

THE PRODIGAL SON:



Pray When?

Follow the directions by crossing off the indicated words in the columns below. When you are done, the remaining words will spell out two Bible verses. Write the words in the correct order from top to bottom to discover an important message from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17.

1. Cross off all words that start with the letter M.
2. Cross off every disciple's name.
3. Cross off all three-letter words.
4. Cross off the name of the person who fought Goliath.
5. Cross off all words that start with the letter E.
6. Cross off words that are clothing.
7. Cross off words that start and end with the same letter.
8. Cross off all books of the Bible.
9. Cross off all words that are fruits.
10. Cross off the name of the first person created by God.
11. Cross off all words that begin with the letter F.

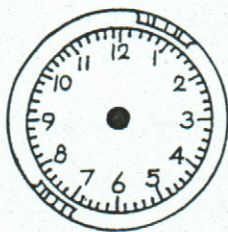
John	apple	David
jacket	mother	be
Ruth	was	early
trust	grapes	senses
Thomas	Adam	joyful
can	Romans	many
always	shirt	son
marched	pray	everyone
banana	Peter	continually
forever	Psalms	faith



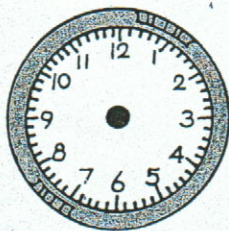
The verses say:

Prayer Time

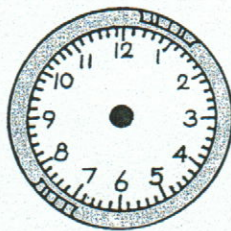
Jesus hears our prayers any time we pray. Draw the hands on the clock to show the time when you could pray.



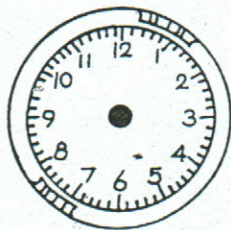
10:15



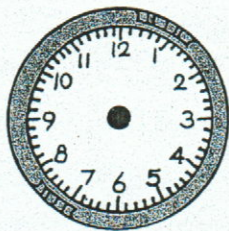
7:27



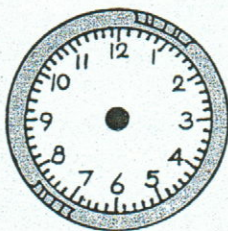
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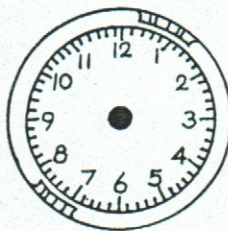
5:47



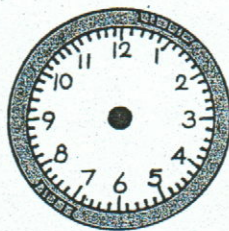
11:58



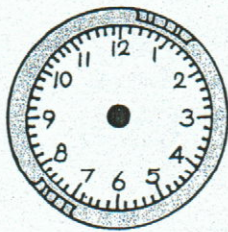
1:11



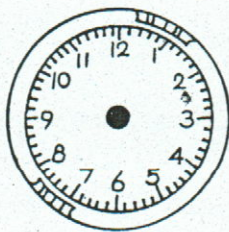
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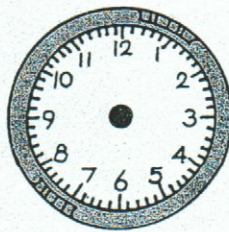
3:22



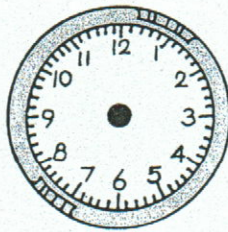
12:13



8:09



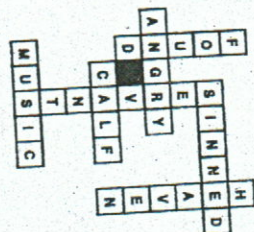
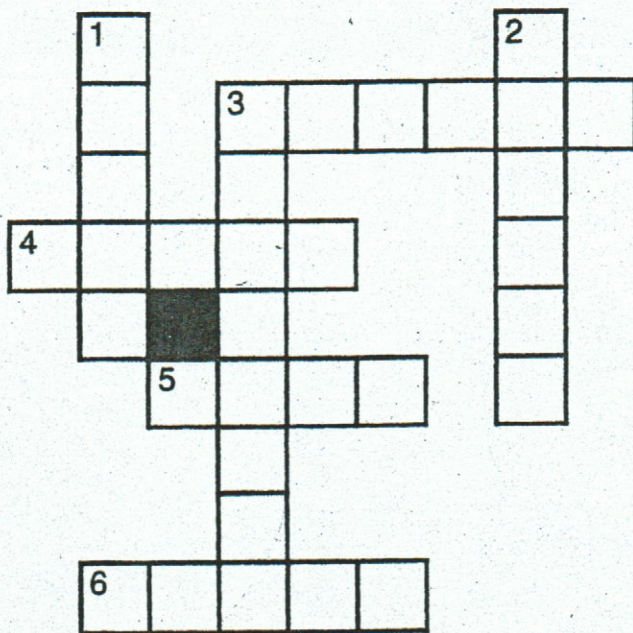
4:41



6:18

THE PRODIGAL SON

Hint: You'll find help in Luke 15



ACROSS

- 3 The son told his father that he had ___ against him
- 4 The older brother became ___ when he saw that the younger son had returned
- 5 The father killed a ___ to celebrate his son's return
- 6 The older son heard ___ and laughter when he returned from the fields

DOWN

- 1 The father told the older son to celebrate his brother's return because he was lost and then was ___
- 2 The younger son told his father that he had sinned against ___
- 3 The ___ were told to kill the fatted calf

Prodigal Son

Generally speaking when we come to today's reading, we often just think or misemphasize the prodigality of the younger son while excusing that of the older one or agreeing he has a good reason to be angry. Unfortunately, and perhaps because of the kind goodness of the great father in the narrative, the elder son also has just as serious a problem as does the younger one. Apparently neither exercises the innate self-respect necessary to evaluate and overcome life's challenging problems.

Today we ask that on a scale of one to ten, we rate our personal relationships, first with our spouse, then children, relatives and friends. When ever a relationship is not everything we want it to be, we quickly solve the problem and blame the other party, "If only he would...If only she didn't..." That is how we play the game since childhood, but our Lord shows us that blaming others for our failures is not only offensive to our God, it is detrimental to our relationships. While we all want healthier relationships, most of us have a hard time breaking free from our natural inclinations. The words of Christ can bring about extra ordinary change in every relationship in life, for the rest of our lives.

There are questions among us that only our God can answer. When Jesus was asked which commandment of God was the greatest, He gave the following answer; "the most important one...is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all you mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" Mark 12: 29 – 31. One point that is so very often missed when reading this passage is that Jesus' response to the questions was instantaneous; there was so pause or pulse between the man's question and the Saviour's answer. There was no "That's a good one...give me a minute to think about it."

No one other than God had the knowledge or the right to answer this question. And yet Jesus answered it authoritatively and without a second thought. How could He do this? Because He had been united with the Eternal Father for eternity, knowing every thought, every value, every priority of the Father. He knew the mind and heart of the Father as completely as the Father knew his. There was deep truth in his assertion, "I and the Father are one" It is the question which. Are we of the mind of our God? Do we have the thinking of the Saviour? Is our heart and soul beating in harmony with the purpose of our life? Do we wish simply our own solution and way out of problems? Will we permit the will of God to lead us to his solution and his grace in becoming a faithful servant? Or are we going it alone, all by ourselves?

While we might have expected that loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength would be the greatest commandment, could we have thought that the second greatest commandment would be loving our neighbor as ourselves? What about "you shall not kill?" or "you shall not steal?" What about "keep holy the Sabbath day?" All these are equal in value and integral part of the big ten and "love your neighbor" as yourself" did not even appear on the tablets of stone as Moses trudged down Sinai's heights to sea level. Yet Jesus identifies this commandment from Leviticus as second only to loving God!

What does it mean to love my neighbor as myself? How can I possibly love anyone as much as I automatically care about my own needs and concerns? To do so is not contrary to human nature. And once I have determined exactly who my neighbor is, then how am I supposed to love him or her? Jesus answers all these questions for us today. Many of his answers run contrary to our natural inclinations and we are light-years beyond ordinary human reasoning. For example, our Lord insists we bless people who curse us and to do good to those who hate us. And that is just the tip of the iceberg. If we have a conflict with someone, Jesus gives us precise steps to initiate reconciliation and resolve the conflict, particularly even when we are victims. We are not excused by saying, He started it and I am not doing a thing until they apologize. The older brother had a distinct and astounding opportunity to say to his errant younger brother "how good it is to see you once again; glad you are home, delighted you so respect your father who has daily been looking down the road for you since you left. The older brother didn't understand our Lord doesn't care who started it. He tells his followers it is their responsibility to resolve it in God's way.

Then there is much on the subject of forgiveness. Our Lord expects his disciples, his baptized followers, to have the endowment in grace to do what He expects, that is, to forgive as many as four hundred times, for the SAME offence (Matthew 18: 22)! How difficult it is for our unfortunate human nature is shown that even when the disciples hear him say this truth, "...forgive seven times seven" they plead, "Increase our faith!" Luke 17: 4, 5. As our heart is changed by the power of the words of Jesus, forgiven a person who hurt and offended you, end devastation in your life, and even then clearly remains in the wrong and you in the right, clearly requires more effort than forgiving someone who repents.

The revelation of our Lord to us on the subject of forgiveness is life-shattering, life-changing and most importantly, life-giving and life-strengthening. His words are life-shattering as He identifies our forgiveness of others as the ultimate evidence of our spiritual birth. Spiritual birth in fact does release spiritual fruit of forgiveness in our lives. If that evidence is not present then we must conclude we have not been born again and our faith in Christ is based on a mental exercise rather than salutary faith. Our Lord repeatedly emphasizes the value of his teaching, "If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses" Matthew 6: 15. Without God's forgiveness, unleashed by us, there is no entrance into the eternal kingdom.

Today we gain an insight into gaining a heart that is quick to forgive. Initially we must gain insight into how great our own offenses against God are. We must understand how hopeless our state is before him, how miraculous his sacrifice is and how great and weighty a debt of personal sin we each have guilt for. When we realize that Jesus paid off our trillion dollar debt of guilt with his suffering and blood, how can we possibly not forgive the "ten cent debt" that has afflicted us? Jesus' words are far more liberating and powerful.

The words of the Lord are life-changing, because we experience the power of true forgiveness, our hurts, our anger, our bitterness and resentment are transformed into peace, joy, contentment, love and trust. The terrible weight we once shouldered is finally lifted, freeing us to be to others the way God is to us!

Our relationship with God improves and is strengthened; the once callous heart becomes tender and is easily moved by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Because forgiveness of others is God's litmus test of our spiritual birth and the reality of faith in Christ, few subjects are more important to us than this one. From another dimension we permit this celebration today, to overshadow and take possession of us. We replace God's forging grace for the hardness of heart of the elder brother. His jealousy, his envy, his, in fact, inferiority complex led him into the enemy camp away from his own flesh and brother.

We can have better relationships with all who cross our path, but it does not happen naturally. The example of the Lord is provided us and the power that frees us is from above human nature. What becomes an act of devoted obedience to the will of our Lord – simply doing what the Son of God asks us – can become a way of life that exalts the Saviour. Today we pray that our eyes will be opened to the wisdom of Christ and accessible to the power He offers us to walk in the path that brings about true intimacy with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to all who surround us as well.