

## THE WORD

### Prayer for illumination

**Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover your peace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord Amen.**

### OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 (Page 923,924)

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

- 1 You, Lord, showed favor to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- 2 You forgave the iniquity of your people  
and covered all their sins.<sup>[b]</sup>
  
- 8 I will listen to what God the Lord says;  
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—  
but let them not turn to folly.
- 9 Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Love and faithfulness meet together;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
- 11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,  
and righteousness looks down from heaven.
- 12 The Lord will indeed give what is good,  
and our land will yield its harvest.
- 13 Righteousness goes before him  
and prepares the way for his steps.

**1** The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,<sup>[a]</sup> the Son of God, **2** as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”<sup>[c]</sup>—  
**3** “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”  
**4** And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. **6** John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8** I baptize you with<sup>[e]</sup> water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

## Prepare the Way

Most of us are all too aware of having to prepare for something. School papers and projects start early in our education. We learn to read and write and research resources even as little ones. We learn to color inside the lines. We learn to think critically for each phase of life. What do I need to learn first? What step will lead me to the next phase of life. Each event in our lives requires some sort of preparation.

Growing up in the south, there were certain things expected of a stay at home mom/wife. ( I know men have unspoken rules for life as well.) A clean and organized home leads to an organized life. Rita Davenport was a renown public speaker in the 90's who went on to lead Arbonne cosmetics for 20 years. She was born in Tennessee so she was a "down home" girl similar to Dolly Parton in her humor. One of my favorite stories she used to tell was about preparing for friends to come over. It seems so would scrub and polish the whole house, make special, home-made goodies, even "freshened" the powder room by placing magnolia petals in the toilet. By the time her friends arrived, the house looked wonderful but she was exhausted and bedraggled. Her friend finally told her one day to "chill". They came to see her, not the house. Then, of course, there's the other extreme where nothing is done so that, when the friends arrive, a flurry of rearranging occurs to find a place to sit. Rita tells that after her friend's advice: now you can eat off my floors – there's mashed potatoes over there and peas over here. So how do we find the happy medium?

John encourages us to prepare for the Christ. John lives in the wilderness, so he doesn't have to clean the house. He suggests we clean ourselves from the inside out. He calls for repentance, humbleness, integrity, morality, honesty, decency, in other words, righteousness. He choses an example that the rugged men can relate to:

"Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."

I can remember taking the roads through the mountains as a child. Many contained "kiss your backside" curves. It seemed to take forever as we rode back and forth around every little rock or hill. The interstate highway system made



travel so much easier. John was fortunate enough to live with one of the Roman's best endeavors – good roads. Some of those exact roads are still in use after thousands of years. The Romans cleared all the impediments and laid a good foundation so that the smooth rocks placed on that foundation were level and straight.

So, John starts laying the foundation for our spirit to be ready to receive the new Spirit of Christ. We must begin with repentance, which means we need to “turn around.” We not only have to recognize our true selves, but we need to turn away from ways that lead us away from Christ. Anything that leads us to act in a way that puts a wall between us, and Christ needs to be replaced with something that draws us closer to Christ. Just like cleaning a house is not a bad thing, cleaning house instead of doing other things may be a lesser thing. If we need to help a neighbor in crisis, then that's what we should do. – the house will be there when we get back. If our family needs to have our attention, a few minutes of undivided attention can go a long way to bringing everyone closer and to clarify misunderstandings.

Taking the time to spend in quiet meditation before we start the day helps to center our minds on what is important. Taking the things on our minds that are distracting our mission and laying them at the feet of Christ gives new energy for the demands of the day. Some have found singing or dancing first thing in the morning sets a better tone for the day. Each person has things that calm them and things that lift them up. Spend time in prayer and figure it out.

One thing I had to learn as an extrovert is to “be still and know that I am God.” I process by talking. So I tell God what's up all the time. I had to learn that I can hear God a better if I be still and listen. Next, we lay a sturdy foundation by reading God's word and committing it to memory. Then, when temptation calls, the right answer will be in our database. A good devotional guide or study guide helps to keep us focused too. I found it encouraging that Jimmy and Roselyn Carter read scripture together every night. These practices strengthen the foundation of our faith. The psalmist says:

I will listen to what God the Lord says;  
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—  
but let them not turn to folly.

<sup>9</sup> Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.

One thing that seems to be missing in our world today is the ability to listen to one another. Several congress members who could run for reelection are NOT going to because they can't stand the chaos anymore. Citing the lack of true conversation, they are choosing to go home rather than go through another day in the mess.

This happens in everyday conversation as well. So many times people hear one thing and then are so busy formulating an answer that they miss the true question which was posed during their deliberations. Give and take doesn't seem to exist anymore. When Jesus encounters angry men and loud demands, he remains quiet until they quiet down, then gives his response.

<sup>10</sup> Love and faithfulness meet together;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

<sup>11</sup> Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,  
and righteousness looks down from heaven.

<sup>12</sup> The Lord will indeed give what is good,  
and our land will yield its harvest.

<sup>13</sup> Righteousness goes before him  
and prepares the way for his steps.

Humility comes into play here. I am reminded of young children who have learned a little but think they have all the answers, "I do it myself!" My youngest grandson likes to say "I take care of myself. I can stand up to bad guys". How often do we sound like this? We have a mighty God who will take care of us –if we but let him.

The old folk's used to say, 'Count to ten' when we were upset. Science now supports the wisdom in that statement. It seems when you count, you force your logical brain into action – away from the limbic/emotional/irrational response. Jesus reminds us to take it to the Lord in prayer. I think he's telling us the same thing. Take deep breaths and inhale the Spirit of the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> The Lord will indeed give what is good,  
and our land will yield its harvest.

<sup>13</sup> Righteousness goes before him  
and prepares the way for his steps.

Then

Love and faithfulness meet together;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other

Praise be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit! Amen.