

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

(September 24th to 29th, 2007)

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Monday

Scripture:

- Jeremiah 9.12-26
- Psalm 106.40-48
- Acts 4.1-12

Reflection:

Psalm 106 reminds me of the recitation of salvation history in the eucharistic, or communion, prayer. It is a confession of Israel's sin in the context of public worship. The psalmist speaks of the sins of the ancestors, and about how God was nevertheless merciful to the people. The psalm ends as it begins: with praise to God who is faithful, even when the people are not.

It could be an interesting exercise to write a recitation of salvation history that is more specific to our own time and our own ancestors. Ancient Israel was not the only people to turn away from God. We might think of those times in the last century or two when our ancestors did the same, as well as the times when God continued to be faithful in spite of our unfaithfulness. Of course such a prayer would also end with the doxology: "Blessed be God, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say "Amen." Praise the LORD!"

Prayer:

Faithful One, in your mercy you have sought us out. In our brokenness we find it almost impossible to follow your will and your way all the time. It seems all too easy for us to turn away from you. And yet each time we turn back, you are there, already moving toward us again. Thank you. I honour you for your faithfulness and for your trust in me.

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:

- Jeremiah 10.1-16
- Psalm 106.40-48
- 1 Corinthians 9.19-23

Reflection:

Jeremiah 10 contrasts the true God of Israel with the false gods of their neighbours. The Bible never claims the other gods aren't real, only that they are powerless to give life, as God does. Walter Brueggemann, in his commentary on Jeremiah, says that "in Jeremiah's own time as in our own, the critical faith issue is not atheism, but idolatry." We moderns can look at wood or gold idols from other cultures and know very clearly that they are powerless. And yet we truly believe that the idols we have made for ourselves -- militarism, consumerism, globalization, and the like -- are powerful forces which are somehow beyond our control. The biblical witness is that no matter what humans create and invest with power, it cannot compare to the One who stands beyond all, who invests us with life, and calls us to be faithful to the One alone.

What besides God have you invested with power? What are your idols? Where are you aware of God's call to you to stop putting your trust in things that cannot profit?

Prayer:

Mighty One, we humans seem so naturally to invest power in people and systems that do not warrant it. And then we tell ourselves that they are too powerful for us, that we cannot control them, and can only appease them. Help us to see how silly we can be. Help us not to give away the power which is yours and ours. Help us to be faithful to you alone, and to trust that true life resides in you, and not in things of our own making.

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.

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Jeremiah 10.17-25
- Psalm 106.40-48
- Luke 20.45-21.4

Reflection:

I have heard many “widow’s mite” stories of people without much being incredibly generous. I remember hearing a statistic a number of years ago that said that Newfoundland – at that time the economically poorest region of the country – had the highest rate in the country of giving to charity. It seems like it is often the poorest who give the most (at least percentage wise), perhaps because they appreciate how much it is needed. On the other hand, I have also seen people who could afford to give more use this story to justify their lack of generosity. (“It’s not the amount that counts, it’s the thought behind it.”)

How generous are you in your giving? Do you give out of what’s left over, or do you give generously off the top, trusting in God for your life?

Prayer:

Generous provider, thank you for the gift of my life. For the gifts of sustenance and providing all that I need. Help me to trust in your goodness and your abundance. Create in me a generous heart, that my actions as well as my words might demonstrate to others that my trust is in you.

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

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

Thursday

Scripture:

- Jeremiah 23.9-22
- Psalm 91.1-6, 14-16
- 2 Corinthians 8.8-15

Reflection:

Psalm 91 is well known to many United Church people as the text on which the hymn “On Eagles’ Wings” is based. I still have a hard time singing that hymn without getting a lump in my throat. This psalm sings of the faithfulness and protection of God. To me that doesn’t mean that nothing bad will ever happen to me. Or that if something bad does happen, it must be because of something I did wrong, and for which I’m being punished. To me, this psalm speaks of something much deeper and ultimately more valuable than physical safety. The radical promise in this psalm is that no matter what unravels, no matter what falls apart in my life, nothing can ever remove me from the presence of God, or God from me. That kind of sure knowledge is a spiritual gift that some of us possess, and some of us still long for. I believe it is something for which we can ask, and which the Spirit will ultimately give.

What is your experience of this radical presence of God?

Prayer:

Beloved, I am still learning to trust you. Even though you have never given me any reason to doubt your faithfulness, the world has, and there is still a part of me that wonders if you might not be there one day when I need you the most. Thank you for the witness of psalms like this one, that speak to my deepest desire for your presence with me, no matter what.

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with your love,
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Friday

Scripture:

- Jeremiah 23.23-32
- Psalm 91.1-6, 14-16
- Ephesians 2.1-10

Reflection:

This text from Ephesians is one of Paul’s clearest statements that we are saved by God’s grace, not by our own works. Phew. That takes the pressure off, doesn’t it? Our salvation is not up to us. It is a free gift from the One who created and sustains us. That, however, doesn’t mean we can do whatever we want. God’s grace is not to be cynically treated as a “get out of jail free” card. I believe we are on the right track when we understand our works not as the means of our salvation, but as a response to our salvation, as an act of gratitude for God’s love and care for us.

What role do “good works” play in your understanding of your relationship with God? Do you hope doing the “right thing” will improve your position in God’s eyes? Do you operate from a place of gratitude?

Prayer:

Gracious God,

I give you thanks that in your beloved eyes, I am already enough. I thank you that I am freed from worrying about whether I have impressed you enough today. Help me to share with others the love I have known from you, so that they may experience through my actions the special place they occupy in your great love as well.

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.

Saturday

Scripture:

- Jeremiah 24.1-10
- Psalm 91.1-6, 14-16
- Luke 9.43b-48

Reflection:

When I was younger, there were times when I read the stories about Jesus’ disciples not understanding who he was and what he was about and thought that if I had been there, I would have understood. But now I don’t think I would have got it any more than they did. The ability to see and not see, hear and not hear now strikes me as a human trait not reserved for Jesus’ first followers. From time to time I find myself looking and wondering what it is I’m not seeing, listening and wondering what it is I’m not hearing. In my experience, hindsight often has a way of bringing clarity. In the meantime, discerning the Spirit can be an elusive proposition.

How do you discern the Spirit? In what ways and places have you found yourself seeing and hearing well, or missing what God had to say to you? What role does the practice of prayer play in your attention to God’s voice?

Prayer:

Loving God,

You speak to us in many ways: through scripture, tradition, our neighbours, the natural world. So often we misinterpret or miss altogether your word for us. Help me to be open and receptive to you. Help me to welcome your Spirit and to be awake and attentive, so that I may hear your voice and do your will.

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

For your grace,
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