

Scattered But Worshiping Together
Fifth Sunday of Easter - May 10, 2020

There is no right way to do this. But make it your own; use it as you want to. As you read through the devotional, if there are thoughts to engage with, we encourage you to do that.

At 11 am gather in a common area in your home.
In the centre, place a lit candle.

Prayer (Or you can pray in your own words)

Heavenly Father, remind us that we are not people of fear: we are people of faith. We are not people who protect our own safety: we are people who protect our neighbours' safety. We are not people of greed: we are people of generosity. We are your people God, giving and loving, wherever we are, whatever it costs. For as long as it takes, wherever you call us. Lord, hear our prayer.

Scripture Reading for the Day - Acts 12:1-19

Invite 1 or 2 to read it from a Bible.

Devotional

One of the very real questions I have been asked in this time of Pandemic, is "Why?". Why is this happening? Why is God letting/allowing/causing this crisis? Why?

Why indeed. We ask "why" to help us understand. To understand the virus, to understand people, to understand God. We ask it to help us process it all.

"Why" is a question we all ask at some point or another. We cry out to the Lord, "Why me Lord? What have I done to deserve this?"

The simplest answer to that question is "Nothing." It's possible that you have done nothing to deserve the troubles you are presently having.

In the Old and New Testaments, people believed that goodness was rewarded and evil was punished in this life. To help us deal with the "Why me Lord?" question. Let's look at a unique verse tucked away in Acts 12. Verse 24: "Meanwhile, the word of God continued to spread, and there were many new believers."

At first glance this may not be a significant verse. But the context changes that. The passage we read indicates how difficult a time it was to be a Christian in that place.

In Acts 12 we see that the persecution of the early church shifted from primarily religious persecution, to more of a political persecution. King Herod became involved. Peter was imprisoned, and the church was praying for his release. In the midst of this persecution, the church grew. It was the kind of persecution that would make people ask, "Why us Lord?"

Perhaps we should consider some things as we ask "Why me Lord?"

1. A Theological Answer: God owes us nothing.

We assume so much. We act as though we deserve goodness, blessing and a carefree life. We act as though God is somehow obligated to us, yet we never ask the "Why Us?" question when good things happen to us.

It is only when the reverse occurs, when something bad happens, that we question God. We just seem to assume that we will experience the good things of life.

Yet all good things that we experience come from the Grace of God. We cannot buy grace, and we don't deserve grace. God has given us grace, BECAUSE HE LOVES US.

All of our good works cannot be used to manipulate God. We cannot put God in our debt.

A friend who experienced the loss of a child calls out to God, "Why God? I've served you my whole life long. Why do you allow this to happen to me?"

Have we in our blessed lives, developed a sense of entitlement? Do we think we have done much for God, and therefore deserve better from Him?

2. A Wise Answer: Remember the truth.

So how do we respond when that question of "Why" looms in front of us? Perhaps a simple exercise. During those times when you begin to feel like you are the victim of some kind of celestial conspiracy let me challenge you to try this. Count your blessings. Literally, write them down.

Write down anything you can be thankful for. Everything. Make a list. It's not as hokey as it sounds. Do it!! Grab onto anything you can be thankful for.

A profound result can come from the simple exercise of counting your blessings. You may discover the truth that more good things have happened than bad.

And whatever the balance is between the good and bad things, joy and suffering, you can know and see that God has graced you.

This helps to get life in focus. Too often we develop tunnel vision, and spiral downward thinking that only bad things have happened to us, when that just isn't true. Begin to apply truth to the situation. Gather the blessings.

3. A Faith Answer: Cultivate trust in God.

We can determine that we will live in faith - to learn that God loves us and always has our best in mind.

Consider the church that lived under persecution and threat of death. Even during that most difficult time of asking "Why," they grew and were strengthened.

They didn't stop praying or witnessing about what they had seen and experienced. They lived by faith.

Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith tells us of the broken, hurting people of God who were considered great because of their faith, their trust in God and his purposes, even in the face of such strong "Why" questions.

People like Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David, and many unnamed faces.

All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They had good reasons to ask why!

Stop and read Hebrews 11:35-40
"For God had something better in mind..."

Grow faith, like those who have gone before you. Like those who had reason to ask "Why," yet instead of abandoning their God, they grew their faith, they

trusted him and their relationship with him. They earned a good reputation, because of their faith.

Ever been around someone who has gone through very difficult times yet come through not bitter, but with a deeper faith in God? Like Corrie Ten Boom, or even people from this church, who are a joy to be around. They have realized these truths and continue to grow their trust (faith) in God.

Cultivate a thankful heart. Grow in faith. Trust him with your life.

In times of trouble we tend to look inward and feel like we are the only ones experiencing difficulty. We want to know what we have done to deserve these troubles.

Yet we can look outward towards God, remember the truth and live in trust (faith,) knowing that He always goes with us.

It's interesting to me that Job never did find out why he suffered, but he found God, and that was enough. He trusted God and God's purposes in his life.

Let's lift up our eyes to the Lord in challenging times. Let's remember the truths about how He loves us, and let's grow our trust in Him through these times.

Take time to pray together.

-Ask or think of some things to pray for

Prayer - Have someone pray this, or pray together:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.