

Providence Forge Presbyterian Church

Lenten Devotional Week Two: Prayer

February 21, 2021

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

James 1:5

Prayer for Divine Wisdom

God, I am here today to ask for divine wisdom. In many scenarios I find myself frequently confronted with a lack of a direct solution. So I pray to You that You give me the insight into how I will manage all the crucial aspects of my life. Teach me, for I will listen and adhere to Your advice. Thank You, Father, for answering this prayer. *Amen.*

My grandmother was one of the wisest people I've ever known. She lived until the age of 95, and a day did not pass without her asking God for the blessings of Wisdom and Understanding. (Of course, I thought this was quite unnecessary in her case, but she taught me that the process of becoming wise and acquiring greater understanding was a life-long skill that became harder the older you were. To be able to surrender to God that you don't know everything—even at the ripe old age of 95—is an act of humility which in itself shows great wisdom. She was a person that everyone would go to for advice—and, if they were smart, they'd take it and use it. No use asking for wisdom and then not following the advice you've been given. As the years go by, I find myself praying more and more frequently for "Wisdom and Understanding". In these turbulent times we live in, it seems to me that there can be no greater gift from God to help us all.

Submitted by Marcia Gardy

The History of the Pretzel

We really don't know exactly when the pretzel originated, and there are various legends about it. One is that an Italian monk, around 610, would bake strips of dough that he folded into a shape resembling a child crossing their arms in prayer. He would give these treats, which he called "pretiolas" or "little rewards," to children who had memorized their prayers. Unfortunately—and not surprisingly—there's no documented evidence from the 600's to confirm this story. Whatever their origin, for Christians throughout the centuries, pretzels have been regarded as having religious significance for both their ingredients and shape. They were shaped in the form of crossed arms, for the custom was to cross arms over the breast while praying. Pretzels were considered a sign of good luck and spiritual wholeness—possibly due to the three holes in the common pretzel shape, representing the Holy Trinity. Seen as a symbol of good luck, prosperity and spiritual fulfillment, pretzels were also commonly distributed to the poor, as a way of providing them with both spiritual and literal sustenance. Over time, pretzels became associated with both Lent and Easter. In fact, pretzels were often hunted on Easter morning just like many children hunt eggs today. Many types still show the form of arms crossed in prayer, reminding us that Lent is a time of prayer.

Thoughts on Prayer:

Prayer that reforms and heals is the absolute faith that all things are possible to God. What are our motives for prayer? Do we pray to try to instruct God who already knows all? Do we pray to be heard by others? We do not need to use a lot of words nor flowery phrases to pray. God already knows all, and is all. Jesus was most concerned that we talk with God as we would with a friend. You can pray in different positions. You may be standing, sitting, kneeling, or lying down. Some people always kneel. Others sit; most bow their heads; many fold their hands. Any position can be right; it is the attitude that counts. It is the desire to pray that matters. Desire is prayer. Thoughts unspoken are not unknown to God. God is love. Can we ask God to be more? God is intelligence. Can we inform God of anything He does not already know? Are we grateful for all that we already have when we ask for more? You can tell God everything, because God is interested in everything. God is already perfect and our prayers can bring us into the right relationship with God. Our relationship with God needs attention every day.

Adapted from Westwood Presbyterian Church, ND & First Presbyterian Church, NJ

Submitted by Sherrill Smith

Psalm 16: A Psalm of David

Psalm 16 is one of my favorites. Opening with a prayer to God for protection and closing with an affirmation of joy in the presence of the Lord, it runs the gamut in 11 short verses of what it means to live as a faithful believer. How many of us have not prayed that initial verse during this past year: “Protect me, God, for in you I take refuge”? But unless we make the progression to the next verse, “You are my Lord. I have no good apart from you,” the rich blessings found in the remainder of the psalm will not be available to us. Jesus said something similar to this in Mark 10:18, “No one is good except God alone.” Can most of us truly say that God is our only good?

King David could. If anyone had reason to call out to God for safety, it was David. In the days following his anointing by Samuel as king, he was hounded relentlessly by the then-current king, Saul, and forced to live the life of a fugitive for years in order to survive.

Yet survive he did, and went from hiding in caves to living in a palace. Throughout his life, though he sinned royally, David maintained his sense of dependence on God and his belief that God was his only good.

Verse 8 of this psalm reads, “I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.”

Some faith traditions use Lent as a time to temporarily give up one of those things that we see as good, but that might get in the way

of fully focusing on God. If this would be a helpful exercise to you, then go for it. Better still, spend some time this day and throughout Lent naming the people in your life that you hold as good. Offer them up to God, thanking the Lord for them and asking for God’s protection and care. Then read aloud Psalm 16 as your prayer, recognizing God as your highest good.

Blessings to you during this holy season.

Psalm 16

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

**I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you.”**

As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.

Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

For you do not give me up to Sheol, nor let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

By Pastor Nancy Coleman