

Devotional for the Week – Week 14 (January 27, 2021)

Down to the River to Pray

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

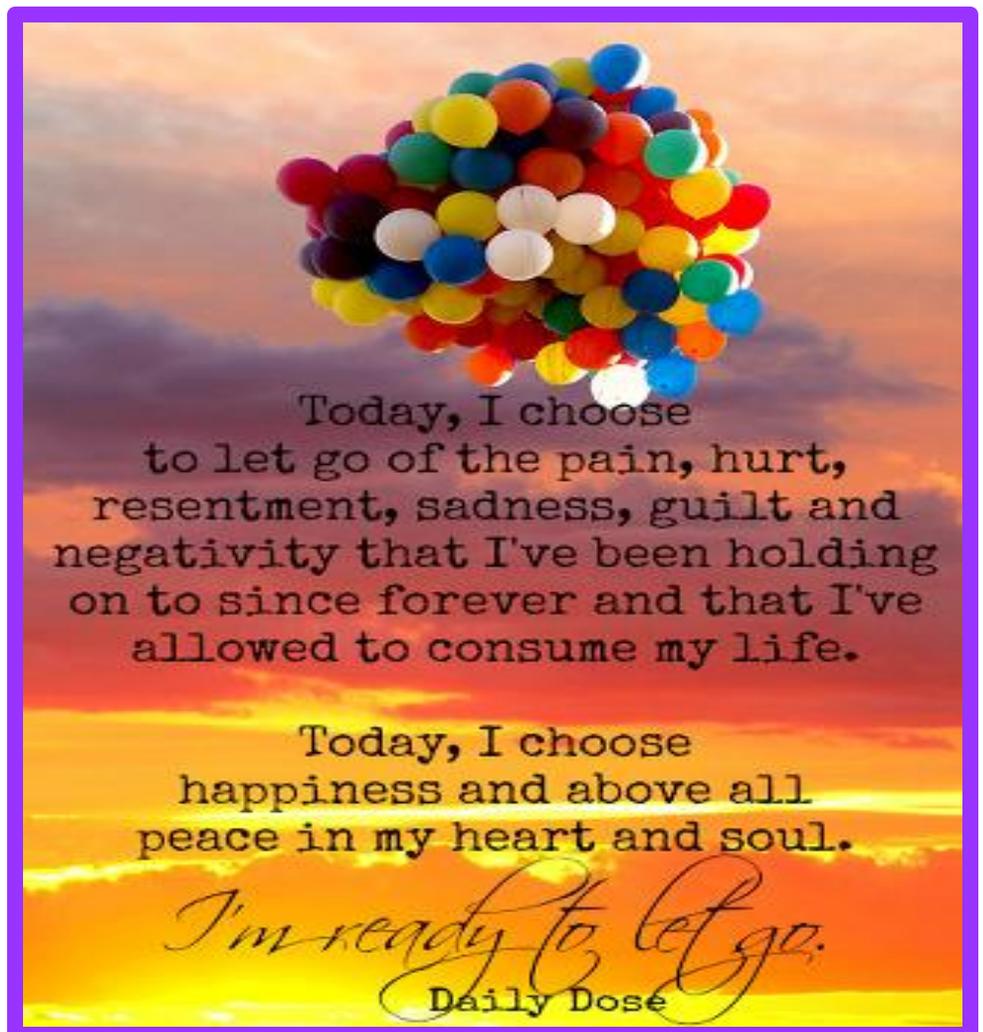
Philippians 4: 6-7, NRSV

Do you remember the old spiritual song - *Down to the River to Pray*? While it is hard to pinpoint the exact origins of the song, it has been referred to as a hymn, a spiritual and an Appalachian song. Some believe that it was a Native American tribal song that was adapted to include Christian lyrics. So, we don't really know its exact origin, but listening to it helps me get back to the basics of my faith, especially when something is bothering me, and I am truly seeking peace.

I also find it comforting to read scripture, in particular Philippians 4: 6-7. I have often referred to Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, and I particularly appreciate his version of these verses, because they get right down to the heart of the matter: *Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praise shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life. (The Message)*

But no matter what version of scripture you prefer, I hope that you truly hear its message to you – God doesn't want you to dwell in pain or discomfort. You can choose to stay there, or you can choose to surround yourself with happiness and peace – a peace that passes all understanding.

Oftentimes, we simply get surrounded by troubles and we need to remove ourselves from them, at least temporarily. If you can't "get down to the river to pray," why not try something else? The word "pray" as defined in the dictionary, means "to address God with a devout petition - to request something fervently - to implore." When we pray, we express our worship and adoration, laying our requests before God, with anticipation for his guidance and wisdom; so why not consider seeking God in the *PRAYER CLOSET*.



Prayer is as necessary as the air we breathe. It is the way we talk to God. Just as our bodies need oxygen to survive, our spirit needs the power that communication with God gives us to thrive. When we are in constant communication with the Lord, he nourishes our souls.

God makes it easy for us to communicate with him, even if we are unsure of how to do so. Throughout scripture, God speaks about this form of communication. The most notable passage is The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6: 9-13 in which Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray.

You don't need a special place to retreat and pray, although some people use a quiet place or an actual closet in a spare room, or an empty pantry. The Lord loves to hear you speak with him, so wherever we do it, it matters not the place or amount of time you spend. You can whisper private informal short prayers, pray the Lord's Prayer, or simply tell God what is on your heart.

Why not invite God into your life, whether it be to share time with him in your "prayer closet" or even out in nature, wherever you feel most comfortable speaking with your Lord. So, whether you want to share your joys or concerns, God is always ready to listen. What a wonderful, caring God we have the privilege of loving and partnering with as we serve others!

May God bless and keep you this day and every day,

Carol

PS – If you'd like to listen to the spiritual, *Down to the River to Pray* sung by Alison Krause, check out this link. I think you might bring you a few minutes of peace, and perhaps you can even picture yourself wearing a white robe and a starry crown: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8nBNbk9DRk>
Regardless, claim the blessings of your baptism! And I am attaching a coloring sheet if you might find that helpful to emblazon on your heart and mind Philippians 4: 6-7.

