

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 23, 2014  
Christ the King/Reign of Christ A

The readings this week:

- Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 ◦ Psalm 100
- Ephesians 1:15-23 ◦ Matthew 25:31-46



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## Ephesians 1.15-23— a paraphrase

Beloved,  
the Lord of Love shines out through you  
and your love of others radiates  
so clearly I can see it from here.  
I am grateful for you,  
and I hold you in the arms of my prayers.

I pray that God,  
whom our Master of Love revealed to us,  
the Womb of Beauty,  
may give you a spirit of wisdom and clarity of  
vision.

I pray that you come to know God  
more and more deeply.  
May the eyes of your heart be bright.  
May you find yourself in the place of hope  
that God has prepared for you.  
May you discover the glorious riches  
that God gives all her precious children.  
May God's power amaze you  
as it works within you through your trust in God—  
it's the same power with which God  
raised Christ from the dead!

Christ's love reigns with God at the heart of all  
things.  
This love is greater than any human power,  
greater than all systems and dominions and empires,  
and renders them pointless.  
Christ's love saturates all that is,  
and all that is to come.  
God has given everything over to love.

The Church is the embodiment of this love,  
Christ's risen body, Christ's fulfillment,  
filling everything  
until everything  
is love.

*"Come, you who are blessed," Jesus says;*

## You Who Bless

"You  
who are  
yourselves  
a blessing  
  
who know  
that to feed  
the hungry  
is to bless  
  
and to give drink  
to those who thirst  
is to bless  
  
who know  
the blessing  
in welcoming  
the stranger  
  
and giving clothes  
to those  
who have none  
  
who know  
to care  
for the sick  
is blessing  
  
and blessing  
to visit  
the prisoner:  
  
may the blessing  
you have offered  
now turn itself  
toward you  
  
to welcome  
and to embrace you  
at the feast  
of the blessed.



# Reflecting on the Word



## 1st Reading: [Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24](#)

This part of Ezekiel reflects encouragement to the returning exiles as they face the challenge of rebuilding Jerusalem. Who are the shepherds in this passage? (Clue: Check verse 24) Who are the sheep? When the Exiles returned to rebuild Jerusalem, they hoped for the return not only of those in exile but other scattered Jews of the Diaspora as well. What verses reflect that hope? Who is the "I" who will be shepherd in verse 15? Who is mentioned in verse 23 as shepherd? What is the connection between these two shepherds? The imagery in this lesson is that of sheep, but people are really meant. Summarize in your own words what benefits will come to the people according to the imagery in verses 13-16. What phrase in these verses do you think best summarizes the whole? [Light on the Lessons](#)

## Psalm Reading: [Psalm 100](#)

God invites you to see yourself as a child of God. What obstacles might keep you from seeing yourself in this way? According to this psalm, who is God and what is he like? This psalm also tells us about ourselves. According to this psalm, who are we? The text instructs us to "know that LORD is God." What does it mean to "know that the Lord is God"? What freedom might knowing this provide? What things are we invited to do in response to God? In what area of your life do you need to quit trying to be superhuman? How might it help you personally to "know that the LORD is God," that you are a creature, and "the sheep of his pasture"? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#), [InterVarsity Press](#)

On your feet now - applaud God! Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourselves into his presence. Know this: God is God, and God, God. He made us; we didn't make him. We're his people, his well-tended sheep. Enter with the password: "Thank you!" Make yourselves at home, talking praise. Thank him. Worship him. For God is sheer beauty, all-generous in love, loyal always and ever. [The Message](#)



## Praying Toward Sunday

Father, there is much that we don't understand on this side; why some go through life seemingly with ease and little trouble and others seem to be born with trouble that never goes away. It is not for us to understand Your ways for You are a God of mystery with greater purpose than we can comprehend, and yet You have made clear to us through Scripture that which we are to understand. Some of the very trouble we seek to avoid is what brings us to faith and causes us to live a life that is honoring to You and purposeful to others. Keep our hearts sensitive and compassionate toward those who are undervalued by the world's standards. When we put ourselves in their place, we identify with their struggles and feel the deep hurt they experience when looked down upon and rejected by others. May we be Your tender arm of compassion, Your gentle voice of acceptance and unconditional love. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

[Daily Encouragement](#)

## 3rd Reading: [Ephesians 1:15-23](#)

Paul notices two things about the people of Ephesus that lead him to remember/pray for them. What are they? Do you notice these things and do they stir your heart to pray for others? In v.17-18, Paul makes a crucial prayer request. What is it? Notice how Paul prays more for spiritual needs than physical. We are not saying that praying for physical things is wrong, but physical requests are never meant to be prayed alone. Examine your prayer life...is there enough praying for the spiritual well-being of those around you? Paul prays that you would have "the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know" three things. What are those three things? What do they mean? Do you pray these things consistently for those around you? Paul prays for the "eyes of our heart to be enlightened." What sort of habits needs to be strengthened in your life to help you consistently see God clearly? A well-known Christian motto goes like this, "To know Christ and make Him known." Paul prays the first half of that statement for the people in Ephesus. How can our congregation do/encourage both parts (a: to know Him b: to make Him known)? [Stonegate Church](#)

## 4th Reading: [Matthew 25:31-46](#)

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, identify the King, the sheep, the goats and the "brothers" of the King. What criteria does the King use to separate the sheep from the goats? According to Jesus' teaching in this chapter, what should we be doing until he returns? What resources and responsibilities has Jesus given you? How can you handle them in a good and faithful manner? How should Matthew 25 affect your current priorities? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#), [InterVarsity Press](#)