

“May I . . . ?” or “Can I . . . ?” Which Is It this Merry Month of May?

Many of us have been taught that **can** refers to **ability** while **may** refers to **permission**. When we ask for permission to do something we ask because we have the **desire** to do whatever *it* is. And most likely we've asked a question using the wrong word and been corrected; maybe you, like me, have asked a teacher “Can I please go to the bathroom?” Only to have the teacher reply, “I don't know, *can* you?” Eventually I got it!

I'd like to ask you to honestly look at your calendars and your desires this month. We have a number of special opportunities this month here at LRPC and we would love each of you to participate as you're able. Only you, though, can tell if you *want to* participate! Allow me to annotate some of the opportunities and you can pray about your ability and desire to attend. If you find that you *can't* come to any of these things (a couple of which are regular Lord's Day gatherings), then please take some time to pray about how busy you are. If you look at what your church family is doing and decide you *don't want* to come to any of it, then please take some time to pray about that!

May 3rd, Thursday – National Day of Prayer: Times of earnest corporate prayer are found throughout Scripture and often the people are called to gather and pray together for certain urgent needs. In addition to the numerous times we see this in the national life of Israel in the Old Testament, we too often forget that the New Testament Church has a similar example and privilege as God's people. The exhortations to pray are very often given to congregations, not just individuals. Historically, our own tradition recognizes the right and duty of observing special days of fasting (characterized by solemn prayer and particular confession of sin) and thanksgiving (time spent rejoicing and singing psalms and hymns of praise). From 10 am until 8 pm we have an opportunity to join our hearts and prayers together with brothers and sisters in Christ in our own congregation and around the nation to pray for our country. To give thanks for the many blessings as well as confess our many sins. To understand the times and plead for God's mercy; to pray that He would send revival and that it would begin with me! Do you share the sense of urgency for spiritual awakening? Then please come and pray with us! Let us gather and pray for ourselves, our families and church, every other true church, our neighbors and communities, our city, state, and nation.

May 5th & 6th, Saturday & Sunday – LRPC Missions Conference: Here is an extra special chance to meet and interact with your overseas missionaries who are typically thousands of miles away as well as talk face to face with leaders of two local ministries that we have partnered with for many years. What a blessed opportunity to hear about what is happening in two very different cultures and lands (Europe and Asia) as well as right here in our back yard (Center for Pregnancy Concerns and Youth for Christ). And at the end of the afternoon, our very own Heavenly Hands puppet team will lead the closing program! The personal connections that happen at a conference like this in our own church are invaluable. What a difference it makes to our prayers and giving when we have met the missionary ourselves or heard about the ministry firsthand. By God's grace, perhaps it will open up a further opportunity to volunteer locally or even globally as God works in our hearts and lives. Lord willing, each one who attends will experience the Holy Spirit stirring us up to greater passion for proclaiming the Gospel to the lost and greater desire to see God glorified among all nations. Can you come out and

support your missionaries by your presence that Saturday? Will you? And if you don't normally attend Sunday School at 9:30, please make an exception and come out to hear what God is doing in Japan for that hour. Then Rev. Pete Mitchell will be preaching in the morning, and we will have a special congregational pot luck after worship.

May 13th, Sunday – *Mother's Day*: You may wonder why this cultural holiday is here; how is this an opportunity to worship and grow in grace? The cynic would say that it's just a 'Hallmark holiday', a money grab by card makers, flower shops, and restaurants. I would reply by observing that God has sovereignly, in His providence, given us mothers for our good and His glory. We have an opportunity to bless them especially on this day and if our mother is not a Christian, how fervently we pray that she would know the blessings of salvation. Because this cultural holiday falls on the Lord's Day, we have a special chance to engage our neighbors in a Gospel-oriented way as we share in this celebration. But as Christians who understand the reality of sin in this world we also have the important duty of grieving with those who grieve as well as rejoicing with those who rejoice (see Romans 12:15). We will do that this year by looking in the Bible at the need for lament and our ultimate hope in God as we cry out to Him. On this Sunday pray that we can offer real comfort and redemptive hope for those who are suffering as others are celebrating. And perhaps you can invite a family member or friend who needs something more than a Hallmark card.

May 27th, Sunday – *LRPC's Annual Remembrance Sunday*: Over the past several years we have paused to remember the saints who have gone before us from our own church family in the previous year. Our memorial booklet allows us not just to remember them but to thank God again for them and their service. The prayer of this time is that we who are still here would among other things recognize first of all our own mortality and the need to prepare for eternity ("Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" Ps. 90:12 NIV). Secondly, we want to understand the importance of fighting the good fight, finishing the race, and keeping the faith ("... the time of my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearing" 2 Tim. 4:6b-8 NIV). Neither the last thing (we don't have time to list all the ways I hope God works in our hearts by this exercise) not the least thing is to look around and celebrate the sure and certain hope of heaven all who believe have! And we should celebrate that reality because it is based not on what we have done or promise to do for God but on what God has done for us! The Gospel frees us from the bondage of sin and the futility of salvation by our own good works. The Gospel frees us to serve God wholeheartedly in whatever we do, wherever we are, and however young or old we might be. This Sunday remembrance hopefully helps us be intentional in how we live every day of our lives and opens our eyes that we might serve and love one another better.

These four occasions to worship and work together as a church will have to suffice for the purposes of this article. I don't have time to encourage at least a modicum of attention to the traditional church calendar which on **May 10th** this year celebrates **Ascension Day**—when the Risen Lord Jesus Christ visibly and bodily was taken up into heaven forty days after his resurrection (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:3 & 9). Or **Pentecost Sunday (5/20/18)** when the Church praises God for pouring out the Holy Spirit as the

Father had promised and the believers waited and prayed (Acts 1:4-5, 14; 2:1-39). Neither is there time or space to enumerate the regular monthly opportunities to fellowship and grow together in various small groups. I wish you would come to our 4th Sunday evening time of prayer and praise; **May 27th at 7:00 pm** we will have a *Hymn Sing*, and what a blessing these times have been for those who can and will attend. Then there is the major American holiday on **Monday, May 28th – Memorial Day** which traditionally has been a solemn civic occasion but more recently seems to have become simply a way to start some summer activities. How does your Christian faith take this opportunity within the public square to share Gospel convictions? While we mustn't mindlessly baptize the flag, surely Scripture gives us guidance on how to live in this world even as we are citizens of heaven! Surely obedience by God's grace to the greatest commandment—to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength (see Mark 12:29-30) is the only way, again by God's grace, to fulfill the second one: to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mk. 12:31). That love of God and others motivates us to tell them about Jesus! Do you have the ability to look for ways and times to share the Good News? Do you desire to be used by God as His witness, testifying before others to His saving grace?

I hope at the beginning of this month of May in the year of our Lord 2018 that you will ask for God's help to give you the ability to serve Him and enjoy Him as well as the desire to do so! Maybe you will spend a few minutes looking ahead and identifying opportunities, then come to God in prayer and ask "Please, can I . . . ?" and also ask, "God please, may I . . . ?"

Please God, show us how to use our time wisely and well for your glory and the blessing of others. Please Lord, help us to see each day as a gift which we must steward and for which we must give account.

May He bless us richly for His own Name's sake,

Pastor Milligan