

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 23 November 2025

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-5

Opening Hymn: 282 I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art

Confession of Sin

O eternal God and merciful Father, we humble ourselves before your great majesty, against which we have frequently and grievously sinned. We acknowledge that we deserve nothing less than eternal death, that we are unclean before you and children of wrath. We continually transgress your commandments, failing to do what you have commanded, and doing that which you have expressly forbidden. We acknowledge our waywardness, and are heartily sorry for all our sins. We are not worthy to be called your children, nor to lift up our eyes heavenward to you in prayer. Nevertheless, O Lord God and gracious Father, we know that your mercy toward those who turn to you is infinite; and so we take courage to call upon you, trusting in our Mediator Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Forgive all our sins for Christ's sake. Cover us with his innocence and righteousness, for the glory of your name. Deliver our understanding from all blindness, and our hearts from all willfulness and rebellion, we pray through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. *Amen*

Assurance of Pardon: Psalm 86:5-7

Psalm of Preparation: 149A Give Praise to the LORD

Old Covenant Reading: Exodus 1:1-14

New Covenant Reading: Acts 6:1-15

Sermon Title: *The Purposes of the LORD Shall Stand*

Psalm of Response: 14 The Fool Speaks in His Heart

Confession of Faith: 1 Heidelberg Catechism (p. 872)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Psalm: 48A Great Is the LORD Our God

PM Worship – Guest Preacher, the Rev. Stephen Atkinson

212 Come, Thou Almighty King

90A LORD, You Have been Our Dwelling Place

471 The Sands of Time are Sinking

Old Covenant Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

New Covenant Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Sermon Title: *Eternity*

We are pleased to welcome Stephen Atkinson to our pulpit this evening. Stephen is a missionary with the Presbyterian Church in America who serves as the Director of Mission to Israel, North America.

Adult Sunday School – Congregational Meeting / All Classes in Cafeteria

Suggested Preparations

Monday (11/17) Read and discuss Exodus 1:1–14

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. (ESV)

R. Reed Lessing writes:

In Genesis 12:2-3, God tells Abram, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The term curse appears five times in Genesis 1-11. God counters that with a five-fold promise of blessing to Abram in Genesis 12:2-3.

According to Exodus 1:7, therefore, God is fulfilling His promise to Abram. The Israelites are becoming a great nation. They will channel God’s blessings to the nations – ultimately through Christ Jesus our Lord. *Curses must yield to blessings.*

Exodus 1:1-5 confirms this interpretation. Jacob’s seventy descendants who went down to Egypt correspond to the seventy descendants of Noah in Genesis 10. Through Israel’s seventy, God will bring His blessing to Noah’s seventy – that is, to the entire world. God’s promise to Abram, that he would become a great nation, is now being realized. Yahweh will use Israel to bring abounding mercy and grace to the world.

Taken together, Exodus 1:1-7 announces God’s plan to use Israel as His conduit to bless all the families of the earth. This sets the stage for Exodus 1:8-15:21. Two pharaohs will attempt to derail Yahweh’s purposes. Egypt will suffer heartache and hell for it.

Read or sing Hymn 282 I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art

Tuesday (11/18) Read and discuss Hebrews 13:20–25

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you. (ESV)

Tom Schreiner writes:

The Christian faith expresses itself in mutual care and love for one another. Believers, therefore, turn to God in prayer, asking God to strengthen and help fellow Christians in their journey to the heavenly city. We also recognize that the witness of believers in the world is exemplified in living a godly life so that God is honored by the moral virtue of saints. Finally, the author wants to see the readers so he can minister face-to-face with them, for such ministry is typically the most effective. The church of Jesus Christ is a family. Greetings and news about one another are significant, for every person matters; every person is important. Part of what it means to love one another is to greet one another warmly and in love.

The words in verses 20-21 pick up some of the major themes of the letter. The author reminds his readers that only God gives peace in the midst of the anxieties and worries of everyday life. The believers have a high priest who lives, who has conquered death, and this high priest is also their Shepherd. As their ‘great Shepherd’ he spilled his blood for them so they would enjoy forgiveness of sins and be members of the new covenant. God works what is pleasing to him in his people. He is the one who saves and strengthens them for every good work. Hence all glory and praise and honor belong to God for granting salvation through Jesus. Those who have experienced his great goodness give him praise.

Read or sing Psalm 149A Give Praise to the LORD

Wednesday (11/19) Read and discuss Acts 6

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor,

and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. (ESV)

Eckhard Schnabel writes:

Stephen’s ministry is characterized by grace and power (v. 8) and by wisdom and the presence of the Holy Spirit (v. 10). As God bestows grace on people who come to faith in Jesus, it is God’s Spirit who bestows wisdom and empowers ministry. Christians living in the West are in danger of being too thoroughly influenced by a culture that values technical skills, management strategies, and methodical planning. While expertise in these areas is not unimportant, it can easily obscure the fact that ministries, particularly mission and evangelism, are not rendered effective by techniques but by the power of God, who empowers His witnesses through His Spirit. Luke describes the reason for Stephen’s powerful ministry with reference to God’s grace and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

While signs and wonders [did] accompany [Stephen’s] ministry, they are not the explanation for the effectiveness of Stephen’s ministry. The diaspora Jews were apparently aware of the miracles performed by Stephen, they were even more impressed by “the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke” (v. 10). Signs and wonders cannot be used as a strategic or tactical means of making ministry effective. By definition they are divine interventions in history, which cannot be controlled and must not be manipulated by human beings. At the same time, the secular world view of Western culture must not be allowed to minimize or doubt God’s ability and gracious willingness to miraculously heal and help believers in need.

Read or sing Psalm 4 The Fool Speaks in His Heart

Thursday (11/20) Read and discuss 2 Corinthians 4:7–18

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (ESV)

Colin Kruse writes:

In 4:7-18 Paul juxtaposes statements about present sufferings in the carrying out of his ministry that contribute to his outward wasting away with the inward renewal that enables him to persevere. He likens himself to a cheap and fragile clay jar, but one that bears an invaluable treasure: the light of the gospel of the glory of God displayed in the face of Jesus Christ. The immense privilege of being a minister of this gospel is one reason why he does not lose heart amidst his afflictions. The other reason is that God compensates the effects of his outward afflictions with inner renewal through the work of the Spirit. He endures the sufferings for two reasons: firstly, for the benefit of those to whom he ministers so that they will experience God's blessings as a result of his labors ('death is at work in us, but life is at work in you'), and secondly, because in the light of those blessings there will be an ever-increasing volume of thanksgiving to God who bestowed them. Paul regarded the afflictions accompanying his ministry as 'light and momentary' in comparison with the 'eternal glory' they were achieving for him. Keeping his eyes fixed on what is eternal prevented him from losing heart.

Friday (11/21) Read and discuss Ecclesiastes 3:1–15

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away. (ESV)

Douglas Sean O'Donnell writes:

To review, there are three lessons to learn from our text. First, we should embrace the beauty of God's comprehensive control of everything. ... Second, under the sunlight of God's sovereignty, we should be holy and happy. ... Third, because of God's enduring, complete, and just providence, we should fear God. That lesson is derived from Ecclesiastes 3:14-15. ...

God's work in the world is enduring, complete, and just. The idea of God's providence – His constant care of the world being just – comes from [verse 15]: "and God will call the past to account." The sense seems to be that in the way God controls the times, He ends up balancing the scales of justice. For those who have lost out in life as the result of injustice, He redeems the time; and for those who have done injustice, He renders judgment in His time. On the last day, God will certainly call every action into account!

So here we are taught what God has done, is doing, and will do. We are taught something about His providence. We are also taught, in a brief but significant phrase, precisely what we should do. "I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before Him" (Eccl. 3:14).

Read or sing Psalm 48A Great Is the LORD Our God

Saturday (11/22) Read and discuss Exodus 1:1–14

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. (ESV)

Kenneth A Cherney, Jr. writes:

Spare as this account is, implicit in it are the horrors of the oppression. As Fretheim notes, however, in later Scripture the oppression is never recounted as an exercise in collective self-pity. Instead, Israel is warned not to subject the temporary residents among them to the same bitter experience they had been through themselves. To this day, when God’s people see oppression going on, they side with the oppressed, never the oppressors. When they are oppressed themselves, they react with neither vindictiveness nor self-pity. They ask the LORD to keep them innocent of the behavior they resent in others, and they bless their enemies (Lk 6:27-30; 1 Peter 2:16-20).

When Yahweh leads Israel out of Egypt to constitute them as His people in the desert, the break with the world they have left behind is dramatic. There are to be no vast stockpiles of food; instead Yahweh will feed His people day by day. The food is never either too much or too little, and Yahweh’s people can trust Him to provide it without fail. Accumulated surpluses betray a lack of trust and [were] contrary to Yahweh’s will, and they quickly rot and stink. Eventually, Israel enters the Promised Land, and the manna stops. But even there, biblical Israel’s economy was not based on surplus and accumulation, at least initially. We today are not biblical Israel, and the LORD has not given us His Torah as an economic model to impose on contemporary society. But trust in the LORD for our daily bread still marks God’s people today. Trust in accumulated wealth, extracted from those

whose labor produced it by any means possible, marks the people of this world.

Israel in Egypt grows into a huge population, but they live in such abject servitude that freeing themselves is unthinkable, and their oppressors have no incentive or intention other than to see their servitude continue. When later in Scripture the oppressor is mentioned, often it is to set Yahweh's spectacular act of deliverance into bold relief. This is the basis for grateful amazement, loyalty, and loving obedience with which God's people respond and for the confidence that Yahweh's promises regarding the future can be relied upon as well. It also casts in an odd light Israel's apparent nostalgia for Egypt while on their trek through the desert. In the same way, when Scripture recounts the servitude from which we have been rescued, its purpose is to magnify the LORD's spectacular deliverance of us in Christ, to invite us to put our trust in Him, and to make nostalgia for our old way of live seem ridiculous.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.