

Week Nineteen

YEAR ONE

Read

Proverbs
Collins, Chapter 24, "Proverbs," 248–55

Focus

Cite four or five passages from Proverbs that appeal to you. Note the passages in Proverbs that do not appeal to you.

What significance does Proverbs 8 have for faith today?

The Psalms contain five smaller books with different kinds of psalms.

As poetry, they are best read aloud or sung. They also give voice to the human experience. The Song of Songs is also largely composed of poetry. Proverbs mainly consists of ancient aphorisms.

Scan the Psalms, Song of Songs, and Proverbs and select four or five passages. Draw from what Collins wrote to guide your selection. Read the selections aloud, noticing what stirs in you. Reflect on how the passages you selected reveal something of your deeper self: your hopes, your concerns, your experience.

YEAR TWO

Read

Powell, Chapter 12, "Romans," pages 255–71

Focus

For Western Christianity, the Pauline teaching on justification is highly influential and formative. Powell presented on page 263 "Models for Understanding Justification." Which model or combination of models best clarify the "justification issue" for you?

YEAR THREE

Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 13, "Faith in a New Rome," pages 427–65

Focus

Hagia Sophia (pronunciation = EYE-yah so-FEE-yah)—sacred space shaping Eastern Orthodox Christianity

Describe three or four characteristics of Orthodoxy.

Byzantine Spirituality

Name distinctive qualities of Byzantine spirituality.

Iconoclastic controversy

What concerns motivated both sides of the iconoclastic controversy?

Name one or two reasons why understanding the controversy is important to you as you live in today's world.

Orthodox Missions to the West

In a nutshell, describe Photios's missionary strategy and the significance for Christianity in the twenty-first century.

YEAR FOUR

Read

Allen, Chapter 13, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Eternal Life," pages 131–46

Focus

Everlasting life or eternal life issues turn on the understanding one holds of life. *Bios* and *zoe* distinctions frame thinking about the nature and purpose of life. Think about how those distinctions affect your theology of ministry.

Allen used a painting analogy to support understanding the Good News found in the Gospels. Which of the resurrection "pictures" painted in the Gospels appeal to you?

All in all, what difference does a person's view of life after death have on daily ministry?



ALL YEARS

Respond

“God Save the Queen!” or “God Bless America!” or “Long Live (You Name It!)” What is meant by such statements? Is it a prayer, a hope, a conviction, a battle cry? The act of blessing, to borrow a phrase from David Ford and Daniel Hardy, “needs to be rescued from the magical and superstitious associations it has gathered.” Such a rescue operation often begins with clarifying definitions and etymological investigations. Ford and Hardy provided such when they wrote:

There is a comprehensive biblical term for the powerful yet respectful interaction between God and the world, in which the world is enhanced at all levels. It is that of “blessing.” In being blessed a person, animal, plant, situation or thing is affirmed by God in the way most appropriate to its nature and future. There is no manipulation, but a combination of discernment and active enabling. “God rules creation by blessing,” said the Jewish rabbis of the time of Jesus. . . .

Blessing is the comprehensive praise and thanks that returns all reality to God, and so let’s all be taken up into the fulfillment of creation. For the rabbis of Jesus’ time, to use anything of creation without blessing God was to rob God. Only the person receiving with thanks really received from God, and if there is one summary expression of Jewish response to God it is the blessing of the divine name, which represents God’s whole being. Jesus was in this tradition, and himself blessed God, food, children, and disciples. His whole work is summed up in Acts having been sent to bless, completing the history of the blessing of Israel through Abraham (Acts 3:25f). Jesus is seen as the concentration of the mutuality of blessing. God blessing people and people blessing God. This is the dynamic of both creation and reconciliation.²¹

Blessing occurs within the radical specifics of one’s situation. For someone imagining the social, cultural, and intellectual contexts of a bygone era, the risk is always to rush to judgment, thereby projecting current mores into the lives of people of the past. Notice how the people you read about this week understood blessing and how their understanding shaped praying. How, if at all, was God active in their lives as One who blesses?

21. David F. Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 102–103.