

Monday: Read Matthew 6:25-34. Have you ever worried about something? We have real needs that need to be addressed, but sometimes we become consumed with worry at the expense of what is life-giving. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encouraged his followers to take their cue from nature. Just as God has provided all that the birds and the flowers need, we can trust in God's providential care for us. This isn't simply a "don't worry, be happy" platitude, but a reminder that our worth does not rest in what we have or what we do. Therefore, we can address each day's problems with confidence while maintaining focus on the kingdom of God. What worry do you need to release into God's care today?

Tuesday: Read Exodus 16:1-36. As newly-freed people, the Israelites had to learn what it meant to rely on God and shake off old habits. When they grumbled about being hungry, God sent manna and quail to sustain them. What's interesting is that there would be just enough for each person every day – but if someone tried to hoard extra, it would be rotten by the next morning. In a similar way, there would be a double-portion provided the day before the Sabbath so the people could rest, but some people went out on the Sabbath anyway only to find nothing. Sometimes we, too, lean on our own strength, understanding, strategy, and planning instead of relying on God. How has God already provided what you need to accomplish today's tasks? In what way can you claim space this week to simply rest and enjoy God's love?

Wednesday: Read Matthew 4:1-4. While Jesus is in the wilderness preparing to embark on his ministry, Satan questions his confidence in his identity. Satan tempts Jesus to use his power to turn stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger, but Jesus counters by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. It recalls that the people survived in the wilderness not by what they could do for themselves, but because God cared for them. In a similar way, we do not live by our own strength, but we thrive because of God. Another way to look at Jesus' response is holistic wellbeing: bread is important to nourish our bodies, but it is the word of God that nourishes our souls. Sometimes we are tempted to neglect our spiritual health, or to put our own understanding of "wellbeing" ahead of what is truly good for us. How is it with your soul? What is one way you can attend to your relationship with God the rest of this week (prayer, Bible reading, study, etc.)?

Thursday: Read 1 Kings 17:7-16. God cares about our physical needs, too. During a drought, the prophet Elijah is sent to a widow's house for sustenance. Though her food has run so low that she expects that she and her son will soon die of hunger, she has the courage to follow the prophet's instructions and share what she has. Her supplies last until the drought ends. In sharing with the prophet, she herself is blessed. Sometimes we are afraid to share what we have, but God calls us to live out of a mindset of abundance, not scarcity. Sometimes provision will show up in surprising ways! When have you experienced an unexpected blessing? How can you share with someone in need today?

Friday: Read Matthew 14:13-21. Twice in Matthew's Gospel Jesus feeds a huge crowd (see also 15:32-39), which echoes how the prophet Elisha fed a (smaller) crowd with a few loaves of bread (see 2 Kings 4:42-44). Jesus has compassion for the physical needs of the people, including their hunger, and urges his disciples to tend to them. While the disciples moan that their meager supplies of bread and fish surely cannot be enough, Jesus takes what they have and behold, it is sufficient. After everyone eats and is satisfied, they still have leftovers! Sometimes we are convinced that what we have to offer is inadequate, but God does amazing things with just a little bit. How might the Spirit open your eyes to how your own "loaves and fishes" – whether they are tangible or intangible – can be used to further the kingdom of God?