

HOPE UMC SUMMER OF PRAYER 2017

WEEK #4

Supplies You May Want to Use

- ❖ Bible
- ❖ Prayer candle and lighter
- ❖ Pen, pencils, art supplies
- ❖ Journal or computer on which to write
- ❖ Reading glasses
- ❖ Church and friend/family directory
- ❖ Comfortable pillow or chair

THIS WEEK BEGINS THE SECOND HALF OF YOUR PRAYER JOURNEY! How is it going? Do you find some prayers/scripture interest you more than others? Are you able to pray every day? The good news is that these prayers can be used anywhere, any time. Or, maybe you want to make some of your own! As we begin this second half, may you find prayer to be more integral in your daily life.

You are still encouraged, as part of the Hope faith community, to include the Hope prayer in your daily activities. This prayer is from the Hope for the Future Campaign, with some slight alterations:

HOPE PRAYER: Gracious God, we are blessed and we are grateful... and still we need. We come to you seeking guidance and wisdom as we go forward with our faith community, Hope. Give us the insight to understand your desires for us. Give us the faith to trust your will. Give us the realization that it is our responsibility to do our part to make this work and worship pleasing to you. Give us hope for the future. With confidence in your love and gratitude in our hearts, we pray in Jesus name. Amen!

PRAY EACH DAY

Each day on this journey you will find a scripture and a prayer. Here is an example of arranging this prayer time:

- Begin your time by going to a place you have designated for prayer and get comfortable
- Light a candle to welcome Jesus into your prayer time.
- Take some deep breaths and become fully present in this time with God.
- Read the scripture for the day through slowly – what words or lines speak to you? Read the scripture again and then underline or write down in your journal those words that speak to you. Read another Bible interpretation if you would like to understand more.
- Read the insights for the day, then prepare yourself for prayer.
- Begin your prayer time with the daily prayer given. Then, if you feel you want to continue with your prayer, you can pray for your family, friends, yourself, your faith community – prayers of thanksgiving, of concerns, leaving time to listen to God's answers.
- When you are finished, take a deep breath and give thanks for this day in your life.

Week 4: Monday – Your Whole Self

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service.

² Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

We often think of our body, soul, mind and emotions as separate things, but they are not. We try to pray when we are not connected to what we are doing, just as when we exercise we don't think that is connected to our emotions at the time. But it is ALL CONNECTED as science and spiritual teachings have greed over the last thousand years.

In our spiritual lives we need to connect all of these areas of our lives. We connect them through our faith in God as our scripture indicates. Therefore, today is a great day to try to do that through prayer. Prayer allows us to detach from our daily lists and routines and "what-ifs" by focusing us on God and bringing together ALL that we are. It's an exercise, just as running or swimming or any physical exercise.

Let's try prayer exercise! As you sit to pray ask God to help you clear your mind of the daily items running through your thoughts, to let go of the disappointments, worries and false actions that have collected in you. Then start moving, big moves or small, it's up to you, but as you move, keep focused on God and feel your breath go in and out. As we don on Sundays, inhale the wonder of God, exhale the tension in your body, the old ideas, concerns, frustrations.

Then pick up the pace. Whether you just move your arms or you move your whole body, move a little faster. As you do, ask Jesus to come into you to heal you and help clear your thoughts. As you exhale let go of your internal clutter, let your mind concentrate on your faith, your relationship with Jesus. You can even use a short scripture or phrase as you breathe: INHALE and say "The Lord my God is with me," then EXHALE and say "wherever I go."

Prayer

Oh, God, let my body be a holy temple for your Spirit. Help me to be more aware of my body today and every day as I live in my faith. Help me to take the time to connect ALL parts of me before you, and I ask that you help me each day to find moments when I am aware of you and your kindness to me? Thank you! Amen.

Week 4: Tuesday – Remembering Your Baptism

Scripture: Matthew 3:11-12

¹¹ I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives. The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out."

These words are from John as he was baptizing people in the Jordan River. He was talking about Jesus coming and baptizing us all with a fire that cannot be put out, and the Holy Spirit who will be with us always, unlike the water with which John baptized all who came to him.

Many of us do not remember our baptism as we went through this sacrament as infants. We cannot remember the words said or the feeling of the water on us. Those who are baptized as adults do carry those memories with them. But isn't it interesting that we continue to baptize as John did – with water? That is because we are all human! We use water as the symbol of the Holy Spirit coming upon us as we become part of the body of Christ. It's even more interesting that water is used for the fire of the Holy Spirit but it is a physical reminder that something has changed, something is different within us.

When we are blessed to take part in a baptism at church we are called to remember our baptism and renew the vows that were taken at that time. It is always good to be reminded that Christ is the one who is bringing us into the faith family, and we vow to be part of the body. We remember that God makes us new.

Today, take time to remember your baptism into the body of Christ, and if you were confirmed in that baptism. What was it like to go through this sacred experience? What does it mean to you now? Take time to sit in silence and think about what it means to be part of this faith and where you have failed God since that time. Then, go to the sink and turn on the water. Let it flow and as it does, think of what frightens you or fills you with regrets. Ask God to forgive you for each, then put your hands under the water and let all of those things be carried away with the water. Remember your baptism.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for forgiving me every day and continuing to make me a new creation. Thank you that I continue to be your child, despite all that I do! I am pardoned by your mercy and saved through Christ. Thank you! Amen.

Week 4: Wednesday – Joy in Life

Scripture: Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶ I say be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires. ¹⁷ A person's selfish desires are set against the Spirit, and the Spirit is set against one's selfish desires. They are opposed to each other, so you shouldn't do whatever you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are being led by the Spirit, you aren't under the Law. ¹⁹ The actions that are produced by selfish motives are obvious, since they include sexual immorality, moral corruption, doing whatever feels good, ²⁰ idolatry, drug use and casting spells, hate, fighting, obsession, losing your temper, competitive opposition, conflict, selfishness, group rivalry, ²¹ jealousy, drunkenness, partying, and other things like that. I warn you as I have already warned you, that those who do these kinds of things won't inherit God's kingdom.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit. ²⁶ Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other.

Our lives are filled with rushing from one moment to another, not taking time to enjoy or even acknowledge that great things that happen to us. We feel as if we don't have time – there's so much more to do! This is not how God calls us to live our lives. Jesus calls us into deep, abundant lives that include experiencing joy.

Can you remember a great joy in your life? Not just something fleeting but a deep joy that feels like a force of nature. Things like falling in love, having a child, watching a friend be baptized. As our relationship with God deepens so too does our ability to recognize and celebrate profound joy in our lives. As we say "Yes, God, I am yours", we can slow down because we know God is with us. And when we do we can grow joy in our lives as we grow our faith. This deep joy we feel is one of the fruits of the Spirit and comes from a deeper, more direct relationship with God.

Today, as you take time to pray, take time to thank God for the joy in your life. Then, invite God to help you find a deeper relationship with the Holy Trinity. Ask God to come closer when you are ready to make that commitment.

Prayer:

God, Christ, Holy Spirit, please come close to me and help me to get to know you better. Help me to rely on You more so I can find joy in my life. I ask for your Spirit and the gift of joy that You bring. Amen.

Week 4: Thursday – The Weight of our Worries

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I’m gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. ³⁰ My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.”

Have you read this scripture before? It reminds us that we all carry heavy loads until we give them to Jesus. The best way to think of our burdens is rocks. Like rocks, some burdens are small and don’t weigh much, but others are big and heavy and hard to hold. When all of the rocks are put together we may find an impressive pile and a massive weight!

Why don’t you try it? Get a backpack and go outside (or to the beach) where there are many sizes of rocks. Sit quietly a moment and think of what burdens you carry. As you name them, pick up a rock, the size of which correlates to the size of its weight on you, and put it in the backpack. Take some time to be honest and claim your burdens.

Then pick up the backpack. Are you surprised at how heavy it is? Or is it lighter than expected? Were you surprised at what you named as burdens?

Now, as you pray, take the rocks out, one by one, and give those burdens to Christ. Let go of them and let your faith free you from their weight and the fear of what they might bring to your life. When you’re finished pray the prayer below:

Prayer

Jesus, help me to trust that you are with me every step of my day and help me to hand these burdens to you so I can be free to live my life abundantly and fearlessly. Here are my burdens – I give them to you and take on your yoke of faith. Thank you! Amen.

Week 4: Friday – Wisdom of the Elders

Scripture: Deuteronomy 34:1-7

Then Moses hiked up from the Moabite plains to Mount Nebo, the peak of the Pisgah slope, which faces Jericho. The Lord showed him the whole land: the Gilead region as far as Dan's territory;² all the parts belonging to Naphtali along with the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as the entirety of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea;³ also the arid southern plain, and the plain—including the Jericho Valley, Palm City—as far as Zoar.

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses: "This is the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I promised: 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have shown it to you with your own eyes; however, you will not cross over into it."

⁵ Then Moses, the Lord's servant, died—right there in the land of Moab, according to the Lord's command. ⁶ The Lord buried him in a valley in Moabite country across from Beth-peor. Even now, no one knows where Moses' grave is. ⁷ Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eyesight wasn't impaired, and his vigor hadn't diminished a bit.

It is interesting to note that God set many important things in motion through people who were very old and perhaps not considered in their prime. This scripture assures us that Moses, as he finished bringing the Israelites to the promised land was 120 years old and still vigorous. There was no thought by God that Moses couldn't do the job because he was older.

The same thing is true of Abraham and Sarah. They were given a son when they were way over the age of child-bearing and yet Isaac was born to produce the family of God that would be more numerous than grains of sand. Elizabeth also bore a child long past child-bearing years. This was John who would prepare the world for the coming of Jesus! God had no problem with age at all, respected and honored them with some of the most important part of God's plan.

Older people today are sometimes dismissed in our culture. As we grow older we run into physical and mental issues that can cause problems but it does not EVER diminish who we are as children of God! Membership in God's family and in God's plan has no age limit! You are invited to pray for all of the older adults in your family, church, friends, daily life. Pray that they get the respect they deserve as children of God and as wise people with life experience. And, if you know someone whose God-given talents are not being used because of age, pray for them (and tell your pastor). Each one of us is a gift from God no matter what age.

Prayer

Holy One, you have told us you created us and we are all your children. Help us to look at one another in that way and not see age or infirmity but see wisdom and experience. Be with those of us who are growing older and experiencing physical or mental issues and help them know they are your cherished members of the family of God. Amen.

Week 4: Saturday – House Prayer Walk

Scripture: Mar 6:1-5

Jesus left that place and came to his hometown. His disciples followed him. ² On the Sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard him were surprised. “Where did this man get all this? What’s this wisdom he’s been given? What about the powerful acts accomplished through him? ³ Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t he Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” They were repulsed by him and fell into sin.

⁴ Jesus said to them, “Prophets are honored everywhere except in their own hometowns, among their relatives, and in their own households.” ⁵ He was unable to do any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ He was appalled by their disbelief.

Isn't it interesting that it's so much harder to get respect and have relationships in the places where we grow up? My family finds the whole notion of me as a pastor amusing because they have seen me through so many phases of my life. They know it is my calling and yet it's never the same talking with them as with strangers who have no preconceived notions. The same is true about praying. It's much easier to pray with new people than with family or even faith community members. Somehow that gets too personal, too uncomfortable.

How do we counteract this? By beginning at home! Each of us needs to be comfortable in our own home, then our neighborhood, faith community, etc. I invite you to begin by taking a prayer walk through your home. Walk through your house stopping to pray in each room. Pray for your children in their room, bless their beds, their computers. Pray for your spouse and your relationship in your bedroom, or pray for yourself by blessing your closet and dresser. Bless your dining room and kitchen for the meals for the body, bless the furnace, the door frames. As you do this you are invited to pray something such as “Jesus, help us to love one another and to live through you.”

If you are feeling ready, pray for the home of your neighbor or even the person you would like to invite to church. Bless their house as you have blessed your own.

Prayer:

Gracious God, let this home become a place where you live more deeply. Help us to change, to become the family we are in You. Thank you, God, for the blessings of this home. Amen.

Week 4: Sunday – Favorite Scripture

Do you have a favorite scripture, a Bible passage that connects deeply with you? If so, pull it out today and explore it once again. One way to do that is to read it out loud a couple of times and see what words or phrases reach you. Why do they connect with you? Go deeper to explore why this passage is a favorite. Another is to read the same passage in a couple of different Bible interpretations. This will help to decide what captures you.

If you don't have a favorite, pick up a Bible! It may seem overwhelming but try it this way. Open it up to a random page and read what's there. Or, begin by reading the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke or John – where the story of Jesus comes alive. Or, go to the Psalms and see what they say to you.

Either way, spend some time today with scripture. There is so much there to help us live faithful lives as well as understanding God more deeply. Scripture also brings up many questions. Find a faith friend sometime and discuss what questions your scripture reading has brought up to you.

My favorite? It is Psalm 51:

Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love! Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion! ² Wash me completely clean of my guilt; purify me from my sin! ³ Because I know my wrongdoings, my sin is always right in front of me. ⁴ I've sinned against you—you alone. I've committed evil in your sight. That's why you are justified when you render your verdict, completely correct when you issue your judgment. ⁶ And yes, you want truth in the most hidden places; you teach me wisdom in the most secret space.^[a]

⁷ Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and celebration again; let the bones you crushed rejoice once more. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins; wipe away all my guilty deeds! ¹⁰ Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me! ¹¹ Please don't throw me out of your presence; please don't take your holy spirit away from me. ¹² Return the joy of your salvation to me and sustain me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach wrongdoers your ways, and sinners will come back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from violence, God, God of my salvation, so that my tongue can sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵ Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise. ¹⁶ You don't want sacrifices. If I gave an entirely burned offering, you wouldn't be pleased. ¹⁷ A broken spirit is my sacrifice, God. You won't despise a heart, God, that is broken and crushed.

Prayer:

Create in us clean hearts, God, and let us revel in the knowledge you provide in scriptures. You bring us forgiveness, blessings, joy and justice. Help us to work to pass those on to all in this world as we work toward your transformation. Amen.