

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, August 22, 2024

Please be in continued prayer for our team currently in Tanzania serving alongside Zoe Ministry. Today we pray for our own continued commitment to God's work in the world. To learn more, visit our website at fmcm.org/ZOE, or for the prayer guide go to fmcm.org/ZOE-Tanzania.

Today is Thursday, August 22 and we are exploring how God's goodness and mercy follow us.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed Lord God, thank You for loving me. I come to this quiet place and seek Your presence. I calm my scattered thoughts, release my worries and slow my breath. I focus on the goodness and mercy You promise. The goodness and mercy that follow me. Great Shepherd of my soul, open the ears of my heart to hear the message You have for me today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:6-8

REFLECTION

The 23rd Psalm says, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. This beautiful outpouring of goodness and mercy should not stop with me or become stagnant in my life. I am to pass on the benefit of God's goodness and mercy to others. Just as God's goodness and mercy flow to me throughout my life, so goodness and mercy should follow me, should be left behind me as a legacy to others. At the end of my life something worthwhile, productive, beautiful and beneficial should be left behind. Where I walked, beauty and blessing should remain.

When you look at your life, ask yourself what is left by your footprints. Do you leave a trail of sadness or gladness? Do people remember you for your goodness and mercy, or forget you altogether? Is your life a pleasure to others or an annoyance? Do you leave behind peace or turmoil? Forgiveness or bitterness? Contentment or conflict? Do you leave behind joy or frustration? What will you be remembered for?

In this second letter to Timothy, Paul sits in a cold Roman prison and winter is approaching. Paul is about to be executed, he is waiting to be put to death. Paul is considering what he will leave behind and for what he will be remembered. From his dank prison cell, he reflects on his life and past ministry.

Paul uses four analogies that are helpful as we reflect on our own lives – the drink offering, the departure, the fight and the race. The drink offering was poured out daily around the base of the altar. It was poured out fully, the vessel was emptied – the libation was the last of the sacrifice.

Paul thought of his life as a sacrificial offering. His life was a life poured out daily on the altar in service to God and others. A living sacrifice. The word “departure” has nuances of taking a tent down, analogous to the soul leaving the body in death. Our physical bodies are merely a temporary dwelling place and not a permanent lasting home. We reside in this earthly shell for a certain number of years and then go to our permanent home to be with God. Paul compares the living of life to the athletic endeavors of a fight and a foot race. The race for Paul, the race of life was not a sprint, but a marathon with hurdles and pitfalls. A steeplechase. A battle to be fought. A race to be won.

We run the race of life with perseverance until the day of our departure and we pour ourselves out. Daily. We pour out our goodness, we pour out our mercy, we pour out our forgiveness, we pour out our kindness, we pour out our encouragement, we pour out our service, we pour out our gifts, we pour out our abilities, we pour out our lives, we pour out our love, we pour out our very essence for the good of the world and the lives of others.

Ask: How can I pour out my love for others today? How can I pour myself out as a living sacrifice in service to God?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Lord Jesus, thank you for pouring Your life out for me in love and sacrifice, inspire me now to pour out my life for others. Show me what it means to live a life of goodness and mercy. Let me leave a legacy of love. May the places where I have lived and served be better because of my time and efforts. Let me say like Paul at the time of my departure, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Amen.