



Week of Prayer

2018

Pilgrims and Foreigners

January 7 – 14

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Editorial

Strangers, Pilgrims, Travellers ...

Quite a few years ago I enjoyed a Sabbatical. My mentor suggested: "Do not invest into formal further education. Let God invest in you." How do you go about this with four months at your disposal?

I had heard about "The Camino", the famous pilgrims route to Santiago de Compostela (Spain). This had put a dream into my heart. It emerged again as I was contemplating my plans for my Sabbatical. So, I decided to spend two weeks on that pilgrims route, becoming a "real" pilgrim.

The bible sees us as strangers, pilgrims and travellers, as you will notice in these materials for the Week of Prayer. However, our natural inclination is to try to settle. The German word for *real estate* is *Immobilien*, not mobile. A good reason for a settled person like me to literally become mobile as a pilgrim.

The difference between a tourist and a pilgrim is that the tourist wants to see new things and the pilgrim wants to become new. Therefore, I decided not to act like a tourist. I would keep my visits to a minimum and avoid much contact with other people. Meditating on scripture and praying were my disciplines as I walked day by day. I learnt that travelling light makes a lot of sense as you must carry everything yourself. Focusing on a goal and not be distracted was another piece which became important to me. And practicing more of that constant conversation with God another one.

I understood a little more about Jesus, who became a pilgrim on this earth as I walked under the hot sun and sometimes in rain. And strangely as I journeyed I often felt more at home than in my settled state.

As you go through this Week of Prayer you will encounter a lot of challenges to your status quo. It is my prayer that you may let God do his good work in you through them. Let him move you, through his Holy Spirit, to make a few corrections in your journey.

May Jesus meet with you in a new way en route to your heavenly destination!

Thomas Bucher
General Secretary European Evangelical Alliance

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Introduction

FOREIGNERS AND PILGRIMS

“Everybody is a stranger - almost everywhere.” This slogan, which became very popular a couple of years ago, reflects a deep biblical truth: as Christians we are strangers in this world, we are travelling through, but this world is not our home. We are on our way to our definite destination: the heavenly mansion that Christ is building for us.

This simple and basic truth has many implications:

1. *The Christian knows that he or she will not be around forever*

This is the best antidote against the rampant materialism of our times. As Christians, we do not have to put our trust in savings, stocks or a splendid career. We are only passing through this world. We know that only what we invest in the Kingdom of God will be of lasting value. Nobody furnishes a hotel room as if they were going to live there forever.

2. *The Christian is looking forward to the future*

The Christian life is like looking forward to holidays, all-inclusive and all paid for in the best hotel in the universe - only much better and beyond any imagination. There is only a short time to go, with struggles, yes, but worthwhile. Unfortunately, many Christians have lost sight of the destination of their faith. This helps us to endure hardship and suffering. We are looking forward to that never-ending and joyful tomorrow.

3. *The Christian is able to evaluate things correctly*

Which means: we evaluate things in the light of their future value. It is eternal things that count. We have to constantly ask ourselves: what eternal impact for the glory of God can I make today among my family, my friends and my neighbours?

4. *The Christian can suffer persecutions for having different values*

Not everybody will agree with our point of view. The fact is that many people and governments see the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as a threat. They intuitively realise that Jesus is Lord and He is not going to share his glory with anybody. Sometimes standing up for our faith can lead to persecution, even death.

5. *The Christian is merciful towards those who are strangers*

Being strangers in this world, we can sympathise with the strangers God has brought into our countries. As Christians we are called to be merciful to strangers and foreigners showing them the same mercy that Jesus has shown to us. It is our privilege to invite them in, welcoming them into our community of faith, that they may join us in our way towards the Eternal City.

José Hutter

Sunday 7 January

Abraham – The example of the believer as pilgrim (Hebrews 11:8-10; 13:14)

Abraham is one of the best-known characters in the Bible, especially as an *example of faith*. His journey begins with the divine calling to leave Ur and to follow to an unknown place. Faith transforms him into a pilgrim. His faith meant that he was justified. He believed God's promise that he would have a son, which contradicted every possibility, given his age and his wife's, together with her infertility. He believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness (Ga. 3:6). The faith that led him to leave Ur did not appear randomly, but, as Stephen would say, "*the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham*" (Acts 7: 2). It wasn't the glory of God, but the God of glory. This revelation strengthened his faith. What he expected was not longer an earthly place, but a heavenly one. It wasn't a territory better than Ur, where he had lived; faith leads him to wander through the land of the promise, as a pilgrim, because he "*anticipated the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God*". This situation is the same for every believer. In the manner of Abraham, we believed and were justified. Salvation is by grace, through faith (Eph. 2: 8-9). The evidence of that faith is that the human being leaves everything to accept what only God offers them. The world becomes a place of transit towards the *city that has foundations*, according to Jesus' promise (John 14: 1-4). As Abraham had to leave everything he owned to follow God, we leave our world to trail a path marked by the footsteps of Jesus (1 P. 2: 21). There is nothing permanent for a Christian in this temporality. Their vision turns to heaven, where the eternal goods are, awaiting the permanent city. The victorious church is that which, following Christ, is directed towards the heavenly home
In a relative world, as pilgrims we possess absolute values.

Samuel Pérez Millos

Motives of gratitude:

- We thank God for being Abraham's children regarding faith.
- We thank God because he accompanies us in our journey.
- We thank God because something much better than what we now have is prepared in the heavens for the believers.

Confession:

- Forgive us, Lord, for our lack of faith on so many occasions. We acknowledge that we often do not live as pilgrims, with our sight set on our heavenly city.

Requests:

- May the Lord help us be men and women of faith and to walk trusting in the purpose that God has for our lives
- May we become aware that the world is a place of transit for Christians, heading towards Heaven, the permanent city where Christ awaits.

Monday 8 January

Joseph - A foreigner, but under the care of the God and Lord of History (Gen 37–50)

If a foreigner or a pilgrim is someone who resides temporarily outside of their place of origin. Subject to the difficulties that such a displacement implies, Joseph meets this definition in all senses. After being sold as a slave by his jealous brothers, he ends up in Egypt. As a vulnerable foreigner he wasn't able to defend himself against the unfair accusations of Potiphar's wife. He ended up in prison, left for dead. However, Joseph was also the object of providential care- after a while God freed him and exalted him, using him to bless others. In the end Joseph was the means that Jehovah used to rescue the Egyptians as well as his own family from the famine! Joseph recognised that it was God who directed his pilgrimage according to his sovereign purposes. He told the same brothers that sold him: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). We are also foreigners and pilgrims in a hostile world (1 Peter 2:11). We are vulnerable, subject to injustice and persecution. At the same time we are the special object of providential care, like Joseph. God works everything for our good (Romans 8:28), frees us (Galatians 1:4), and uses us to bless those who are around us (1 Peter 2:9). In the midst of our difficulties, how can we be sure that God will look after us? Partly because of his faithfulness, revealed in the life of Joseph. But even more because one greater than Joseph was sent as a foreigner to this hostile world (John 3:17), subjected to vulnerability and injustice, given over and abandoned to death by his brothers. God freed him, resurrected him and exalted him and in him all the nations of the world are blessed.

Thanks to Jesus we can know that God is by our side always: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things" (Romans 8:32). May the Lord help us, like Joseph, to trust Him, to be faithful and to bless others on our pilgrimage

Matthew Leighton

Motives of gratitude:

- Thank you, Lord, because by means of the difficult circumstances that we experience we understand the wisdom that comes from above. Thank you because all things work together for good.
- Thank you for preserving our heart in those difficult circumstances
- Thank you for the strength you give us in each situation

Confession:

- Forgive us for often not trusting your sovereignty and your perfect plans.

Requests:

- May God guide our pilgrimage according to his sovereign purposes as he did with Joseph
- May we confess and understand that God acts for our good, that he frees us, and that he uses us to bless those around us
- May the Lord help us trust in Him, be faithful to Him, and bless others in our pilgrimage

Tuesday 9 January

Ruth – Driven by hunger she meets her God (Ruth 1)

We must highlight the God of all grace. In the long term we perceive the plan of redemption. The book concludes with Ruth becoming part of the genealogy of David (4: 18-22) and later we see her as Jesus' ancestor (Mt. 1: 5). Therefore, Yahweh weaves the events of his eternal counsel of salvation together. The divine blessing is revealed in times of apostasy, as the story of Ruth takes place in the days of the Judges (1: 1). Improbable as it may seem, the Lord acts favourably and we can emphasize two things: A) In his providence, he reverts situations (6: 22). He who allowed the deprivation that made reasonable the emigration and disgrace of Naomi and her daughters-in-law because of death, now creates the conditions for the return to the promised land.

B) He leads people to faith (1: 16, 17). To do so he uses personal testimony. Noemi has been the object of harsh criticism for leaving the promised land and somehow leaving her faith. Nevertheless, a) the words of Ruth "your God will be my God" (16) make clear that she never surrendered to the dominant religion or culture of Moab; b) she knew how to intercede on behalf of her daughters-in-law (8) and she undoubtedly expected a divine answer; c) she saw the hand of Yahweh in everything that had happened, as she names the Lord four times (20, 21); d) and she does not play the victim claiming the attention of her daughters-in-law, whom she invites to stay in Moab (9-13). Regarding Ruth, what stands out is her very firm resolution: "Entreat me not to leave you..." (16). The fact that it is true faith is seen in the following: (1) she believes in Yahweh in spite of the pitiful circumstances that could have triggered her resentment towards Him; (2) full commitment, a species of discipleship, as she leaves her family and land to follow God; (3) extraordinary sympathy for her mother-in-law (2: 11, 12); (4) a complete identification with God's people, even if as a Moabite she could have been badly perceived by society. She is a true daughter of Abraham (Gen. 12: 3b).

Antonio Ruiz

Motives of gratitude:

- Thank you for all the brothers and sisters who, with their testimony, have impacted lives. Those who have been your hands, your voice, your feet. A kiss for the soul of those who know you and of those who don't.
- Because you make yours all my battles.
- Because you restore us, you return us to our original design

Requests:

- May we lead others to faith in Christ through our testimony
- May we be willing to leave everything to follow God
- That the influences that surround us do not take our eyes away from Christ

Wednesday 10 January

Daniel – Firmness under persecution (Daniel 3)

Three young men in a foreign country. Who would watch over them? Well... there is always someone watching us, the believers! „*You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone (...) must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews (...)*” (Dan 3:10-12). We can think that we are insignificant, that it doesn't matter what we do or what we say, that nobody will take notice... but there is always someone watching. At some point others noticed they were different and they will not stop observing them ever since. The three men knew it. They were the same men that had decided not to contaminate themselves with the king's food and now they decide not to contaminate themselves with his gods. Who is faithful with small issues learns to be faithful in big issues. Tiny lights in a foreign land.

They could have sneaked out in the multitude. They could have endured this minute and then have continued with their lives. But they didn't hide. Like Daniel, praying at his window three times a day. And when the world's emperor, full of arrogance, spits at them with all the disdain and in a mocking tone („...*Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?*” (3:15)), their voice doesn't shake: „*the God we serve is able to save us from it (...). But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods...*” (3:17-18).

The Babylon we live in is also convinced of its absolute power. It thinks that we and our families belong to the culture, but it doesn't know that we are citizens of another country, that we are here just for a moment, and that the law of our King is burning in our hearts. That's why, when everybody applauds injustice, ignorance and indecency, we won't kneel down. When the bad is called good and the good is called bad, we won't kneel down. When they threaten and insult us, we won't adore their gods. Because our King honours those who honour Him. He walks with them when they walk through the fire (Is 43:2). And soon He will receive us home.

Raquel Berrocal

Motives of gratitude:

- Thank God because, no matter where we are, his presence is with us and helps us.

Confession:

- We want to repent for all those times we have not been brave enough to remain pure and firm, not falling, and giving good testimony

Requests:

- May we be faithful in that which is least, so that we learn to be faithful in much.
- Lord, help us to not conform to this century; may we live thinking and acting knowing that our citizenship is in the heavens

Thursday 11 January

Jonah – Preaching to a foreign nation (Jonah 1 y 3)

The book of Jonah is surprising; counteracting the sinful trait of the nationalism of the chosen people and manifesting the otherworldly aspect of his grace. The glorious nation's beacon remains quite badly idle. The negative traits of nationalism are very tenacious; "Act for the benefit of the cruel enemies of my chosen people?" "Never!" Let's not throw stones at the anti-hero Jonah. How much time do you spend per year praying for other nations and yours? Jonah with zero compassion: let the enemies die, so that Israel would feel more secure. Let's not be quick to criticise Jonah; for example, the sudden massive arrival of immigrants at the frontiers of Europe involves certain risks. But it becomes an opportunity in God for us to pray and help so many uprooted needy people. Allowing them to experience His love and His grace? Amen to the welcome offered by some of His children.

Jonah is in prayer and runs away. The true heroes of the book are pagans (seamen and Ninevites) and they pray a lot (look what a lesson they give us!) and God listens to them. Jonah will pray of course, but in chapter 2 and to thank God for his grace towards him (not towards the foreign enemies of his people) and in chapter 4 to complain about the grace of God towards the enemies.

The great commission commits all Jesus followers to praying, evangelising and making disciples of all the nations. We can't all go but all can and should pray.

"Pray, evangelise, why? They aren't going to pay attention to me!" But God calls people that have it difficult because of their context (disabled, prisoners of Islam). He even moves their conscience with a message in which only the bad news is highlighted. Did Jonah pray? Not at all, he sat in the shade under his bush "to see what would happen in the city." In order to then say: "I said it Lord, I knew it, they don't pay attention, do you see it?"

It was difficult to go to Syria to preach to them, so He sends the Syrians to our house! Like our Lord, let's transform ourselves into anti-Jonahs and let's show the love of God by our actions and prayers.

Olivier Py

Motives of gratitude:

- We thank God for his sovereignty
- We thank God for his work and because he counts on us in spite of how we are and think

Confession:

- We ask your forgiveness, dear God, for so many times we walked in the opposite direction to your will
- We want to repent for our ideas and wrong notions about foreigners. Help us love foreigners and share with them everything, from the most valuable thing we have (You) to the smallest and most mundane things.

Requests:

- For our nation and its salvation
- May we be willing to help and intercede for other nations that need assistance, and that these signs of love and grace towards them reflect Christ.
- May we fulfil the great commission to pray, evangelize and make disciples in all nations

Friday 12 January

Paul – International and celestial citizen (Philippians 1:21-26)

In this passage to the Philippians, Paul invites us to accompany him, as if thinking out loud, in his personal reasoning over whether to hold on to life or give himself over to death. This choice is not in his hands, since he finds himself in prison awaiting his sentence. Therefore, this reflection, which at first glance might seem paradoxical, is based on the case where he had the opportunity to choose his destiny.

On the one hand, Paul speaks of death as gain. This preference is accented by the use of the term “depart”, which means “get on one’s way”. Being in the world is for Paul a temporary state whose only logical consequence is the exit, death, *in order to be with Christ, which is very much better*. So, he assumes that his relationship with Christ in death will continue to be dynamic.

Even so, on the other hand, there’s no doubt that for Paul, also in life, Christ has been his exclusive devotion. He has lived and lives in intimate union with Christ. For that reason it is not surprising that he wants to continue living to follow, glorify, and serve Christ.

In this dilemma, given the choice, Paul opts for staying, maintaining his vision on heaven but his feet on the ground. It is his relationship with Christ that motivates him and pushes him to stay to help the Philippians experience the same blessing as he has. His staying in the world is exactly what permits the Philippians to advance in their faith in Christ.

These words of Paul are without doubt a wake-up call for us today. To die is to lose our lives. Still, if in death we can affirm that “for me to live is Christ”, we lose nothing, rather we win! How and for whom do we live? The challenge is in our hands. May we be able to exclaim as Paul “for me to live is Christ and to die is gain”!

Edith Vilamajó

Motives of gratitude:

- The hope we have that to be with Christ is much better
- The confidence that life with Christ is better than everything else

Confession:

- Forgive us, oh Lord, for not always living for you.

Requests:

- May our devotion in life be Christ and may this be manifested in us searching for intimate communion with Christ and living to follow, serve and glorify him.
- May our stay in the world serve so others advance in their faith in Christ
- May we live a life in accordance with the thought that for us to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Saturday 13 January

Priscilla and Aquila – Expelled, but with open doors (18:1)

The apostle Paul met the couple Priscilla and Aquila when they were in exile in Corinth. Luke tells us that they were of the same trade, and that Paul lived with them and worked in their workshop, evangelizing on Saturdays (Acts 18:1-4). This couple, who had had to leave Rome when the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from the capital, came to be the initial core of the great church of Corinth. After a year and a half this missionary trio moved on to Ephesus, where Paul continued with his apostolic work (Acts 18:18-19). In the first century, persecution and exile were circumstances that God used to plant churches in the world of the Roman Empire. When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, Priscilla and Aquila were back in Rome and there was a church in their home. In the list of greetings Paul sends to the believers in Rome, he refers with all fondness to this missionary couple and he describes them as “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:4).

In Europe today, migration, voluntary or forced, continues to be a path that God uses for the extension of the church. Together with the missionaries, dedicated completely to the work of announcing the Gospel and training new disciples, there are millions of missionary volunteers who like Priscilla and Aquila dedicate their homes, their time and service, and their brotherly affection, to the spreading of the Kingdom of God. Let us pray that the Lord continues awakening missionary callings and also mobilizing common, everyday believers like Priscilla and Aquila. God has allowed their story to appear in the book of Acts and Romans so that today we can follow their example.

Samuel Escobar

Motives of gratitude:

- Lord, we are thankful for your threads of love, people, situations, obstacles, etc. In all of them your love has been the motor.
- Thank you for the circumstances we experience, easy or difficult, because everything works for good (Romans 8: 28)
- Thank you for the brothers and sisters that have laid their lives at your feet.

Confession:

- We regret not having a more eternal view of life to perceive everything that happens as something that you are going to use for good
- We ask your forgiveness for not making the most of current circumstances of migration in Europe to advance your Kingdom.
- Forgive us, Lord, for not putting everything we are and have at your service.

Requests:

- For each one of the missionaries that are using their lives for the kingdom of God.
- Wherever God placed us may we be missionaries and may we devote our homes, time, service and brotherly affection to the advancement of the kingdom of God.
- May the Lord keep awakening missionary vocations and also mobilizing common, everyday believers, such as Priscilla and Aquila, for the mission field.

Sunday 14 January

Jesus – The incarnate God among a rebellious humankind (John 1:14)

The central aspect of God's revelation in the Old Testament was the manifestation of its glory: Exodus 33:18-34:7. In the same way, Christianity is, essentially, a revelation of God's glory through Jesus Christ. The glory of God appears now only in the Word of God made flesh, the Father's only begotten son, full of grace and truth. This is the great message of the Christian faith.

Moses had a transforming meeting with the God of glory: Exodus 34:8-10. The same way, John and the first disciples of the Lord Jesus were transformed by their encounter with the Lord of glory: I Cor 2:9. The people of Israel in the wilderness experienced that the glory of God resides primarily in that He showed them His mercy. Now, the church knows the glory of God through the saving grace that is in the Father's only begotten Son who was incarnated so that he could save us by what He did on the cross. Jesus Christ is full of grace and truth which He offers to the rebellious and sinful humanity. God shows His glory in that He saves the sinners in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope resides in the divine determination to justify the ungodly: Romans 4:5, in His overabundant grace that reigns in the Lord Jesus Christ: Romans 5:20-21. This encounter with the glory of God is the only explanation for the spreading of the Christian faith today. The fact that there were men and women transformed by the glory of God, who wanted others to experience the same thing that they had. That's why we can confront the future of the church with hope, because God has decided that His glory shall be known among all the nations, that His only begotten incarnated Son shall be announced to everybody. Our prayers, though, are raised with the best of motives – that God shows His glory by saving the sinners. And that is precisely the reason why we can be sure that our requests will be heard by the Lord Jesus.

José Moreno

Motives of gratitude:

- For making us participants in your salvation.
- Because you count on us to save others
- For your initiative. Thank you because, being the God of Glory, you approached mankind.

Confession:

- Forgive us for, as a church, not being good broadcasters of your salvation.

Requests:

- May the transformation through the glory of God that we have experienced make us long to see others experimenting the same in their lives, announcing the good news of the Gospel.
- May we be people of prayer who intercede for those who don't know Him yet.
- May we live with the hope of comprehending that God has decided that his glory be known by every nation.