

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word for today, September 23, 2020. Thank you so much for tuning in, and for taking this time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

I am currently in the midst of planning Confirmation lessons for our middle school students for the next few weeks, and this year we are learning about the Lord's Prayer. I am also extending this out a bit to learn about prayer as a whole, and how prayer as a spiritual practice can help us, especially in these weird and challenging times.

In researching for these classes, I am reading a book that I'm finding really beautiful and life-giving - that book is "Help, Thanks, Wow" by Anne Lamott. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants a deeper meditation on the power of prayer.

And I felt inspired by her book, by these lessons for the students as they navigate a really difficult year and reality, or maybe that inspiration was actually the Holy Spirit, but regardless, decided to keep that energy around prayer going for these Wednesday Word devotions. So for each of the next three weeks, I will cover one of these topics of Anne Lamott's book - help, thanks, and wow - with our psalms and prayers.

Today's topic then is help, and I think help is simultaneously the hardest and easiest time that we turn to God in prayer. When we need help, it can be easy to ask God to just take away the hurting or the struggle and that is a holy and life-giving thing to do. But as Anne Lamott writes, and I believe to be true as well, sometimes it's in the depths of the struggle that we see and appreciate God's work the most. In the moments when it's not easy, when we struggle to have any words or answers for what's going on, God may not always help or answer us in the way we envision, but by God's grace and might, we will make it through. God will help us even if it's different from what we expect. And that's a gift for which we can always be grateful - that God will help us and come to our aid, no matter what. Even when the words don't come out really well, remembering God's faithfulness will still center us and still communicate with our God who created us. That's what prayer does in such a powerful way - it centers us and allows us to connect and deepen our relationship with God.

So I hope as we hear these words of Psalm 43 that we know we can lift anything to God, and that asking God for help is truly a soul-centering and life-saving practice.

This is Psalm 43:

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and unjust
deliver me!
For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you cast me off?
Why must I walk about mournfully

because of the oppression of the enemy?

O send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.
Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy;
and I will praise you with the harp,
O God, my God.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

The Word of the Lord.

And now please join me in a word of prayer:

God our help in ages past, our help in the present, and our hope for the future, we come to you today carrying difficult burdens. We ask for your help in easing our burdens, centering our spirits, lightening the loads we carry, giving us the strength we need to carry on. We all face different challenging realities, with work or school or money or relationships or mental health or hopelessness or loneliness or fear or just straight up being overwhelmed, God, and we ask for your help. We call upon your Holy Spirit to come into our lives, our hearts, minds, bodies, spirits, and give us a taste of that peace which surpasses all understanding. Help us to make the best decisions we can with what we have, to keep ourselves and the people around us safe, healthy, well-loved, and with all they need to live and thrive, O Lord. Help us to live into the kingdom you envision for us, where we love God and love our neighbors above all else. And God, empower us in love, in the choices we make, the things we do or don't do, and help us give grace to ourselves and the people around us when we or they mess up. In our human struggles, give us divine hope and mercy. In our pain and struggles, help us to see the new life that rises forth from the tombs that threaten us. In the name of Jesus Christ, come to our help, now and every day, in the great love you have shown the world. Thank you Lord, for hearing this and all our prayers. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thanks again everyone! Go in peace, have a beautiful day. Amen.