**I Love to Tell the Story**

Explore every story of Jesus in this year-long devotional guide. Go at your own pace using the online archive.

**Day 36: Jesus on loving our enemies**

Read: Matt 5: 43-48; Luke 6:27-28, 32-36

Guided reflections:

1. Jesus stretches us in how we treat those who persecute us. He says, it is easy to love and pray for those who are your friends, but my love, AGAPE love, makes you stretch that love. My love not only loves you, but the stranger and even the one who is making your life miserable! Who fits in that category in your life?
2. Love does not mean that anything goes or that you just let others hurt you, but I think Jesus is saying for us to look at others as persons for whom Christ died – Jesus died for them as well. Pray for their forgiveness, their wholeness, and their brokenness to be healed.

Guided prayer:

*“Loving God, this is where the rubber hits the road in our walk with you. Do we have to love our enemies? Still, we know you sent your son to die on the cross for ALL – not just me… help me see those who mistreat me from your eyes. Right now, I pray for your love to touch and make whole these persons that I do not like: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (list their names to God… and pray for GOD to love them.)*

**Day 37: Jesus on doing things for show**

Read: Matt 6: 1-4

Guided reflections:

1. In Jesus’ day, the temple folks made a big deal about showing how “good” they were – how they gave, prayed, tithed, yada yada yada. It made them feel good to know they did all the right things, but Jesus is more interested in us BEING right in our hearts, then DOING right things for everyone to see us. Of course we are to feel good when we give, but have you ever tried to give so others will be impressed?
2. Imagine doing acts of kindness and giving gifts that blow people away without knowing you did them… imagine you and God creating a secret box in heaven where your good deeds are hiding. What can you do today that is a secret act of love?

Guided prayer:

*“Giving God, you get a kick out of blessing us… teach me how to be in an adventure with you where you and I, together, get some kicks out of be secret agents of your love. What can I do right now? Amen” (Now, do it!)*

**Day 38: Jesus on Prayer**

Read: Matt 6:5-8

Guided reflections:

1. Jesus teaches real, gut level praying – alone, with just you and God. In the past, I have prayed for my food in public because I know that folks might see that I am a minister and did not do my Christian duty to thank God for my food. So, to not make my gratitude look like I am praying in public for others, I raise my glass, clink it with my friends and say, “Dear ones, are you thankful? I am! Yeah, God!” How do you balance being a good witness with doing your praying in private?
2. Empty phrases – do you have a litany of words you say to God in every prayer – what do they mean? Jesus says prayer is that “real, authentic, gut level telling God like it is” stuff!

Guided prayer:

*“Dear God, I do not always know how to pray honestly. I am not always sure what is the right thing to say to the Almighty, but if I could just sit down and have lunch with Jesus, this is what I would say…. (say what is on your mind – forget the “these and thous” – just be you!) Amen!”*

**Day 39: The Lord’s Prayer**

Read: Matt 6: 9-15, 11:25,26; Luke 11: 2-4

Guided reflection:

Jesus just said in yesterday’s reading that we are not to recite empty words or phrases… yet we repeat the same words every Sunday – why? I think this prayer is a formula and our praying it in worship is our pact with God

that we want to pray like Jesus did.

Guided prayer – conversation with God – be honest, come clean like Jesus says:

*“Loving God: Do I speak your name like it is holy? Do I really want your will in my house like Jesus wants it? Do I have what I need for today – am I thankful or worrying about tomorrow?*

*Do I have things that need forgiveness - things that stand in the way between me and you, God?*

*Are there people in my life with whom I have unfinished business – can I at least be open to consider forgiving them? Am I enjoying my temptations or do I want God’s help in facing them? Where do I need to be delivered from evil? What is in my power to resist? Amen!”*

**Day 40: Jesus on Fasting**

Read: Matt 6: 16-18

Guided reflection:

1. Fasting is the spiritual discipline of not eating food for a designated period of time as a sign to God that we are earnest about a prayer and about a deepening our relationships with God. The fasting is to be between us and God. It is not a sign to everyone else to know that we are trying to be spiritual!
2. Have you ever fasted? Again, Jesus wants us to get off doing religions rituals and focus on being in relationships with God. Our religious activity is for God, not for others to see us. Are there spiritual practices (like prayers, going to worship, giving an offering) that you do to look good to others?

Guided Prayer:

*“Holy and awesome God, I humble myself before you and say I want to know you. Help me let go of the things that make me focus on looking good to others. I would rather “look good” in your eyes. Help me see myself from your point of view. Amen”*