

It's Monday...

A Weekly Blessing for a



Your life is too valuable to be guided by anything less than what matters most. Miroslav Volf, *Life Worth Living*

When you think of what makes life worth living, where does your mind go? What are the experiences you are drawn to, the relationships that enliven you, the beliefs that guide you?

This fall we are exploring those questions and more in our sermon series, *Life Worth Living*. Let's be clear. This is not a judgment on the value of one person's life over another. This is an invitation to examine what makes your life meaningful, gives it purpose, provides direction, specifically, as Jesus' followers.

To that end, we have created weekly *It's Monday Blessings* for you to immerse yourselves more deeply in the preaching themes. They can be done any time during the week. They are meant to be used individually, for sure. They can also be used with a group of friends that meets consistently or with an organized small group, as a supplement to what you are studying.

The process is simple. Read the opening elements—the welcome, the prayer, and the scripture texts. Then, contemplate the reflection questions and make a plan to do the action. Close with the blessing.

The reflection questions consistently include, "What are you drawn to?" and "What do you resist?" These questions have been used by spiritual directors to help you pay attention to what is going on inside as you read and reflect. *What are you drawn to*—what

words or phrases stick out, what makes you curious; what encourages you; what makes you want to learn more? *What do you resist*—what makes you feel uneasy; what challenges you; brings up past thoughts, struggles, what would you rather avoid? Both questions are important for your growth.

You will also be asked to think about what Jesus might say to you or you might say to Jesus. Again, that may not be something familiar or comfortable for you. Give it a shot. Imagine Jesus joining in your conversation. What would you want to say? Hear?

Finally, you will be invited to make some commitments as you move forward individually and as someone engaged in the ministry of Incarnation. Start small. Find someone who will walk with you. Make a plan to build a new rhythm into your life.

In John 10:10, Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly!" What did he mean then? What does it mean for you now? What gives worth and value to your living?

September 11: A Jesus-Shaped Vision for Life

Welcome: For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Welcome to this time to focus our thoughts and our actions on the life of Jesus and his way of love.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you invited us to a way of living that is generous in giving, compassionate in relating, and sacrificial in loving service to others. Grant us desire to explore your life more deeply, gratitude to receive your love more freely, and courage to offer it to others more willingly. Amen.

Text: Read Colossians 1:15 and Matthew 25:31-40

Reflections: If Jesus is the image of God, what do Jesus' life and ministry tell us about our God and how our God regards us? Others?

- As you read Matthew 25:31-40, what are you drawn to? What do you resist?
- If you could ask Jesus any question about the life you are hoping to live, what would it be?

Notes:

Action: As you think about the life of Jesus, what one characteristic would you most like to emulate? What specific action can you take to embody that characteristic this week?

Blessing: Remember this: You are a child of God, chosen and marked by love, pride of God's life. (Mark 1:11—*The Message* Translation)

This week I will focus on...

September 18: You are Here

Welcome: For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Welcome to this time of honestly acknowledging where we are on our journey of faith and hopefully taking a step forward.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for meeting us right where we are, in our confidence and confusion, our trusting and as we deal with temptation. Give us your grace of honesty as we look at our lives. Grant us the energy of hopefulness as we live each new day. Amen.

Text: Read Romans 7:14-20 and Luke 14:15-24

Reflections: As you read Paul's words in Romans 7, how does his honesty strike you? What does his honesty encourage in you?

- As you read Luke 14, and hear the excuses made, what characters are you drawn to? Whom do you resist?
- If you could be honest with Jesus about where you are on your journey, what would you say? If you could be hopeful about moving forward, how would you ask Jesus to help and guide you?

Notes:

Action: At the end of each day this week, take 5-10 minutes and

- Name three things you are grateful for today.
- Thank God for the simple gifts of today.

Blessing: May God's grace meet you in helpful and hopeful ways this day.

This week I will take a step forward by...

September 25: What We Focus On and Do, We Become

Welcome: For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Welcome to this season of building and sustaining healthy habits for life.

Prayer: Guiding Spirit, thank you for inviting us into an intentional life of faith and growth. Renew our inner strength. Root and ground us in the love you have for each of us. Give us a mind that envisions a new path and a heart that is willing to follow. Amen.

Text: Read Ephesians 3:14-21 and Mark 10:17-22

Reflections: The Apostle Paul prays for a sense of inner strength in Ephesians 3. What does that mean to you? Where does that inner strength come from for you?

- As you read Mark 10, notice the early confidence of the young man and then the confusion when Jesus speaks directly about his money. In this story, what are you drawn to? What do you resist?
- If you could ask Jesus to help you identify the “one thing lacking” in your life (like he did for the young man), what do you think it would be for you?

Notes:

Action: What you focus on and do, you become. Think about how you spend your time—what you do, what you read, what you watch, whom you relate to. What one, intentional change can you make this week to help you focus on the most important, worthwhile aspects of life?

Blessing: May your days and your ways be rooted and grounded in love for yourself, for others, and for the world God created.

One daily habit I will adjust or continue more intentionally is...

October 2: How Then Shall We Live?

Welcome: For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Welcome to this time of celebrating the beauty of God experienced through our ordinary lives.

Prayer: Ever present God, all of life comes from you—our bodies, our minds, our capacity to interact and relate. Surprise us with extraordinary experiences of your grace and love and help us savor the ordinary moments of goodness and joy. Amen.

Text: Read Philippians 4:4-9 and Luke 3:7-14

Reflections: In Philippians 4, Paul reminds us to keep doing what is honorable, commendable, and true. What does that mean in the ordinary rhythms of your day—at work, at home, in community?

- As you read the text in Luke 3, and listen to John the Baptist’s response to the question “How then shall we live?,” what are you drawn to? What do you resist?
- How can you imagine Jesus being present in your everyday life?

Notes:

Action: At the end of each day, take 5-10 minutes and reflect on

- How was God present in my life today?
- How can I be God’s presence to others this upcoming week?

Blessing: May you experience the simple wonder of God’s presence and love each day.

This week I discovered God’s presence in...

October 9: YOUR Life is Plural

Welcome: For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Welcome to this time of recognizing and celebrating the diversity of human life.

Prayer: God of all nations and peoples, we thank you for the diversity of human community. Help us see others as you see us. Root out any hatred and fear that divides. Create new spirits of hospitality and welcome toward all your beloved people. Amen

Text: Read Romans 9:9-18 and Luke 5:27-32

Reflections: In Romans 9, Paul invites us to extend hospitality to strangers. What does that look like for you?

- As you read the Luke 5 story about Jesus eating with “tax collectors and sinners”, what are you drawn to? What do you resist?
- In the story, Jesus erases the line that the religious leaders used to separate themselves from others. If you put yourself in that story, who would you be? The tax collectors? The Pharisees? Jesus? A bystander? And why?

Notes:

Action: On a piece of paper draw a line. Above the line draw a circle that represents you. Below the line draw circles that include the people you have the hardest time being around or understanding. Ask yourself

- What does that line represent and what would it take to erase it?
- Can you dare to ask Jesus to help you with, at least, the desire to erase it?

Blessing: May you learn to see the beauty in others that God sees in YOU (plural).

This week, when I encounter someone I would rather avoid, I will...

October 16: One Day at a Time

Welcome: For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Welcome to this day that God has made for you.

Prayer: God of our moments and days, release us from our regret or fixation on what is past. Shield us from perpetually living in the future. Awaken us to the goodness of this day that we may be fully present in and fully aware of the gift this day is for us. Amen.

Text: Read Colossians 3:12-17 and Matthew 6:25-34

Reflections: Paul reminds us that, whatever we do in word or deed, we should do it like Jesus—with compassion, forgiveness, and love. What does mean for you today?

- In the Matthew text, Jesus invites us to release worry about tomorrow and to focus on today’s issues. As you read this text, what are you drawn to? What do you resist?
- If you could talk with Jesus about your worries and anxiety, what would you say? What would Jesus say to you?

Notes:

Action: Clear your mind as you begin each day by taking 5-10 minutes (or more) to slowly recite these words from Psalm 46: 10. **Be still and know that I am God.** Repeat the text in this way:

Be still and know that I am God. (pause for a moment)

Be still and know that I am (pause again)

Be still and know (pause)

Be still (pause)

Be (pause until your mind is more settled and clear)

Blessing: This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

When I notice myself dwelling on the past or obsessing about what is to come, I will...

October 23: Failing and Forgiving

Welcome: For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Welcome to this time of living in the renewing power of God's forgiving love.

Prayer: Forgiving God, thank you for the healing power of your forgiveness and love. Release us from what holds us back. Reconnect us with others that have hurt us or whom we have hurt. Renew our vision of a life well lived in relationship with you and those we love. Amen.

Text: Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-19 and Matthew 22:34-40

Reflections: In 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds us of the forgiveness we have received and the forgiveness entrusted to us. What is more difficult for you to do—offer forgiveness, receive forgiveness from others, or forgive yourself? Why?

- As Jesus invites us to focus on loving God and loving neighbor, he adds, “as yourself”. What are you drawn to in that phrase? What do you resist?
- Is there something about yourself that you have a hard time loving? What can you imagine Jesus saying to you?

Notes:

Action: Think about the difference between a dry erase marker on a white board and a permanent marker. Now consider this: Your sins and failings are not written in permanent marker. They are wiped away by the eraser of God's love and grace. Imagine writing your sins and failings on a white board. Now, imagine them being totally wiped away by God's love and grace. How does that feel? What does it make you think about God?

Blessing: May you receive freely, and offer generously, the forgiving love of Jesus.

This week I will forgive myself or another person by...

Next Steps for a Life Worth Living: Personal

If we're going to live into visions of life that we take to be worthy of our shared humanity, we'll need strategies not just to get us started, but to help us stay on track for the long haul.

In these past few weeks...

- I've been thinking more intentionally about...
- I've noticed positive feelings in these circumstances...
- I've discovered these points of resistance...
- I've become more aware of these habits that keep me focused on a life worth living...
- I've become more aware of these habits that distract me from that kind of life...

Given my responses above, I would like to be more intentional about these areas of my life...

One step forward I will take is:

One strategy I will put in place to sustain this practice is:

Next Steps for a Life Worth Living: Incarnation Community

As a gathered community, we need each other. To live into our vision of “a world filled with God’s grace and love” we have to find ways to **receive** God’s grace and love and then **be** God’s grace and love for others. In this upcoming year, I plan on taking these next steps...

- **Worship:** I will gather consistently with my community for worship.
- **Serving:** A next step I am willing to take in my life of service is: (See www.incarnationmn.org/serve for list of service opportunities)
- **Relationships:** A next step I am willing to take to deepen my relationships is: (See www.incarnationmn.org/ministries/smallgroups for small groups)
- **Financial Giving:** A next step I am willing to take is:
 - Give generously as I am able.
 - Make a financial commitment to our ministry for 2024. (See www.incarnationmn.org/give/itsworthit or pick up a commitment card at Incarnation and return by November 14.)

Your life is worth living. It is valuable. In fact, it’s beyond valuable. It’s invaluable. And precisely because it is so truly worth living, your life is worth living well. Your life is too valuable to be guided by anything less than what matters most.

Quotes above from:

Miroslav Volf, Matthew Crossmun, Ryan McAnnaly, *Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most*, 2023.

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incarnationmn.org 651-484-7213
4880 Hodgson Road, Shoreview, MN 55126