

HOPE UMC SUMMER OF PRAYER 2017

WEEK #5

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

We have two more weeks left of this prayer journey! As we begin this week you are encouraged to try something new in prayer, to stretch yourself. Maybe you want to write your own prayer or go walk a labyrinth to pray (there are several close by!) or take your prayer to another location. The good news is that these prayers go with you anywhere! Or, think about taking the step to pray with someone else and start them on their own prayer journey. Whatever you do in God's name will keep making your connection strong.

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 5: Monday – Transformation

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

¹⁷ The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

We continue to think that change is an event when, in fact, it is a continuing process! Just as each day we grow older and our bodies and minds change, so too does everyone around us and every part of God's creation. We have seasons where we expect things to change, but we never know exactly how they will change. That is true also of our experience of growing older.

But the fact of the matter is transformation cannot happen without change! In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he makes it clear that through our faith and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are indeed being transformed "from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. That is what we strive for in our faith, right?

Why, then, is it so hard to accept change in our churches, our family members, our world? Every day we are all changing which means that ALL of who we are as human beings is continually changing. What we as people of faith understand is that this change can lead to wondrous transformation if we believe and embrace it. Our prayer journey is helping us to understand more about this process of change and transformation because it brings us closer to God and to one another.

If we embrace change as transformation into the image of God's glory how can it be anything but a wondrous, mysterious, joyous process? We are human and we cling to what we know and the fear of what we don't, but if we can let go what wonders await us in God's transformation?

Prayer

It's not that we don't want to change, God, it's just that change is really hard; the challenges of the world threaten to overwhelm us, the struggles of living each day come close to being too much, and so we are tempted to grab the quick-fix, the easy solution, and inevitably, we are disappointed. So we pray, reach into our hearts with courage and hope, to embrace the tough transformations, to make the real and lasting changes, to seek the truly good answers; for the sake of our families and communities, our countries and our continents, our people and our planet, for the sake of our very selves; May we find together and alone, the strength to climb the mountain and see your glory; and then to walk to the cross, through the pain, until we know the joy and glory of resurrection. (John Van de Laar)

Week 5: Tuesday – Light of the World

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ *You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden.* ¹⁵ *Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house.* ¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.*

This scripture always puts to mind the song “This Little Light of Mine” – *This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.* We think of Jesus as the light that came into a darkened world full of despair, distress and disconnection. That is what we celebrate at Christmas – the light that God sent into the cold, dark world in the form of a vulnerable, tiny baby. We expect Jesus to be the light in our world and so he is -

When we let him be that light! We need to regularly invite Jesus' light into our lives and into ourselves. Any time you need to see Jesus in your life, light a candle! When we light a candle we are inviting Jesus into our prayer time, meeting, any gathering. Feel free to do so now before you finish the rest of this prayer time.

But that light of Jesus is not just for us. As his disciples we are called to shine that light on others so they can see what it means not only to follow Jesus but to be part of the light in the world. We are not to hide our light under a bushel, NO!, but to shine it into the darkest corners of our lives and our world so that we can be an agent of transformation in God's world.

Sit back and close your eyes. Feel the Spirit of the Lord as light within you illuminating your heart, your mind. Ask Jesus to give you strength and courage to keep his light shining within you and to help you to shine that light on others to help them experience the light and power of Jesus' love. Ask God to let others see the light of Christ in you and help you to shine it so others can see Jesus, the light of the world.

Prayer

Spirit of God, please shine on me. Heal me. Help me to hand you anything in my life that keeps me from being available to you and from shining your light out into the world. Please use me to be Jesus' love and light to the people I meet today. Amen.

Week 5: Wednesday – Pack Nothing for the Trip

Scripture: Luke 9:1-6

Jesus called the Twelve together and he gave them power and authority over all demons and to heal sicknesses. 2 He sent them out to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal the sick. 3 He told them, "Take nothing for the journey—no walking stick, no bag, no bread, no money, not even an extra shirt. 4 Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. 5 Wherever they don't welcome you, as you leave that city, shake the dust off your feet as a witness against them." 6 They departed and went through the villages proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

How does this passage make you feel? Jesus sends out his disciples telling them to take nothing for the journey, but to get what they need as they go. Talk about faith! They had to have it to go out like that! But even more Jesus gave the disciples *power and authority over all demons and to heal sicknesses*. When you read that, do you assume this power and authority was given only to the 12?

In the gospel of John, chapter 14 we are told we will be able to do greater miracles because God will send us the Holy Spirit! We will be able to do greater miracles than the disciples sent out by Jesus? What does that look like? Do we believe we have that kind of power and authority today? If so, how would we use it? Miracles can be big or small and apply to one person or many.

Jesus offers us lives of tremendous spiritual power and authority – NOW. Today he still tells us not to wait until the right time, or for when you are financially able, or when the kids are grown, but to drop everything and allow Jesus to use us in the world today. Dropping everything to do God's work can be as simple as running across the street to comfort a neighbor who is grieving or as complex as leaving everything behind and becoming a missionary. The miracles of Jesus are both big and small, and we are given the power and authority to do them in Jesus name.

Sit for a moment in silence with Christ and see what is blocking your way from accepting his offer of a life of spiritual power. What barriers are you using to fence Christ out, to keep him at a safe distance? What would it look like, feel like if you accepted the power and authority being offered?

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for helping me to see what I'm using to block your power in my life. Help me to give it to you so I can go into this world and use it to help others see your light and love. Help me to understand I don't need to fear this power but I do need to use it to help others. Please help me continue to grow into a mature life with you. Amen.

Week 5: Thursday – Courage to Be All We Can Be

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 28:20

“Be strong and courageous,” David said to his son Solomon. “Get to work. Don’t be afraid or discouraged, because the LORD God, my God, is with you. He’ll neither let you down nor leave you before all the work for the service of the LORD’s temple is done.

What would happen in your life if you feared nothing? What would that change? Yesterday we talked about accepting the power and authority Jesus gives us. Would that also change if we had nothing to fear?

All through scriptures we are reminded that fear is what keeps us from a deeper relationship with God and with one another. Today’s scripture is from the Older Testament, even before Jesus came to free us from fear. David is talking to his son, reminding him that God is ALWAYS with him and will not let him down. Does that sound familiar? It might since this is the message through the entire New Testament!

We study, worship and pray about Jesus – his life, his death and his resurrection. As Christians we understand that Jesus came to be an example to us of God’s love, mercy, forgiveness. Jesus also came to allow humanity to start over with a clean slate – he died and rose again so that death was no longer victorious and fear no longer held us captive. We know there is life eternal, something beyond this world. But we still have trouble letting go of our fear.

When we hold on to the reins of our life it is much easier for fear to enter into daily life. If we give our concerns, our burdens to God, and know that God is always with us, then we should be able to live without fear making our decisions. Imagine our world if we didn’t fear the person down the street because they are different or the country on the other side of the world because we don’t understand their customs. If we didn’t have fear we could reach out, learn about one another and make the transformation God is calling us to make.

Take a moment with God. Talk about the fears in your life and what it might take to live fear-free or with less fear. Take time to listen for an answer. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to live without fear?

Prayer

The Ones We Long For

In a world that too easily wounds and breaks, we long for those who will heal and restore; In a world that too easily divides and dissects, we long for those who will unify and interweave; In a world that too easily excludes and judges, we long for those who will include and understand; And in a world where your call, O God, can still be heard, we long for the courage to answer, and to be the ones we long for. Amen. (John Van de Laar)

Week 5: Friday – Make a Joyful Noise

Scripture: Psalm 100

Shout triumphantly to the LORD, all the earth!

² *Serve the LORD with celebration!*

Come before him with shouts of joy!

³ *Know that the LORD is God—*

he made us; we belong to him.^[a]

We are his people,

the sheep of his own pasture.

⁴ *Enter his gates with thanks;*

enter his courtyards with praise!

Thank him! Bless his name!

⁵ *Because the LORD is good,*

his loyal love lasts forever;

his faithfulness lasts generation after generation.

Just reading this psalm makes you want to sing, to dance! It is a song of thanksgiving and it reminds us that our God wants us to have joy and abundance and love in our life. Again we see that God will be with us always and *his faithfulness lasts generation after generation*. When we let go and give thanks we can find joy all around us. That doesn't mean the difficulties and concerns go away – it means that we find what we want to find when we look around.

If you listen to the news sometimes it is very hard to remember how much love and joy there is in the world. We hear about problems and the natural disasters, politics and shootings. It's sometimes very hard to see the joy and the love, but it's there! Almost every story of disaster also includes stories of heroism where despite the problems people jump in to help strangers.

The stories we don't hear are about the everyday love shown by one person to another. Whether it's grabbing a runaway dog so it is not injured in the street or babysitting your grandchildren for no reason or picking flowers for your elderly neighbors, there is love all around and joy in the faces of those who experience it. When we look for joy we find it. Kind of like those jars we got at the beginning of the year to hold our events for the year so we can look back at the end of the year to see all of the great things we have done. We need to look for joy if we want to find it!

And, we know that when we read (or hear or see) something joyous like Psalm 100 it's hard to feel anything but the hopeful joy that comes with our faith. Take a moment to write down where you experienced joy this week and where you gave joy to others.

Prayer

God we thank you for the joy and the love you give to us! Thank you for the promise that nothing can separate us from you. And thank you for the people in my life – for the joy I find when I am with them and the love I give when I can. Amen.

Week 5: Saturday – A Taste of Psalms

This summer at Hope we are getting a Taste of Psalms – learning about this wondrous book of the Bible and its songs of hope, songs of lament, and the various ways to connect with God through them. (August 2nd at 5:30 p.m. is the next meeting!) There is something for everyone in the Psalms.

Today you are invited to explore this book of the Older Testament. There are 150 psalms from which to choose! There are a couple below to help you get a taste of the variety, but you are invited to explore these songs/poems at your leisure. Then, in your time with God, read one aloud that fits your current feelings.

PSALM 46

God is our refuge and strength, a help always near in times of great trouble. ² That's why we won't be afraid when the world falls apart, when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea, when its waters roar and rage, when the mountains shake because of its surging waves. Selah

⁴ There is a river whose streams gladden God's city, the holiest dwelling of the Most High. ⁵ God is in that city. It will never crumble. God will help it when morning dawns. ⁶ Nations roar; kingdoms crumble. God utters his voice; the earth melts. ⁷ The LORD of heavenly forces is with us! The God of Jacob is our place of safety. Selah

⁸ Come, see the LORD's deeds, what devastation he has imposed on the earth—⁹bringing wars to an end in every corner of the world, breaking the bow and shattering the spear, burning chariots with fire. ¹⁰ "That's enough! Now know that I am God! I am exalted among all nations; I am exalted throughout the world!" ¹¹ The LORD of heavenly forces is with us! The God of Jacob is our place of safety. Selah

PSALM 82

God takes his stand in the divine council; he gives judgment among the gods: ² "How long will you judge unjustly by granting favor to the wicked? Selah

³ Give justice to the lowly and the orphan; maintain the right of the poor and the destitute!

⁴ Rescue the lowly and the needy. Deliver them from the power of the wicked! ⁵ They don't know; they don't understand; they wander around in the dark. All the earth's foundations shake.

⁶ I hereby declare, "You are gods, children of the Most High—all of you!" ⁷ But you will die like mortals; you will fall down like any prince." ⁸ Rise up, God! Judge the earth because you hold all nations in your possession!

Prayer:

Blessed God, your words fill me with hope. But sometimes I need words that also express my distress, my need. Thank you for giving us the Psalms that hold all of our human emotions. Your word lights my path on this faith journey. Thank you! Amen.

Week 5: Sunday – Worship and Practice

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:13-16

¹³ *Until I arrive, pay attention to public reading, preaching, and teaching.* ¹⁴ *Don't neglect the spiritual gift in you that was given through prophecy when the elders laid hands on you.*

¹⁵ *Practice these things, and live by them so that your progress will be visible to all.* ¹⁶ *Focus on working on your own development and on what you teach. If you do this, you will save yourself and those who hear you.*

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, recognized that we are striving for perfection in our faith life every single day of our lives. He also acknowledged that we will not reach perfection until we meet Jesus face to face. So what do we do to strive toward perfection in our relationship with God and one another?

The Apostle Paul reminds us that it is important to attend to our spiritual practices. As he puts it, *pay attention to public reading, preaching, and teaching*. These are spiritual practices as much as praying or journaling or reading daily devotions or walking a labyrinth. The “public” part of these practices is worship, not time by oneself but worship with others on the faith journey. Paul is reminding us that we cannot be faithful alone while we wait for Jesus’ return, but we must enter into a faith community and pay attention to the spiritual practices there as well as the ones we do on our own.

When you are in worship at church, what is it you find most inspiring? Is there something you would like to see in worship that isn't there? If you cannot get to church to worship, do you find others with whom you can gather and praise God? Worshipping together is an experience we all need to keep us on the path of faith.

And don't forget your spiritual practices – you're engaged in one right now on our prayer journey! There are many practices to help us get to know God better and to understand ourselves as God sees us. Writing, praying, worship, Bible study, walking, fasting, are all ways to connect spiritually with God. They are practices meant to be undertaken regularly, not as a burden but as a joy!

Prayer:

O God, under the shadow of your wings let us experience hope. You support us through all of our lives, when we are troubled and when we are filled with joy. Thank you! Help us to remember to share our worship with others and to continue our spiritual practices even when we feel lost and alone. You are always with us and we sing your praises! Amen.

FAVORITE PRAYERS

Below are a couple of prayers you have provided to share. It is always wonderful to share our practices and prayers.

Prayer upon rising to a new day:

*Life has begun again, Father.
You have given me another day of grace
Another day to live:
 to speak to someone
 to touch something
 to ask for something
 to take something
 to give something*

*Whatever I made of this day,
Whatever I become this day,
I put in your hands.
Amen.*

Geoff Popham shared this prayer - a variation on a pastoral prayer he first heard back when he was a teenager growing up at Hennepin Avenue UMC:

If there is...

*Help me, Lord, to remember those who I have not remembered or cared for as I should
If there is a child who needs my love or attention in a special way, help me to freely give it
If there is an older person, who through my inattention has felt lonely or deserted, help me
stand, again, close
If there is someone going through deep, trouble water who could find in me a rock to cling to,
show me a way to be that rock
If there is a friend or neighbor nearby that I have failed to welcome, may I reach out my hand
If there is someone whom I love who is far away, let a card or telephone call be a reminder that
I care
Make, somehow, real to me
The pain of others that I do not feel
The anxiety of others that does not gnaw at me
The sorrow of others that my happiness ignores
And
The weakness of others that my strength does not know
In Jesus name,
Amen*