

**JANUARY 27**

## Jesus Came to Save the World and Us

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

JOHN 3:16–17

God sent Jesus into the world not to condemn it, but in order to save it. Think about that for a moment, Jesus came not as a condemning/punishing force but a saving one for the world. God is love and can't help but love all of creation including all of us fallible/sinful humans. On this side of the kingdom no matter how many times we fail, when we repent, God's love through Jesus Christ is there with open arms to embrace us again and again. No matter how far we think we may have fallen or messed up, it's not too far for God's loving reach to pull us back.

Regardless of how good we are with our spiritual practices, or how long we have been on our spiritual pilgrimage, or how prayerful or humble we have become, or how involved we are with a faith community, we have a need for daily repentance. All of us have occasions where we need to repent of our sins, to turn around from facing our will toward facing God's will, and to convert and live our life in a new way.

Jesus came *not* to condemn the world but to save it, and that means you and me. May that fact daily impact how you live, think, and act in all aspects of your life!

*Saving Lord, may your Holy Spirit give me the courage to boldly live as your disciple, knowing that your Son came to save me. May my life be a reflection of your saving grace, love, and mercy! Amen.*

**JANUARY 28**

## Jesus Lives to Make Intercession for Us

Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

HEBREWS 7:25



This is a well-known passage that indicates that because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, priests would no longer be needed to offer sacrifices on a daily basis for the sins of the people. Jesus has taken that role of a high priest forever and is able to save those who approach God through him. Additionally, he is living forever and is able to make intercession for those who come to him.

Thus, when we come asking for God's mercy and forgiveness we will be heard and Jesus is praying for us and making intercession for us. Many of us pray for others during our meditation time, we pray for our family, friends, work situations, faith community, and issues around us or in the world. However, knowing when we come to God that Jesus is praying for us can encourage us to strive for God's kingdom in a faithful and persistent manner.

In my life when someone says that they will pray for me, it helps me realize that I am not alone in my journey, and that others care about what I am going through. Likewise, when I hear of someone needing prayers, and where it is possible and appropriate, I let them know that they are in my prayers, and often their lives are lifted up when they hear this. In the same manner on our spiritual pilgrimage when we approach the Lord in prayer, knowing that we are being prayed for as well by Jesus can also elevate and brighten up our souls!

*Lord Jesus, thank you for life and for your prayers and intercession for me, and help me to pray for those around me who are in need! Amen.*

## JANUARY 29

### God Wants All to Come to Repentance

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

2 PETER 3:8-10

Many wise people have written about the point that God's timing is not ours. When we look at life through our human lens we are always limited because our knowledge and insights can only see things so far ahead. Generally, the best we can do is to know what is happening at this very moment, and what

can and may occur later on is hard to determine. Apparently, this passage was trying to address those who felt that God's future kingdom wasn't coming fast enough for them. Does that sound like many of us today who live in a world of instant everything, we would probably be saying the same thing, why does God appear to take so long in doing something?

This writer is noting that as mortals we can't begin to understand how God sees time. Just trying to express this topic in human terms probably shouldn't be done, because our finite words can't fully describe God. However, we continue to try to do this because words are how we communicate. Thus, noting that for the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like one day is the best we can do.

However, one of the main points of this passage is that the future kingdom is coming in God's timing versus human's timing. God doesn't want any to perish, but *all* to come to repentance. God is love and can't help but love all of creation. All of the creation means those who are like me and those who are different, all of what God has made. There will come a point when the next kingdom will come as noted in verse 10. But until then, the Lord is allowing the time for all to come to repentance. On your spiritual pilgrimage, while you are striving for God's kingdom today may you ask the Lord to forgive you of your trespasses, knowing that because of God's grace and love it will be granted you!

*Lord of all time, help me to trust in your timing in all things, and may I always seek your forgiveness knowing that I will be heard and loved! Amen.*

## JANUARY 30

### Humility

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

Being humble is a trait that doesn't come easily. Most humans want to be liked and cared about and thus may try to push themselves into situations where they are looked upon favorably. Like things in life having a healthy balance is the key, so that we don't go too far in either extreme. However, on this spiritual pilgrimage when we are attempting to become a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ, we have to look toward how Jesus lived, and use his life as our model. Verse 8 in this passage notes that Jesus humbled himself.

Even though Jesus came in the form of God, he emptied himself and became obedient to what he was called to do.

The peculiar thing about being humble is that if we tried to be humble we would be missing the point. Some spiritual writers have noted that when we pray and open ourselves to what God wants for us in our lives, we are on the way to living as Jesus lived, a humble and obedient life. As we take part in our spiritual practices we come to realize over time that whatever we become, and whatever we do, comes from God as a gift. Our practices merely put us in a position to receive this gift, but it doesn't come because of these practices. What comes is because of God's grace and not our own efforts. Humility is not something that is sought after, but comes to us while we are on our spiritual pilgrimage.

Striving for God's kingdom in this time and place and becoming the person that God wants us to be is both a concrete and mysterious situation. It is concrete because by taking part in the spiritual practices of prayer, Bible study, and reflection we are doing our part for our own personal growth, and for bringing God's kingdom into this present time. It is mysterious because we don't know what will come out of it, nor do we know the timing of anything.

The part that keeps us on the path of humility is that we continue with our spiritual practices not knowing what will come out of them, only that we have been called to continue. Our trust is in the Lord and not our own efforts. Jesus humbled himself by emptying himself and being obedient to his heavenly Father. Our humility comes from seeking to be obedient to God's will each day.

*Loving Lord, in my spiritual practices help me to be open to where you are guiding me, and leading me to become the person that you want me to be, and in the process, may I help others to do the same thing! Amen.*

## JANUARY 31

### A New Creation

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-18

This is one of my favorite Bible verses, because it establishes that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, everything old has passed away. On this spiritual pilgrimage, situations from our past can sometimes weigh us down

and prevent us from becoming the person that God wants us to be. Because we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, we are a new creation, a new person, and those things that once held us back are gone. Becoming a new creation happens because of our relationship with God, and it can come in large and small ways; it can also come about when we go through some milestones in our lives.

This has occurred in my life on a number of occasions, and one of the more significant times was after earning my bachelor's degree. I had been working full time in the open-hearth department of a steel mill while going to college part time. The job at the mill could be very hot and dirty at times, and thus required me to change out of my work clothes and clean up after my shift. After going to college part time for eight years I graduated and was able to obtain a job in the insurance industry. At that point I felt that my life was a new creation.

I went from working forty hours a week in a mill and going to school part time, to just working forty hours a week as a trainee with the insurance company. I also went from wearing work clothes and working shift hours to wearing shirts and ties and only working during the daytime. The mill was in my hometown of Youngstown, Ohio, and the insurance company moved my family to Denver, Colorado. I felt both very fortunate and very humbled about this new role. This new created life was a joy-filled experience for me and my family.

Think of times in your life when you have been part of a new creation, which also can happen in little ways every day as you take part in the spiritual practices of this journey. God can make us into a new creation daily as we open ourselves up to the love that God has to offer, and to the guidance that the Holy Spirit has for us!

*Creating Lord, please help me to realize that in Christ I am a new creation and that everything old has passed away, indeed, everything has become new! Amen.*