

Some thoughts to start...

Engaging in the practice of faith is not always easy. For some people, sitting down and having an open, in-depth chat with God is not difficult. For many of us, however, it is.

What we're trying to do here is to give people a resource – to help them in their thinking about scripture, and in the practice of personal prayer.

Everything written here is simply a suggestion. If you find other practices more helpful, please use them!

Find a bible (or go to <http://bible.oremus.org/>) and head to a place you won't be disturbed. Before opening up your bible, take a few moments to sit quietly. In that quiet moment you might want to say to God, "What would you like me to hear today?"

Read each of the scriptures. Some people prefer to read silently, while others find it more helpful to read out loud. Take a few moments to reflect on what you've heard. (If you would like, the 'reflection' section is there to help start you off.)

Finally, take a few moments to talk with God. The printed prayer is there as a guide, but there may be other things you want to share with God. Chat, as openly and honestly as you can. Then, through the day, listen for God's response.

This resource was initiated by St. Andrew's Haney United Church, Maple Ridge, BC.

The suggested scripture readings are based on the Consultation on Common Text's *Daily Lectionary*.

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ST. ANDREW'S HANEY UNITED CHURCH

Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

(February 12th to 17th, 2007)

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Monday

Scripture:

- 2 Kings 24.18 - 25.21
- Psalm 120
- 1 Corinthians 15.20-34

Reflection:

"King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon laid siege to the city of Jerusalem..." so the final chapter of 2 Kings tells the story of the fall of Jerusalem, the murder of the last king of an independent Judah, the destruction of the temple and the murder or exile of all the leaders of the nation. Worse, it describes this as the result of God's anger. The story describes loss and fear and worse yet – abandonment -the terrible loneliness of being abandoned by God.

Yet this story would not have been told at all if that were true. For this story was told by those who survived and those who returned, those who were resurrected as a people and a nation, who rebuilt a temple and who encountered God again. Paul also calls people to remember resurrection. Although the might of nations is against them, they need not be hopeless, that though they may die, there is yet much to live for in the meantime, a life which is worth dying for. For God will destroy even kings, and yet bring the fearful and the lowly to abundance of life.

Prayer:

My God, do not abandon me,
Do not leave unfinished
the work of your hands.
For I have much to offer life,
All those things which you made me for
I desire to do.
The peace you call me to I desire to share.
The love you offer to me I desire to live.

I pray today for _____, friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace,
with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Tuesday

Scripture:

- Ezra 1.1-11
- Psalm 120
- 2 Corinthians 1.12-19

Reflection:

"Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem." So King Cyrus of Persia, announces that the exile of the Jews is at an end. Cyrus acknowledges that it is the God of Israel, not the god of Persia, who has given him power over the nations. Like yesterday's reading, this story is told on two scales. There is the grand story, the announcement of a King - the proclamation of God's favour. But on a small and touching scale are also the stories of people. The reading from 2 Kings spoke of terror and fear. Ezra's story is told years later. When Cyrus releases the people of Judah to return, their neighbours assist them, giving them gold & silver and goods & gifts.

In this story I regain my hope for God's people in the modern middle eastern countries. Surely when the captives were marched to Persia, they never imagined that a generation or so later, their Persian neighbours would give them gifts to return to their homes and to rebuild a temple. I imagine tearful farewells, women who had raised children together saying goodbye, men who had built homes and communities in a strange land offering shouts of encouragement. Through God, all is possible.

Prayer:

Near God of neighbours, hear my prayer for peace, Take my promise to work for peace among my neighbours. turn it into a life of joy! When I am fearful and discouraged remind me that through you, even the relationships born of war, can be turned to your purposes as people become neighbours despite their fear.

Today I pray for _____ friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace,
with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Jeremiah 22.11-17
- Psalm 120
- Luke 5.37-52

Reflection:

"Woe to him who builds his house through unrighteousness." We often talk about metaphor in the bible, and it would be easy to talk about this "house" being a metaphor for the spiritual house we make for ourselves. But these prophetic passages are real - concrete and specific. Jeremiah names the ways houses are built – actual houses, with expensive wood and large rooms, while the neighbours work for nothing. His words describe a specific type of house, a design as if he were standing in the room. He compares the one building the house with the father who did justice and judged the cause of the poor and the needy.

Luke's story shows Jesus deliberately insulting his host by refusing to wash before the meal. Why should he wash, he implies, when his hosts are dirty? They neglect justice, burden the poor, kill the prophets. Jesus is abrupt, harsh and rude. We know that Jesus likely never met a Pharisee – a group that sprang up after his death. But Luke nevertheless has Jesus speak to Pharisees, the liberals of their day, the ones who spoke out for the poor but, according to Luke, did not act as they spoke. It would be too easy to say Jesus is speaking of other people. In fact, Jesus stands in our own houses - sometimes speaking harshly about the injustice which we build in to our lives.

Prayer:

God of Life and Love, help me to be aware of who I am and remind me that your Spirit and my spirit are bound in relationship. Help me to know and define myself, so that I need not fear the diversity around me, but rather embrace it as an expression of your wondrous Creation.

Thursday

Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 9.1-5
- Psalm 99
- Acts 3.11-16

Reflection:

Says Deuteronomy of the battle between the Israelites and the Anakim, "do not say 'it is because of your own righteousness' it is because of the wickedness of these nations". I find it difficult in this time of war and the destruction of nations to read these words. Is it because of their wickedness that nations are destroyed? Is destruction a necessary part of God's promise? Since ancient Hebrew did not use quotation marks, it's hard to know where the quotation begins and ends. Perhaps we are not supposed to count ourselves as righteous or others as evil, simply because the battle goes our way. The battle is not what counts, it's the promise. The promises of God take place and work out over generations, not one battle. Whether the battle is won or lost, the work of God continues.

Acts tells the story of Peter, who asks in Jesus name for a man to walk and he walks. When the people wonder at this he reminds them that the one in whose name he asks, was brutally murdered. Through him the God of Abraham, of Isaac of Jacob, still works. But though dead, his name has the power to raise the dead. Many generations after a lame man walked, the world is again at war and we ask "Will God's promises be fulfilled?" We are reminded that God's promises are not about winning or losing, but that the God's work continues.

Prayer:

God of our ancestors remind us as we pray that you are here with us not because are righteous and that you do not desert us, even when we are not. But you are here with us because of promises you made long ago that we only dimly understand. You are here. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Friday

Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 9.6-17
- Psalm 99
- Acts 10.1-8

Reflection:

In the reading from Deuteronomy Moses reminds the Israelites that though they have been victors in battle, yet they too have made God angry. God offered them the wonder of the law, not just the wonder of the tablets carved by His own hand, but the richness of a living law which would give them strength and bind their community together. And at the very time that God was giving them this great gift, they were melting their gold to make a calf to worship instead. Moses reminds them that God must have thought to destroy them, then. It's a rich metaphor, that while God is offering us something wonderful, something made by God's own hand, yet we turn away to a copy. We turn from God, to gold. From the wonder of life, to a cold dead thing.

But before we get too caught up in the finger pointing morality story this could too easily turn into, remember this is not a tale that is really about us. It is a tale about God. Because despite what the Israelites did, despite what we do, God turns back to us, even as we turn away. Even while we are worshipping other things, worshipping what one wit called "the greenback god", selling our souls for gold. Even while we are doing that, God continues to create life for us.

Prayer:

God of the mountains
I thought I glimpsed you yesterday
but when I turned it was the sun shining on
your mountains turning the snow to gold.
I thought I saw you this morning,
but when I turned it was a child's face turning
towards another.
I thought I saw you later, but it was just a light
shining on my neighbour's hand reached out
toward me.
Will I see you tomorrow if I look?

Saturday

Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 9.19-24
- Psalm 99
- Luke 10.21-24

Reflection:

Jesus said "thank you... because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to infants." Jesus has sent out followers who have cast out demons in his name. They return rejoicing and congratulating themselves. Though filled with joy, Jesus reminds them that this wonder they have seen happens because through him, they can know God. Many have struggled to see God - the wise have used all their wisdom and still God was not fully revealed to them. This story is one of the few gospel passages to explicitly say that what is happening in the presence of Jesus is more and different than prophecy. Prophecy tells us how we must behave, and there is much of that in the gospels. But revelation shows us who we are in relation to God. The revelation of God in Christ is not a "philosophy or abstract truth", or a system of morals. The presence of Jesus is in itself an event, the proclamation that changes the meaning of human life. This doesn't mean that there is no experience of God without conscious connection to Christ, for everywhere the creation is witness to God. But in Christ we may see God, not through wisdom or any action on our own part, even though we may not be wise or prudent. This wonder can never be fully explained, only experienced. What is the experience God in Christ offers you today?

Prayer:

God our wonder, Christ our brother
I don't understand
Though I bring all my wisdom to you
I don't always see you when I look
Be with me here that I may experience
The mystery that is you
The vision of a universe so vast
That I can only wonder at it,
Not comprehend it.
But find comfort that you
Have a place for me within it.