

Prayer & Study Guide

Daily Scripture Readings — 4/30/16

Prayer - Use the Prayer of Ignatius of Loyola to begin your time with God each day.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labor and not to ask for any reward, except that of knowing that we do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Monday – God and Suffering – Read Luke 13:1-5. Almost every week there seems to be a headline in the newspaper about a tragedy, and we experienced a great tragedy on April 19, 1995 when the Murrah Building was bombed. In Jesus' day, some people asked him what he thought about the Galilean insurgents who were killed by the Romans. They may have expected him to say that their deaths were punishment for their rebellious and belligerent behavior. Yet, in mentioning the collapse of the tower of Siloam, Jesus taught that death can come upon anyone, regardless of how sinful or righteous they are. He went on to teach the need for all people to repent. Although we often wonder why tragedies occur and what they mean, notice that Jesus did not say that such tragedies were punishment from God. Pray for the families of those who have lost loved ones in tragedies.

Tuesday – God's Compassion and Comfort – Read Isaiah 40:1-5, 27-31. Isaiah paints a picture of a God who shows compassion on those who suffer. Isaiah also helps us to believe in the promise that God will right every wrong. When we are suffering, Isaiah calls us to put our faith and our trust in the Lord who is able to lift us up. *Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.* How does it make you feel to know that God will help you and carry you through your most difficult times? Spend some time thanking God for the times when God has carried you through a difficult time. Then, pray for someone you know who is experiencing pain or suffering. Ask God to work through you to offer grace, hope, and healing to that person.

Wednesday – Persevere – Read Hebrews 12:1-2. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.* The race is not a sprint that only the fastest person can win. Rather, it is a marathon that rewards those who persevere and finish. Have you ever considered the impact a faithful person can have over the course of a lifetime? God is able to use a faithful person who perseveres to bless many people. Ask God to help you persevere even through the painful and challenging times in your life.

Thursday – The Race – Read I Corinthians 9:24. Paul compared the Christian life to a race. ²⁴ *Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it.* There's only one thing to do in a race... run! It may seem simple, but it takes great focus and discipline to run a good race. Think about Carl Lewis, Usain Bolt, or any of the great sprinters of our time. When they take their mark in the blocks, there is a look of focus and determination on their faces. There is only one goal in a race... to get to the finish line first. We have a different goal as Christians. Our goal or mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our mission is to tell others the Good News about Jesus Christ and invite people into a saving relationship with Jesus. That is why we work so hard to be in mission and ministry right here in Oklahoma City and throughout the world. Ask God to help you use your gifts to serve in ministry.

Friday – Discipline – Read I Corinthians 9:25. ²⁵ *Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one.* Some of the old clichés are true, aren't they? "You get out of it what you put into it." "Anything worth doing is worth doing well." It takes a lot of hard work to play on a team or to compete in a sport. You lift weights. You eat healthy meals to give you energy. You get plenty of rest. You don't just show up one day and break a world-record at the Olympics. You have to practice, practice, practice. Marathon runners run almost every day to prepare for race day. You get better by practicing. As you pray, think about the intentional ways you are practicing your faith.

Saturday – Practice what you preach. – Read I Corinthians 9:26-27. ²⁶ *So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; ²⁷ but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.* Paul did his best to set an example of what it means to live a Christian life. You might say, "He practiced what he preached." Jesus calls us to practice what we preach. In fact, many times people notice our actions more than our words. At the very least, people watch us to see if our words match our actions. Do you have any bad habits that are inconsistent to what you say you believe? Ask God to help you more consistently live out your Christian beliefs.

Lectionary Readings: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; I Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35.

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