

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 and their minister, the Rev. Richard Bott.

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

ST. ANDREW'S HANEY
UNITED CHURCH

Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

(February 11th to 16th, 2008)

WRITER FOR THIS WEEK:
Rev. SCOTT SWANSON, MINISTER
Langley United Church
Langley, BC

ST. ANDREW'S HANEY
UNITED CHURCH

22165 Dewdney Trunk Road
Maple Ridge, BC V2X 3H7

Phone: 604.463.9611
Email: standrewshaneyuc@telus.net
Web: standrewsuc.com

Monday

Scripture:

- 1 Kings 19.1-8
- Psalm 32
- Hebrews 2.10-18

Reflection:

Fear is one thing; despair is another. Elijah appears to move quite quickly from one to another in this passage. Our lives may not literally be in jeopardy the way Elijah's was, but I think that all of our fear is on some basic level existential: that is, we fear that we (at least as we have come to know ourselves) will no longer exist. I am fascinated by God's response to Elijah and us: to offer us sustenance – whatever it is we need – and then to declare that the place of fear is actually the beginning of the journey to God. God meets our needs before our journey begins, so that we can make the journey beyond fear to God.

Prayer:

Sustaining and Generous One, thank you for coming to me in my fear or doubt, and giving me whatever it is I need in this moment. Help me to know that you are with me as I journey, over and over, from separation to union with you. Be my companion, and make me a companion to others on their own paths.

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:

- Genesis 4.1-16
- Psalm 32
- Hebrews 4.14-5.10

Reflection:

Sin and forgiveness are themes through the readings in the first part of this week, and certainly in today's texts. My sense is that a lot of us in The United Church of Canada prefer to consider the latter and ignore the former, but a high doctrine of forgiveness without also taking sin very seriously amounts to cheap grace. Forgiveness only makes sense in the context of conviction – of knowing there is something for which we need forgiveness. A mentor of mine talks about the prayer of confession in the worship liturgy as being a time of telling the truth about the trouble in which we find ourselves. The good news is that that trouble (sin) is not the last word. The last word (forgiveness) belongs to God.

Prayer:

Loving God, time and again we find ourselves in trouble – trouble of our own making and trouble beyond our making. In the times when we are aware of our brokenness, limitedness, isolation, poverty, sinfulness, be our medicine. Heal us, restore us, reconnect us, fulfill us, forgive us. Bless us, and make us a blessing.

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:

- Exodus 34.1-9, 27-28
- Psalm 32
- Matthew 18.10-14

Reflection:

Matthew places the Parable of the Lost Sheep in a very different context than Luke. Frankly, I think Luke's – where Jesus tells the story to justify eating with outcasts – makes more sense. Matthew ties the story in with church discipline, which I find far less compelling. At the core of the parable, though, the meaning is the same: everyone matters. Even the one who seems most expendable or the least useful. Even the one who is most annoying or offensive. This is one of those examples of the gospel sounding pretty nice to begin with, until you start looking a little more closely at the ramifications of it. Then it can get pretty offensive, pretty fast. Who in your life would you be inclined to identify with the 100th sheep? Can you imagine the Shepherd leaving you to go and find that person, and rejoicing to have the two of you back together in the fold? Everyone matters to God.

Prayer:

Loving One, sometimes I am awestruck or mystified by your radical desire for justice for all. I confess that sometimes I cannot bring myself to go out of my way for the last and least. I am willing to settle for 99%. Or even 75%. Your radical love for all convicts me in my willingness, even desire, to play favourites. But I give you thanks for your radical love all the same. It is amazing grace to know that, if I am the 100th sheep, you will leave all to bring me back too.

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:

- Isaiah 51.1-3
- Psalm 121
- 2 Timothy 1.3-7

Reflection:

Both texts from Hebrew scripture today speak of God as the source of comfort, strength, and help. Psalm 121 is a particularly beautiful reflection on God's sustaining role in our lives. Experience tells me that it is easy to forget this aspect of our relationship with God. Sometimes it may feel to us that God is absent; more often we get so caught up in our lives that it never occurs to us whether God is present and active or not – it's just not on the radar screen. Spiritual masters of many traditions, including Christianity, have used the metaphor of sleep to describe the default human spiritual state. I think this is a common way we are spiritually asleep: when we are not even aware of the ways in which God is supporting and sustaining us. The spiritual task is to "wake up" to who we are and what God is doing. Psalm 121 is a great mnemonic device: God is doing all these things all the time – wake up and take notice.

Prayer:

Sustaining One, thank you for your never-ending care for me. Thank you for the assurance that your presence with me does not depend on my remembering or inviting you to come near. Wake me up to the ways in which you constantly hold my life in your care, and keep me conscious of your desire for me. Create in me a thankful heart – for your presence and sustenance in every moment.

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.

Friday

Scripture:

- Micah 7.18-20
- Psalm 121
- Romans 3.21-31

Reflection:

That last verse in the Romans passage is very important. Too often I hear Christians speak negatively about "law." My concern is that when we move down the path of making law inferior to grace, it is a short journey to making Jews inferior to Christians, which is completely unacceptable. Paul is very clear: the law is the vehicle of God's grace by which the Jews are offered salvation, the faithfulness of (or faith in) Jesus Christ is the vehicle of God's grace by which non-Jews are offered the same salvation. Both the law for the Jews and the faithfulness of Jesus for the rest of us are God's gifts. Salvation is God's action, not ours; we cannot earn it, but only accept it and respond to it in gratitude.

Prayer:

Loving and generous God, I am so grateful that, in your passion for me, you have reached out to draw me back to you. You have not left me or my future to chance. If there are times when I am tempted to think that the path back to you that you have offered me is superior to the one you have offered to someone else, help me to remember that in your vast love you have provided different ways for all of your diverse children. Create in me a spirit of gratitude and a desire to respond to your desire for 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.

Saturday

Scripture:

- Isaiah 51.4-8
- Psalm 121
- Luke 7.1-10

Reflection:

The story of Jesus healing the Centurion's slave was probably an important message in Luke's community, as it foreshadows and authorizes the gathering in of the Gentiles. Once again we are faced with a story of God's radically inclusive love and grace: in God's economy, no one is left out. During a daily reflection time such as this, this story and others like it that we have read this week offer us opportunities to meditate on small examples of God's economy. As we "chew" these texts, taking them in to our hearts, we are slowly shaped by them. In time we may find ourselves thinking and behaving differently toward ourselves and others as we operate more and more with a heart of broader and deeper love.

Prayer:

Infinite love, in our pursuing you, if we are honest, we come up against our own limitations while you are still moving outward. You always exceed us. Thank you for Jesus, who shows us your heart. Help us always to push the boundaries of our capacity to love: ourselves, others, your world. Teach us that no matter how far we push, we cannot overstep you and your capacity to love. Create in us hearts more like yours.

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

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