



Theme: Becoming Better and Not Bitter "Through Worship and Prayer"



You also can get these Meditation Moments each day directly on your phone. Just text "**med moments**" to **970-426-0700** to receive the **daily Meditation Moment** each morning and start your day grounded in faith and peace.

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹ Come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. –
Psalm 95:1

Meditation Moments for Monday, July 21 – Read **Mark 1:16-20**. Mark said Jesus' first ministry act was to call others to follow him. Why? As "God's Son," why would he need any help? Why not go it alone so others wouldn't mess it up? But Jesus knew they needed him, and they were going to need each other. Scholar William Barclay said in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, "Christianity began with a group. The Christian faith is something which from the beginning had to be discovered and lived out in a fellowship... the very name Pharisee means 'the separated one;' the essence of Christianity was that it... presented [people] with the task of living with each other and for each other." In other words, they were not to be separated from God or each other.



In the ancient world, people who made their living by fishing were peasants. Why did Jesus look along the shores of Galilee to find followers, instead of seeking out the day's most eminent religious experts? One outcome was that by reaching beyond his day's political and religious elites, Jesus found people more open to his radical ideas about what it meant to be the Messiah. In what ways does Jesus call you beyond the human system(s) in which you grew up or studied?



What do you think made Jesus' invitation so compelling that, when he called, these four men would promptly leave the familiar security of their family fishing

business to follow him? There are many good ways to serve Jesus today, but answering his call almost always involves making changes in our lives. This sermon series focuses on five simple habits that have the power to redefine our lives and make us better and not get bitter. Are you willing to follow our leader more closely by adopting these five habits that Jesus lived out?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, sometimes I'd rather not hear your call. But I have a sense that it's a bigger risk to miss your call. Keep my ears and my heart open to you and your call on my life. Amen.*

Tuesday, July 22 – Read **Mark 8:31-37**. When Jesus told his closest followers that he faced suffering and death, Peter, who was outspoken as often seemed to be, tried to talk Jesus out of the idea. Perhaps he thought Jesus was just being too negative. Or maybe he was fending off the fear in his own heart as he saw that following Jesus might cost more than just his fishing career. But Jesus said he calls ALL his followers to “take their cross.” When Jesus said this, a cross was a horrific tool of torture and death that “respectable” people avoided at all costs.



Peter, like most first-century Jews, expected a Messiah who had overwhelming human power. That made it hard for him to grasp Jesus' understanding of his self-sacrificing mission. What beliefs about life, success and greatness do you have that make it harder for you to accept Jesus' teaching about a truly great human life? What has helped you move beyond those innate cultural assumptions?



The five habits this series calls us to are simple, but not always easy. Pastor John Ortberg quoted columnist Garret Fiddler as writing, “Really, the cross does not belong on the Christian; the Christian belongs on the cross.” Ortberg added in his book, *Who Is This Man?* “The cross is a reminder that there is something in me that needs to die.” What do you believe it means for you today to “take up your cross” and follow Jesus? What is there in you that “needs to die” to keep you from becoming bitter so you can get better?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, so many voices tell me that avoiding pain and sacrifice is the way to a good life. I want to answer your counter-cultural call. Let my lesser self and bitterness die, so that a better self, shaped by you, may be born. Amen.*

Wednesday, July 23 – Read **2 Peter 1:3-8 and 3:17-18**. Peter said God's forgiveness and divine love give us the inner power we need to escape all that is wrong in our world. He set forth how every part of our life grows “in grace” as we open ourselves to let God's power work in us. This passage pictured qualities that transform our whole life. Cooperate with God to add each of these qualities to your life, Peter said. They will give you everything you need for life and godliness.



Peter made the sweeping claim that God has given us everything we need for a godly life. Which of the positive qualities he listed in chapter 1:5-7 do you find most appealing? Which of these qualities are already present in your life? Thank God for them! This week we invite you to make grateful worship a habit. How can this habit, and the ones we study in the next four weeks, equip you to

connect more fully with God's spiritual power to add other good things to your life?



Methodist founder John Wesley's notes on these verses in 2 Peter said that "'sour godliness,' so called, is of the devil." Have you ever known people who seemed to believe that it takes "sour godliness" to achieve "moral excellence"? What helps you trust that God wants your life to be sweet, not sour, that God's gift of moral excellence offers you a life filled with joy and beauty?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, remind me that I am never "done" growing in this life. Pour your Spirit into my heart, leading me on from one positive step of growth to the next. Amen.

Thursday, July 24 – Read **Psalm 95:1-7**. Israel's understanding of the one God they worshiped developed over time. At times, they adapted language from the cultures around them, as in verse 3 of today's reading. They tended to refer to all supernatural beings, the ones the New Testament and most Christians call "angels," as "gods." But God was the great person they worshiped and thanked together with words like, "**We** are the people of his pasture," and the "great king over all other gods."



One continual hazard of Israel's sacrificial system was the temptation to see the sacrifices as a way to "buy off" God and win divine favor. Psalm 50:13-14 expressed the reality: God didn't need people's sacrifices but valued them as an expression of gratitude for God's gifts. We don't offer animal sacrifices for worship, but at times we make other types of sacrifices to serve God. How have you learned to "come before him with thanks" in your times of worship?



Verse 7 echoes many other psalms, including the beloved Psalm 23, in calling us "sheep" for whom God cares as a shepherd. The image may have been clearer to pastoral Israelites than to modern city dwellers. Left to their own devices, sheep can do little to ensure their survival. They depend utterly on their shepherd to keep them fed, watered and safe. How grateful are you that in this big, complex universe you are one of God's sheep, watched over with caring and love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for promising to be the "good shepherd" who cares for me, who doesn't run away in the face of trouble but is always there. I gratefully worship and praise you. Amen.

Friday, July 25 – Read **Psalm 23**. 1 Samuel 16:11 and 17:34-36 tell us that King David, who became Israel's greatest king, had worked as a shepherd. He likely wrote Psalm 23. He knew a shepherd's job description from his own experience and pictured God in very personal terms as **his** shepherd. As a shepherd leads his flock of sheep in the ways that best protect and nurture them, so God leads all those who put their trust in him. And that is a powerful reason for gratitude and worship.



David described God as guiding him, and all God's children, "in proper paths." Living as we do in a culture that places great value on our freedom to choose our path in life, how easy or difficult do you find it to trust God to guide you to the proper paths for your life? Is it easy or hard for you to thank God for God's

guidance when it differs from your wishes? How can confidence that you are on the proper path reduce your fear when you face tough choices?



We most often think something “pursuing” us is bad. Psalm 23:6 reversed that, saying, “Goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life.” Have there been times when you, like so many people, tried to ignore or avoid God’s presence? In what ways have God’s goodness and faithful love pursued you even if you tried to get away from them? How can building a habit of personal gratitude and worship keep you open to God’s pursuing love and goodness?

Prayer: *Dear God, because you are my shepherd, I have all I need. I am eternally safe in your arms. Help me more fully trust in that reality and gratefully worship you for it. Amen.*

Saturday, June 26 – Read **1 Thessalonians 5:15-18**. We often think gratitude is purely a feeling, a reaction to something outside of us. That makes “give thanks in every situation” puzzling, even irritating. Too many situations simply do not trigger positive feelings. But psychology researcher Robert Emmons wrote in his book, *How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times*, “It is vital to make a distinction between feeling grateful and being grateful... being grateful is a choice, a prevailing attitude that endures and is relatively immune to the gains and losses that flow in and out of our lives.” Research on gratitude has found that it is not happiness that makes us grateful. It’s gratefulness that makes us happy. This tells us of the power that gratitude offers in our lives. We’re not called to give thanks because everything in our lives is perfect. We’re called to give thanks because our life itself is a wonderful gift from God.



A recurring theme in gratitude research is that choosing to be grateful does **not** mean you become blind to the bad things in life, or the sad or angry feelings you may have about them. It does mean, however, that we choose not to let the bad things blind us to the many things for which we are grateful. What ways have you found to remember the things for which you are grateful when your life takes a difficult turn?



Scholar William Barclay wrote in his commentary on Thessalonians, “There is always something for which to give thanks; even on the darkest day there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun the shadows will fall behind us but if we turn our backs on the sun all the shadows will be in front.” As you reflect on gratitude’s benefits, are you more inclined to resist changing the direction your life faces, or to seek to increasingly “face the sun” through grateful worship?

Prayer: *O God, like the sun, you are always shining your love and mercy into my life, whatever happens in my family, my workplace or my health. Teach me how to keep my focus on you every day. Amen.*