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Christian Meditations

Before the bar exam

Reflections by Anna Rapa

Introduction

Taking the bar exam is one of the most stressful times in a person's life. One thing that carries me through stressful times is my relationship with God through Jesus. One thing that I believe is that God wants to help us carry our burdens, if we ask and invite him to. So this is meant to be an invitation and sort of a road map for you to invite God into this bar exam process. And because the whole thing is so stressful, I also wanted to give you some Scripture to meditate on when the stressful thoughts and feelings overtake you.

So here's a short explanation of the different things you will see each day:

Scripture

Each day will start with a quote of a passage from the Bible. You may want to look it up and see what else is around it, or you may just want to think about that Scripture for a while. Sometimes I actually do meditate on the words by saying them over and over and thinking about what they mean.

Reflections

Next you will see a short paragraph or two talking about what that passage means to me in the context of the bar exam. Maybe it's something I thought about while I was preparing to take the exam. Maybe it's something that clarifies or gives background to the Scripture quoted above.

Response Space

Then you will see a blank space where you are invited to respond by writing something or by drawing something. This is the interactive portion, where you can share your thoughts or feelings with God, where you can write or draw a prayer to him. I will give a suggestion here or ask a question, but feel free to use this space in any way that you want to. If there's not enough room, you may want to consider using a journal or a sketchpad.

July 27

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit says the LORD almighty.

Zechariah 4:6

This is it. The final day of the bar exam. In 6 or so hours, it will all be done. You are at the end of your energy and at the end of your strength. But you can make it through by the power of God's spirit at work within you.

Invite God to walk with you today and ask for the strength of his Spirit to sustain you.

July 26

I lift my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Psalm 121:1-4

This Psalm is a worship song written by a Hebrew before Jesus was born. It is a reflection on the kind of God God had been to them over the years that they followed him.

Throughout that nation's history, over all of that time, God had been a faithful God—providing help, watching over them without ever taking a break.

The God of Jesus is the same. He is tirelessly watching over you and desires to be your help in this stressful time. Even when you sleep tonight, he will be watching over you and holding you up.

Take time to meditate on the kind of God who would care enough to watch over you while you sleep. Say a few words to him before you leave for the day or before you sleep tonight.

July 7

But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and all your soul.

Deuteronomy 4:29

In this passage, a man named Moses was giving instructions to this whole nation of people that God had called to follow him. But he knew that they were just ordinary people and that they were likely to walk away from God at some point. Because he knew how much God loved them, he told them that even if they turned away to worship other gods and spent all kinds of time doing all the things God had asked them not to, even from there they could seek God and they would find him.

God longs to have relationship with you. He likes you. He loves you. He wants you to know him and he wants to know you. No matter where you are in life, what you have done before now, how many times you have cursed God or turned your back on him, he still desires to have a relationship with you. No matter how far away you walk, if from there you turn and seek God with all your heart and all your soul, you will find him.

Take a moment to reflect on how you have related to God up until now. If you want to, take this opportunity to ask God to help you to seek and to find him, even in the midst of this crazy time in your life.

July 8

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:28-30

God understands right where you are today. He understands your exhaustion, your anxiety, your stress. He understands how important this test is in your life and how much is resting on it for you. He understands and he cares.

If your hope is in him—if you are walking with him and resting in him and asking him, he will provide strength and comfort in the midst of this chaos.

Take a moment to express to God exactly how you feel about your situation right now. Invite him into that chaos, and ask him to bring strength and calm and focus.

July 25

The LORD himself goes before you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Deuteronomy 3:18

The bar exam is tomorrow. You have made it this far, and you will make it through tomorrow and Wednesday. Do not be afraid and do not be discouraged. Walk in the confidence that you have studied very hard, that you have done what you can do. God will be with you.

Write or draw all your fears and anxieties. Invite Jesus in to them, to walk through them with you.

July 24

My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

One of the most amazing things about walking with Jesus is how he can use even the most mundane or ordinary things and people to accomplish great things. Jesus's original followers were mainly fisherman—just ordinary guys doing ordinary things with no education and nothing to offer. This verse was written by a guy named Paul, and he had some kind of physical ailment that was weighing him down. Even so, he had learned that what he could not do, God could enable him to do.

On those days when you are feeling particularly weak or worn down, like you can't do anything, you have a special opportunity to experience Jesus's power in you. You can ask for him to walk with you and sustain you and give you strength to do the things that you have to do. It is amazing then to watch and see what he can accomplish and how he does it.

What are you not strong enough to do today? Ask Jesus to show himself to you by helping you to do more than you could do on your own.

July 9

Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8

The things you think about have so much power to affect you. You can think negative things, like "I can't do this," "I'm going to fail," or "I'm not going to survive." Or you can think about what is good and true and right.

What is true is that you made it through 3 years of law school, and you passed all your classes. You remember a lot more than you think you do. You are capable of taking this test, and you are capable of passing it. Think about those things. Don't allow your mind to run away from you—take control of those thoughts and tell yourself the truth.

What harmful thoughts have you been allowing to take over your mind? Tell Jesus about them, and then ask him to help you to tell yourself the truth.

July 10

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

You are exhausted. You are weary. You are tired of studying and thinking and stressing. There is rest and peace available to you. Jesus invites you into a relationship with him where you can find peace.

Although your circumstances may not change, when you take on Jesus's name and you walk with him, your soul finds rest in a way that you will not find elsewhere. You can rest in the reality that you are loved and valued no matter what you achieve or don't achieve. You can rest in the reality that no matter what happens in life, you know who you are and who you belong to.

Bring your weariness and exhaustion to Jesus. Ask him for rest—true rest for your soul that only comes from him.

July 23

Cast all your cares upon the LORD and he will sustain you. He will never let the righteous fall.

Psalm 55:22

The word “cast” means to throw or fling or hurl. That's an amazing word picture, isn't it? You should be flinging away all the things that are weighing you down. But you don't fling them off into outer space or into nothingness; you're actually throwing them upon the God of the universe. He can bear those burdens that you are trying to carry alone. Not only that, he is inviting you to send them his way so that he can sustain and uphold you.

To truly let your burdens go though, you're going to have to trust him. You're going to have to trust that he will keep walking with you, that he will hold you up, that he will help you to sleep and to remember and to think clearly.

If you are walking with Jesus, then he has already made you righteous—right with God. He will sustain you.

Take a moment to write or draw everything that is weighing you down. Take it outside and throw it as far away as you can. Or set it on fire. Or something. While you are appropriately discarding of it, pray and cast those things away, to Jesus.

July 22

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:6

This was written by Moses, who led the people of Israel from captivity toward what would become their own land. He wanted to encourage the people of Israel that, because God was with them, they did not have to be afraid.

Unfortunately, the people didn't listen. When they sent spies into the land, they reported back how big and tall and rough the people of the land were. So the people of Israel decided that they couldn't take the land and wandered around the desert for many more years. The next generation had more faith and eventually they ended up where God was leading them. But that first generation missed out on an opportunity to see how God would provide for them.

If you are walking with God, then he is with you no matter where you go. He will be with you when you take this test. He will be with you while you wait for the results. Do not be afraid. Walk forward in confidence that he is with you.

What does it mean to you that God will never leave or forsake you? How does that affect the way you view the bar exam?

July 11

Rejoice in the LORD always! I will say it again: rejoice!

Philippians 4:4

The book of Philippians was written by a man who was imprisoned because of his faith in Jesus. He was writing to a group of Christians who were facing a lot of persecution for their beliefs. And even in these circumstances, he encouraged people to rejoice because of what they had found in Jesus.

Rejoice means to be glad or to take delight in. If you are following Jesus, there are always reasons to rejoice, no matter what the circumstances. And there is so much power in rejoicing, even in spite of stressful and difficult circumstances.

What do you have to be glad about or take delight in right now — today? Take some time to thank God for those things right now.

July 12

But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes, its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

In this passage, the prophet Jeremiah was comparing a man who puts his trust in God and a man who does not trust in God. The word picture seems to be a picture of abundance and thriving greenery versus barrenness and emptiness.

The point is that the world around you is uncertain and stressful and difficult. But when you put your trust in God to walk with you, to provide, to give you what you need, to transform you from the inside out, your confidence will never be misplaced. Even in difficult times, when the world is hostile, your root system goes down to the deep places, gaining strength from the One who will never fail.

Where does your confidence come from? Ask Jesus to help you to trust in him for life and peace during this difficult time.

July 21

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6

Walking with Jesus leads to a lifetime of transformation. When you have invited Jesus into your life and you have begun to listen to what he says about who you are and who you could be, he begins to change you from the inside out. You become more kind, loving, joyful, faithful, self-disciplined, peaceful, patient, good, and gentle. But that process does not happen overnight. Sometimes you find that you are still angry or upset or mean to someone else. Sometimes you will look for peace and not be able to find it.

But you can have confidence that Jesus is not done with you yet, and he will continue to transform you to make you more like him. In those difficult moments where you have forgotten who you are and who you belong to, just stop for a moment and invite Jesus into that pain and ugliness. Ask him to continue to transform you.

What pain or ugliness have you had in life today? Invite Jesus into it and ask him to continue to transform you and give you peace with God and with those around you.

July 20

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

Thessalonians is another letter written by a pastor to an early church. He encourages the church to do three things: be joyful, pray, and give thanks. A few days ago you read about rejoicing, and every day you are taking time to pray about where you are. Today let's focus on giving thanks.

The stress and pressure of the bar exam takes its toll, and it often makes you feel negative about everything. You feel bad about yourself, you feel bad about your abilities, and you feel angry and upset and irritated at everyone around you. One of the best ways to change your attitude and rise above your circumstances is to be thankful for what you have and who you are.

Write or draw as many things as you can think of that you have to be thankful for. Take some time to thank God for providing them for you.

July 13

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

One of the best ways to let go of anxiety is to turn over the things you are worried about to Jesus. Pray about what you are feeling, ask God for what you need, and let go of the stress by placing it in God's hands.

This is hard to do. No sooner will you pray and let things go, when you will find yourself worrying again. Praying, asking, and letting go is a discipline of the mind and the heart. First you have to trust that God is safe to rely on, and you have to be willing to choose to leave things there.

What things are you anxious about? Tell Jesus about them. Ask for what you need. Thank Jesus for what he has already provided and for what he is going to provide.

July 14

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

Followers of Jesus have a calling to participate in his work of rebuilding relationships in the world—relationships between God and people, between people and other people, between people and the earth, and people with themselves. God created you just the way that you are to be a part of this mission and purpose in the world. He has things that he's inviting you to do, and he will help you to do them well.

Knowing this can give you peace and confidence in difficult situations. If you are walking with Jesus and living out of who God created you to be, you will be right where you're supposed to be. God is with you, and he will help you to live out your mission right where you are today.

What good works do you think have been placed in front of you to do today? How about after you become an attorney? Ask for God's help to do those good things, both now and in the future.

July 19

The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.

Nahum 1:7

For thousands of years, those who follow Yahweh (the Hebrew name for God) have said that God is good and a refuge in times of trouble. Many people coming before you have known God, relied on him, and found him to be trustworthy.

He cares about you and you can rely on him. He will be your refuge if you seek shelter from the storms of life in him.

Take a few minutes to memorize this verse. Ask God to be your refuge in this difficult time.

July 18

He said, "In my distress I called to the LORD and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry."

Jonah 2:2

Jonah is the story of a prophet who ran away from God. This caused such a bad storm that he got thrown off the boat he was on and was in the belly of a fish for 3 days. When he was there, he cried out to God and was ultimately thrown out of the fish onto dry land. This verse is Jonah explaining that experience—when he was in the deepest and darkest place he could be, he called out to God and God heard him and responded.

No matter how far away from God you are, no matter if you ran away from him or found yourself in darkness for some other reason, you can be sure that he will hear you when you cry out to him. When you're overwhelmed by the information you're memorizing and feel like you are not going to make it, he will hear you when you pray.

Do you find yourself in darkness today? Call out to God and ask to be rescued from it.

July 15

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Jesus said these words to his followers when he was trying to explain to them that he was going to be killed so that a way would be made for people to have a relationship with God. He was trying to explain to them about the spiritual kingdom that he had been building. He was trying to explain that he would soon conquer death and sin in a way that was final.

He wanted them to know and he wants you to know that he has overcome death and sin and suffering and pain. He will give you peace—right now spiritual peace is available. Ultimately, true and total peace is coming. With his death, Jesus overcame evil. You can walk with him now and find the peace and joy of living with him daily knowing that ultimate peace is coming someday.

What does it mean to you to have peace with God right now? What does it mean that ultimate peace is coming? Talk to Jesus about these things.

July 16

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15

Yesterday you read about the spiritual peace with God that is available right now and about the ultimate peace that is coming someday. Allowing that peace to rule in your heart is the next step. It is not enough to know that you have peace with God. You need to take that peace into relationships with the people around you.

Colossians is a letter written by a pastor to one of the first Christian churches. Like all other people, they struggled in relating to each other in a loving, kind, and compassionate way. The pastor was telling them that, because they had found peace with God, that peace should affect their behavior toward one another. They were called to love and care for and be kind to one another. Because they knew where they stood with God, they could stop being selfish and greedy and mean to each other and simply love out of the love God had given them.

Do you have peace in your heart with God? If so, is that currently affecting your relationships with other people? Pray that God would allow his peace to fill you and give to the ability to be loving and kind and compassionate toward others.

July 17

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Ephesians 3:12

Sometimes it's hard to imagine why a God who created the universe would care to hear from you. Sometimes it's hard to imagine that he would care about whether you pass the bar exam, whether you're feeling well today, whether you're getting sleep, or whether you have what you need in life.

But Jesus came to earth to show you how much God cares about you. God is not a distant God, floating up there in the sky somewhere doing his own thing. He has, since the beginning of time, been involved and active in the affairs of mankind. He loves you so much that he sent Jesus here to show you who he is and how much he loves you. Because of that, you can have confidence that when you pray, God hears your prayers through Jesus. You can feel free to come to him at any time with any problem that you might have.

Jesus has made a way for you to bring all of your hurts and problems before God. Take some time to share your burdens with him right now.