

DAILY PRAYER POINTS

SUNDAY – There is a reason the Lord has brought you to this new week. Pray that He will shine brightly through you so that everyone that comes across you this week may know His presence in you and be blessed by your words and actions.

MONDAY – Thank God for the strength and ability to serve Him each day through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit. Pray that we'll all know God's blessing and strength in serving the Lord with joy and thankfulness.

TUESDAY – Sometimes our doubts leave us wanting to avoid church; pray that you would hold unswervingly to the hope you profess by trusting God's unchanging character. (Heb.10:23)

WEDNESDAY – Ask God to help Session and the Committee of Management as we prayerfully plan for the future of St Andrew's during an uncertain time within the PCQ and Australia, as a whole.

THURSDAY – Pray for **Heather McGaw & McIlwain Family**: Greg, Maricar, Lachland and Connor

FRIDAY – **Continue to pray for those in need of God's healing and comforting hand**: Belinda Birch, Edith Collins, John Donnell, Kevin Petrofski Jr and Margaret Petrofski, and Dawn Robinson. **Pray also for blessings on those who can't get to church**: Audrey Armstrong, Del Finn, Carol Gillett, Joey Kelly, Gladys Marnock, Millie McCarthy, Heather McGaw, Marie McKee, Mavis Smith, and David Valentine.

SATURDAY – Give thanks that in all circumstances our Heavenly Father knows our needs and supplies them richly to us in His Son and His Spirit.

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THE ANCHOR

NEWSLETTER OF THE ST ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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ARE THINGS GETTING WORSE?

BY REUBEN BREDENHOF

SIGNS OF A WORLD IN DECLINE ARE EVERYWHERE. We see catastrophic war, brazen lawlessness, disastrous floods and earthquakes, and the ongoing oppression of Christians. Every week, the news is filled with discouraging and alarming reports. Things are quickly getting worse.

But are they? Is our world really in a state of precipitous decline?

A GROWING CHILL

Scripture is the lens through which we try to look at all of life. And the Bible warns us repeatedly about the troubled days before Christ's return. For instance, Jesus forecasts in Matthew 24: "You will hear of wars and rumours of wars" (v. 6). We do hear of conflicts, whether wars between nations or the clashes of races and ideologies—one thinks about the brutal and violent war in Ukraine over the last several months.



War is only one sign, and Jesus says that it signals but "the beginning of the birth pains" (Matt 24:8). He also speaks of famines, pestilences, and other natural disasters. What is more, Jesus assures us that the persecution of Christians will become commonplace. Publications from Open Doors or The Voice of the Martyrs certainly give disturbing accounts of persecution in many places.

In our Australian context too, the quiet (and sometimes not so quiet) discrimination against Christians is increasing. We find diminishing sympathy for biblical beliefs and morals, while last year's national census reported a continued decline in the numbers of church goers. It's just as Jesus prophesied about this age: "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold" (Matt 24:12). His words paint a fearful picture of a world drifting further from God.



The Bible warns us repeatedly about the troubled days before Christ's return.

The apostle Paul catalogues this spiritual decay: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim 3:1-4). Everywhere we see the ugly handiwork of the devil, who came to "steal, kill,

LANDSCAPE OF THE HEART.

BY PAUL DAVID TRIPP

The landscape of the human heart is not smooth, well-lit, free from confusion and complication.

The landscape of the human heart... Is rough and varied, huge mountains, dark valleys, parched streams, crooked pathways, hidden caves.

Its geography is hard to know, hard to traverse, hard to inspect.

Danger lurks in those valleys, trouble hides in the caves, twisted pathways leave you lost, riverbeds leave you thirsty.

It's fearful to go where the sun never shines.

But the landscape of my heart has been invaded, not by an evil lord, but by a Savior.

He carries a torch of grace into these valleys, shines mercy into those caves.

He does this miraculous thing— He makes the rough places smooth, the twisted roads straight, the valleys bloom, the streams run with fresh water.

Thistles become cypress trees, barren soil produces fruit, peace lives where danger dwelled, caves now temples of worship.

The valleys sing, mountains rejoice, trees clap, wind whispers praise.

Into the landscape of my heart the Restorer came and all things there are new.

GOD AND NATURE

TWO WEEKS ON... BIBLE READING PLAN

TWO WEEKS ON GOD AND NATURE

"There is nothing in the ordinary course of nature, throughout the whole frame of heaven and earth, which does not invite us to the contemplation of God." – John Calvin

WEEK 2 | ☐ Day 8, **Psalm 8** - Praise for the Creator. ☐ Day 9, **Psalm 98** - Nature joins in the praise. ☐ Day 10, **Psalm 104** - God sustains the earth. ☐ Day 11, **Isaiah 40** - The ruler of all creation. ☐ Day 12, **Romans 8** - The "groanings" of our present state. ☐ Day 13, **Isaiah 65** - Preview of a restored earth. ☐ Day 14, **Revelation 22** - The end of history.

WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

The Westminster catechisms begin with the language of glorifying and enjoying God. *These Standards exist to explain in doctrinal terms how Scripture directs us to glorify and enjoy God in all we think, do, and say.* - Burk Parsons

QUESTION 82.

Is anyone able to keep the commandments of God perfectly?

A. Since the fall, no mere human is able to keep the commandments of God perfectly in this life; everyone breaks them daily in thought, word and deed.

QUESTION 83.

Are all transgressions of the law equally evil?

A. Some sins in themselves, and because of various factors that increase their evil, are more evil in the sight of God than others.

QUESTION 84.

What does every sin deserve?

A. Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come.

and destroy" (John 10:10). There are ample indications Satan's ruinous effects in this world. But are things getting worse?

OUR LIMITED VIEW

The New Testament gives many sober warnings about this age before Jesus comes back. So I do not minimise the reality of all this brokenness. Neither am I Pollyanna-ish about the state of this "groaning" world (Rom 8:22), expecting some golden age before Christ's return. But we should judge the world's decline with circumspection. There are a few good reasons for this caution.



➔ We're definitely not the first generation to be convinced that we are witnessing a marked deterioration in world stability. Looming calamities and dangers have always vexed humanity. For a while in the previous century, the threat of catastrophic nuclear warfare was all too real. Just a generation ago, there were dire fears about a population explosion and a world food shortage. When we read another breathless account of just how bad the last two and a half years have been because of COVID, we should think of those who lived through the terrifying years of World War 2. The signs of the end prophesied by Jesus and his apostles have been witnessed in every century of the New Testament Church, not only ours.

➔ The news media have an enormous impact on how we perceive reality. Compared to people who lived just a couple decades ago, we are far more aware of natural disasters, political crises, and violent events all around the world. We are often able to watch them unfold in real-time or through vivid footage. The 24-hour news cycle can make it seem like things are getting worse because there is always another cyclone, school shooting, or



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bombing to report. Checking the news several times per day confirms our perception of the bleak state of global affairs, morally and politically. But this is a one-sided picture. So we can probably be slightly less pessimistic about what's happening in this world.

It is good to look at historical events in context. When we first heard about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, probably many thought of Jesus's words concerning "wars and rumours of wars." Because Scripture is our lens, this is fitting. But in context, the war in Ukraine is the first large-scale invasion of a European country since World War 2. In recent decades, international violence around the world has dropped to an all-time low, probably because of such factors as the high economic price tag of waging conventional war. Seeing events in isolation does not engender accuracy. We should be reticent to declare "doomsday scenarios" in the small slice of history through which we're living, acknowledging how limited is our perspective.

Our tendency is to be self-centric. Because this life is what we are experiencing—and we have no experience of any other life!—we naturally conclude that our time is unique. We might even call our age "unprecedented," asserting that it has never been quite this bad. How much worse can it get?! But again, our vision is overly narrow. Even if Christianity is declining in the West, it is still growing rapidly in many non-Western countries. Meanwhile, we see that a culture's moral trajectory is not always one of unbroken decline. Think of the recent overturning of Roe v. Wade in the United States, a victory against the evils of abortion that perhaps few Christians dared to dream possible. When Scripture speaks of "growing wickedness," this doesn't necessarily mean a trajectory that will be unbroken in a descent into a moral chaos.

FINDING CERTAINTY

So in these last days, what certainties do we have? **Firstly**, the Bible tells us that "the time is short" (1 Cor 7:29), and that the day of Christ is near. We can be certain that we'll see our victorious Saviour "soon" (Rev 22:20).

Secondly, catastrophic events and moral depravity will continue to feature in this closing age in world history. These are but the beginnings of God's wrath on those who reject him (Rev 6:1-17).



Thirdly, we are certain that Christ governs everything for the good of his Church (Eph 1:22), so we can also expect good things to be happening. And they surely are happening: the gospel is being preached throughout the world (Matt 24:14), believers are being refined, and the triune God is being glorified.

These certainties should shape our perspective on the future. If our view is wholly pessimistic, our posture will be defensive, bracing ourselves for an inevitable collapse. Or if our view of the future is naïve, we might be susceptible to false ideas of human progress. But when we adopt the hopeful realism of Scripture, we stand on firm ground.



Whatever the troubling signs we observe today, we don't know if Christ will return within the decade or by the time that our grandchildren are having children. In coming years there might well be a resurgence of Christian influence in Australia, or a continued deterioration. Or there might be something too complex to describe simply as "worse" or "better." Regardless, God calls us to be prepared in the spirit of "our blessed hope," which is "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). In the words of one of his apostles, "The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray" (1 Pet 4:7, NIV). Surely that is the best posture for facing tomorrow.

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GIFTS AND OFFERINGS
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