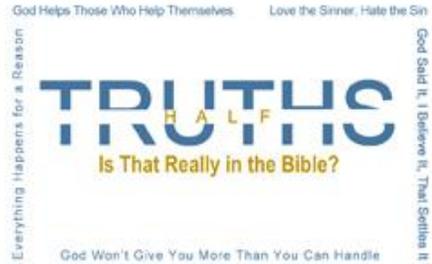


Crossroads Daily Guide
Week of May 1, 2016
Everything Happens for a Reason



This week, to help focus on one spiritual practice a day, there is a word which corresponds to each day of the week. Let that word guide your meditations throughout each of the days.

Serenity Sunday May 1, 2016

Romans 8:28 We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Reflection: We begin this week with one of the most encouraging scriptures in the Bible. This beautiful promise encourages us in that we can know that the God who loves us, walks with us and suffers with us can weave even our darkest experiences into the beautiful tapestry we call life. In darkest days, pinned down by pain, we are assured that God does not bring the suffering upon us but instead holds us in it. Pain and suffering are part of our human story and that is right where the loving and comforting presence of God meets us. How have you felt God's love meet you in pain, confusion, grief or sorrow?

Practice – Serenity: Find a place to close your eyes and take a few deep, gentle breaths. Allow yourself to rest in God's love and peace which is greater than yourself. Use the following breath prayer to help you stay centered in God's unconditional love.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *God can work...* Exhale: *all things together for good.*

Mindful Monday May 2, 2016

Galatians 6:7 – 10 A person will harvest what they plant. Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness, but those who plant for the benefit of the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit. Let's not get tired of doing good, because in time we'll have a harvest if we don't give up. So then, let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith.

Reflection: The phrase "Everything happens for a reason" holds only a half-truth. Life is about cause and effect, but we get it wrong when we see God as the cause of every effect. This is not Biblical. In ancient times people attributed everything they didn't understand to the working of the gods. When storms tore through the land, the gods must have been angry. When a child died, it must have been because of some sin of the parent. When famine gripped the land, some god must have been punishing the people. Today we have the benefit of science to help us understand the dynamics of weather and the workings of our physical bodies. Some things that happen are just because that is how life works. Life is hard for everyone. Still this scripture reminds us to lean toward the spirit and work for the good of all, and never give up, no matter what life brings. How does it make you feel to hear, "Everything happens for a reason"? How does it make you feel when you hear the reason isn't God but life itself?

Practice – Mindfulness: Close your eyes, take in some deep breaths and be in the moment by centering on the good that you have in your life. Use the following breath prayer to help you stay centered. Repeat this five times.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *God can work...* Exhale: *all things together for good.*

Take Stock Tuesday May 3, 2016

Matthew 5:43 – 45 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Reflection: In Jesus’ day, as today, people tended to see tragedy and suffering as divine punishment or a means of teaching humans a lesson. Jesus consistently refuted this. In this verse he reminded the people that the sun rises, and the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous, the good and the evil people of the world. He was teaching that the workings of the earth and the cosmos are not the result of any actions by people, good or bad. How do you feel about this teaching of Jesus?

Practice – Take Stock of your life: Take a few moments today to reflect back on the past year of your life. Have you, or anyone close to you, experienced struggles or suffering that left you wondering why these things happened? Take stock of your own feelings and reactions to what happened. Were you tempted to see God as the cause? Can you be at peace with the idea that there may not be some divine purpose for what happened? Can you see evidence that God was present in those instances as comforting presence? How might this change the way you see and understand suffering and struggles in the future? Take a few moments to center with the following breath prayer.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *In all my struggles...* Exhale: *You are here.*

Wake Up Wednesday May 4, 2016

Luke 13:1-5 Some who were present on that occasion told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices. He replied, “Do you think the suffering of these Galileans proves that they were more sinful than all the other Galileans? No, I tell you. What about those eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them? Do you think that they were more guilty of wrongdoing than everyone else who lives in Jerusalem? No, I tell you.”

Reflection: In this story Jesus was helping the people to process some terrible things that had happened within their communities. One was a series of executions, the other a building accident. Very different circumstances, but Jesus weaves them together to help people see that these terrible things weren’t caused by God. These people were not being punished for any sin or wrongdoing in their lives. Jesus understood cause and effect in human life and tried to rid people of the superstitious ideas prevalent in their culture. Do you ever find yourself judging “the sins” of others? Do you sometimes struggle with thinking others have worse “sins” than your own? If so how does that effect the way you see “the others”?

Practice – Wake Up: The practice for today is to wake up to the world around you and approach this day with a sense of heightened alertness. Pay attention to everything you experience today. Actively look for ways to recognize God’s presence in all that you experience, the good and the bad. Try not to fall into a disengaged state, going through the actions of your day in a mindless, automatic way. Stay alert. Wake up to the shadow and the light within you. Wake up to the many opportunities to see the light of Christ in others. Wake up to opportunities to be the light of Christ to others.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *In all my struggles...* Exhale: *You are here.*

Thankful Thursday May 5, 2016

Jeremiah 29: 10b – 11 This is what the LORD says: “I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Reflection: The context of this verse is important to our understanding the promise. Some of the people in Jerusalem had been taken to Babylonia as prisoners to work. God encourages them to work hard there, marry, have children, enjoy their lives and work to make the land prosperous, because as Babylonia prospered, so

would the people. Some of the people began to consult fortune tellers about the future. This verse is the response to that. God says he will be kind and bring them back to Jerusalem. Sometimes this verse is misused to imply that everything that happens to us is mapped out in detail by God as part of some grand design, and that we don't have control over any aspect of our lives. That is not the intent. God specifically laid out a series of common sense instructions for these people not only to survive their time in captivity, but to thrive there with their families. They were encouraged not to abandon their faith and get involved with seers and conjurers, but to stand firm trusting that God would deliver them. This is a good way for us understand and apply this promise to our own lives. How might your actions influence the course of your life? Or do you believe that every detail is already mapped out for you? These are two very different ways of seeing how God might be involved in our lives. The first can lead to a sense of futility and hopelessness; in this sense we are powerless. The other can lead us to an active robust faith were we are partners with God in our everyday lives.

Practice – Thankfulness: Make a quick, mental list of least 3 to 5 things, people or circumstances in your life for which you are truly thankful. As you go throughout the day, pause to say a prayer of thanksgiving for the things you identified. If you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed, even depressed, say a prayer of thanksgiving for the things you identified.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *In all my struggles...* Exhale: *You are here.*

Fellowship Friday May 6, 2016

John 16: 3 "I've said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world."

Reflection: Here again Jesus acknowledges the state of our human condition saying no matter what we do, we will have troubles. We will have suffering and we will have distress. These things are part of life and they are inescapable realities. Jesus didn't ever deny that; instead he said, "Be encouraged". Jesus was telling the people that even in distress they could find peace, because God's love is bigger than any troubles we might face. What practices help you to remember that? Are there people who have encouraged you in past times of trouble? Do you have a community of people with whom you are in relationship where you can encourage each other? Do you see the gift of community as one way God is present in our lives?

Practice – Fellowship: Today is the end of the work week for most people. It is a great time to intentionally plan to be in fellowship with others sharing the joys and concerns, the thrills and the struggles of our everyday lives. Take a few moments today to think about the people in your life and make a plan to spend some time in fellowship with them. We are stronger, and better able to handle life's struggles together than alone. Who are the people that you want to be with in supportive community?

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *In all my struggles...* Exhale: *You are here.*

Silence and Solitude Saturday May 7, 2016

Psalms 23 - The LORD is my shepherd. I lack for nothing. He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters; he keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff - they protect me. You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over! Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the Lord's house forever.

Reflection: This great Psalm has perhaps provided more comfort to people in times of trouble than any other words. It gives us strength and helps us affirm that even when we walk through life's worst experiences for which there cannot be any good reason, God is always present with us; loving us, holding us, protecting us. Maybe it has been some time since you read this Psalm. Go back and read each phrase through 2 or 3 times and then quietly hold that thought for a few seconds. Continue in the same manner through all the verses. Allow those ancient words of comfort to be with you today.

Practice – Solitude and Silence: Yesterday you were encouraged to be in fellowship with others. Today you are encouraged to just the opposite. Find time, even if it is only 5 minutes, to separate yourself from all the demands of your day. Spend a few minutes alone with no agenda other than to be silent. This is a time of listening and simple being, without any agenda or expected outcome. Silence and solitude are nurturing practices. Try to observe this practice each day. You may find the silence and stillness the richest and most rewarding five minutes of your day.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *In all my struggles...* Exhale: *You are here.*