

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 and head to a place you won't be disturbed. 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. 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*.

If you'd like to share some thoughts about what you've read, head over to the 'chat space' at www.standrewsuc.com

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ST. ANDREW'S HANEY UNITED CHURCH

Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

(July 31st to Aug. 4th, 2007)

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Monday

Scripture:

- Hosea 2.14-3.5
- Psalm 44
- Colossians 2.16-3.1

Reflection:

Go, Hosea, find a woman who is an adulteress, who has a lover, God instructs! So, he did, purchasing her for 15 shekels of silver, a homer of barley and a measure of wine.

This marriage that began in the marketplace, was to be the vehicle of Hosea's prophecy and a mirror for God's love for a people who had turned their backs on God, like a spouse who is unfaithful to their partner in marriage.

Hang on! It's going to be a bumpy ride, for Hosea and Gomer and their kids! It looks like a bus wreck just waiting to happen; but, it had already happened. Israel had looked the other way, embracing the fertility god, Baal; and God's judgement and the consequences from Israel's choices were real and painful.

Thinking on your life, what have you turned toward that has taken you away from God? Did you foresee the consequences, the pain, the shame of those choices? Paul cried: "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Romans 7:15) Where have you felt the same? Where has God been for you?

Prayer:

God, may my deepening relationship with you give me always comfort enough to face the consequences of our actions and inaction, and hope and strength enough to take action according to your Way.

Holy God, how can you love me, when I have been unfaithful to you, brought shame to you and dishonour to your name? You, who with me, I "scarce can take it in."

Turn me, from the very thing I hate, to do the good you have in mind.

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

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

Tuesday

Scripture:

- Hosea 6.1-10
- Psalm 44
- Romans 9.30-10.4

Reflection:

Now, the focus is squarely on the attitude of Israel and Judah. They say that God will always come through for us! Just wait two days and on the third, God will revive us. Do what you want and God will just come and sweep up the mess. God will appear as surely as the dawn and is as dependable as the spring rains.

God looks into the heart of his people and sees this cavalier attitude. Their loyalty, love and trust is like morning dew. It is dried up quickly by the rising sun.

What does God desire from God's people: steadfast love, not sacrifices; knowledge of God, not burnt offerings?

I sometimes wonder about the folks who send our churches a cheque once a year, like a retainer for God's service? Is this the modern equivalent of sacrifices and burnt offerings?

Where have I taken God so lightly? What does God require of me and how can I hear God's call to change, so this requirement is fulfilled?

Prayer:

O Holy One, you desire steadfast love and knowledge of you: I pray that you would take away all that stands in the way of a deeper connection between us. Move me to love you with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love my neighbour as myself. Move me to give honour to your name, in all I am and do and say.

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Wednesday

Scripture:

- Hosea 6.11-7.16
- Psalm 44
- Matthew 5.43-48

Reflection:

In 1923, the great Canadian humourist, Stephen Leacock wrote: "I owe a lot to my teachers and mean to pay them back someday." Looking at today's passage from Matthew, you could take Leacock with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face.

I know I have deeply desired to pay back someone who has done me wrong, biding my time, waiting for the right moment to return the "favour!"

Here, my conniving runs in to the Christ, who had the strength to pray for his persecutors and his executioners. "Forgive them" he prayed.

What hurts and slights do we harbour that pale in comparison to his self-giving and his mercy for those who wanted him gone? The English hymn writer, Isaac Watts put it this way: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Can we hear this word as an invitation to move out of our hurts and hates into a new way of living, Christ's way? Love your enemies, prayer for persecutors, greeting and caring for more than your safe little circle? Where can I start to live as I pray, that the kingdom come on earth as in Heaven?

Prayer:

God of truth and mercy, you look upon me with wondrous love and invite me to an impossible task: to love those who hate me, to seek good who want my destruction, and act generously towards those who will never be able to pay me back.

Strengthen me to take the steps needed to love truly, deeply and widely, as you do.

Thursday

Scripture:

- Hosea 8.1-14
- Psalm 107.1-9, 43
- Romans 11.33-36

Reflection:

For a long time, I struggled with the questions that were raised in the wake of a death or other tragic situation? Why did God let this happen? Where was God when the terrible situation occurred? These are not easy questions for any person to hear, much less answer? We believe, that "God has created and is creating", but is God creating situations like those that give rise to these kinds of questions, that express deep, searing grief and pain.

I look at the situation of Hosea's contemporaries in Israel, a land that has turned its attention from the God of their ancestors, to the golden statue of a cow! "For they sow the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind," says Hosea.

God, who gives us freedom, to choose what is good, conversely, also gives the freedom to spurn it. Israel sought military alliances with other nations, and would soon reap the whirlwind of royal and political intrigue. In these days, when debates about distant wars and ribbons on municipal vehicles are in the news, in which direction is God calling us, for the salvation of the nation and the well-being of our people?

Prayer:

Holy God, you see us as we are, and do not leave us as we are, because you love us. We pray for wisdom in these days of turmoil and uncertainty, for clarity of vision and gifts of discernment, to see the good and embrace it and live it.

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Friday

Scripture:

- Hosea 9.1-17
- Psalm 107.1-9, 43
- Ephesians 4.17-24

Reflection:

Hosea is on quite a tear. No one is exempt from the coming debacle. It is painful to read. It is even more difficult to imagine what it must have been like for those who lived through it. I think of the terror and pain experienced by the people of Rwanda and Srebrenica some 10 and 13 years ago. Darfur in Sudan is before us.

"Never again," leaders have said again and again after the conflicts and wars of the 20th century. I think of members and families of the Canadian Forces who are serving in Afghanistan and their families and am saddened that the dream of their forebears who served in World War II and the Korean War, is still to be realized.

The Ephesians passage speaks of the old and the new life. "You were taught to put away your former way of life...and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

New life, resurrection, truth, righteousness and holiness—how can we as church in these days live the holy dream of a world made new, rather than the nightmare we have experienced again and again?

Prayer:

Lord God, your anger burns hot in the face of unlove. You weep with those who are weeping and you bless the peacemakers. Lead us, as we seek justice and resist evil. We, who have experienced war, pray for the time of peace to come, in ourselves, our relationships and in our world.

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Saturday

Scripture:

- Hosea 10.1-15
- Psalm 107.1-9, 43
- Mark 10:17-22

Reflection:

Here is the kind of fellow, leaders of churches, would love to have! Well-to-do, enthusiastic and willing. All the commandments he had followed were pretty limited in their scope. He hadn't hurt anyone; but as Jesus astutely points out, but he hadn't done much good for anyone in his life. The initial blush of enthusiasm will wear off. Will the cloak of wealth and respectability be enough for salvation? Jesus says, "No."

What could he have done? To this rich fellow, the question has a sharp edge. With all the resources he had at his disposal, with all he could give away, what good was he going to do for others? The question cools his enthusiasm in an instant.

The old hymn celebrates being "Safe in the Arms of Jesus", but Jesus is saying that isn't enough. Jesus looked with love upon this young man, not anger. It must have been mixed with grief, for this man deliberately chose not to be all that he could have been.

Looking back, can you think of those pivotal moments in your faith journey? What might you do differently now? What can you do now, to journey on from here, with the Lord?

Prayer:

Lord, we come to so many cross roads in life and we are prone to take the path of ease. We are satisfied with our respectable, well-heeled lot, and don't give much attention to the real difference we can make. Open us to see ourselves anew and give us the enthusiasm and strength to see the mission through.

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

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