

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*.

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ST. ANDREW'S HANEY UNITED CHURCH

Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

(June 23rd to 28th, 2008)

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Monday

Scripture:

- Genesis 16.1-15
- Psalm 86.11-17
- Revelation 2.1-7

Reflection:

The writer begins this first 'letter' to the church in Ephesus with quite a statement: I know all the things you do. Wow! Imagine someone starting off a message to you like that! Doesn't this mean the ultimate invasion of privacy? What is your reaction to being 'watched,' or at least to the feeling that someone is watching you, putting you under scrutiny? Most of us, I imagine, would feel quite uncomfortable by it, like we were being put to some kind of test that we are bound to fail sooner or later. Is that what this passage is about?

Maybe it's more about 'being seen?' This would bring up very different kinds of issues. Some people prefer to live outside of the 'lime-light', while others relish the idea of being 'front and centre.' Bad exposure versus good attention. Whichever was the case for the community at Ephesus, the watching, or the being seen, yielded a quite positive evaluation – at least for the most part. There was still a criticism: You don't love like you used to! Love harder or else!

Prayer:

We know, O God, that indeed you do know all that we do. Rather than this being a frightening thing, however, may this knowledge comfort us. We know that we cannot hide from you, although we might want to do just that at times. Rather than 'looking for our faults,' just waiting for us to make a mistake (which usually wouldn't long), remind us and assure that you are the One who, without fail, urges us toward you, toward Love. We know that, at times, we expose ourselves as loving less, loving fewer, loving weakly. Strengthen our Love today, we pray...

Tuesday

Scripture:

- Genesis 25.12-18
- Psalm 86.11-17
- Revelation 2.8-11

Reflection:

Smyrna, very much unlike Ephesus, receives nothing but absolute praise from the apocalyptic letter-writer. The description of the First and Last, as the One who died and is alive, is a particularly appropriate (although paradoxical) introduction to the message for the Smyrnians. Their city, too, had been destroyed in the sixth century BCE and lay in ruin for some four hundred years. The community, now re-established, and in particular its church however, is recognized for its perseverance in the face of adversity. Everything about John's 'End-Time Tale' is about things not being what they seem to be. John sees a richness here in spite of physical poverty; fearlessness in the face of suffering; triumph even though some would be thrown into prison by the Devil. In short, John affirms God's promise of eternal life beyond and out of death. I am reminded of the deep roots of faith (rather than the throws of despair) that have, for so many people, resulted in times of oppression, hardship and tragedy.

Prayer:

Thank you, God of mercy, for times of restoration and of re-building. For those incredible 'turning-points' that come along in life when, in fact, they are needed the most. Thank you for the gift of hope in times of trouble and for the promise of life out of death. Thank you for those people who come along and situations that happen... almost as if they had been specifically sent to remind us that your Spirit is at work in the world, in others and in me...

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Jeremiah 42.18-22
- Psalm 86.11-17
- Matthew 10.5-23

Reflection:

Psalm 86 is quite a prayer! (Although the lectionary asks for only the last 7 verses, I think it's worth reading the whole thing today!) In some ways, the psalm serves as a 'model prayer/study-guide,' helping us to reflect on the nature of prayer; it leads us to ask some important questions. Right off the top, verse 1 begs the question, 'Why do we pray?' The psalmist is praying because personal help is needed. There has been quite some discussion across our church lately (and not-so-lately, too) about what God does in the world as well as about God's action in our individual and corporate human lives. If we don't believe that God 'gets involved,' then why do we bother to pray at all? The psalmist, it seems, adamantly believes that God does, in fact, 'intervene.' God is addressed directly ('O Lord,' in NRSV, New Living and others) in at least 14 personal pleas throughout the psalm. This orientation towards 'a God who answers prayer' is one that, I believe, is consistent with the witness of scripture, our tradition and the experiences of many, many people of faith. The psalm-writer is one of those people. It is not some nebulous 'out-there' God who is being prayed to; it is a God who has proven to be faithful and loving in character - the source of our personal and corporate salvation: "for you are good and forgiving;" "for you are great and do wondrous things;" "for great is your steadfast love toward me." What else does this psalm say to you about God and about prayer?

Prayer:

Read through (VU 619)
"Healer of Our Every Ill"

Thursday

Scripture:

- Micah 7.18-20
- Psalm 13
- Galatians 5.2-6

Reflection:

Paul is upset. His angry-toned letter to the churches in Galatia, which he himself founded, is in response to the people's positive reception of a message that he believed to be contrary to the gospel. The people he writes are mainly converts from paganism and this letter is aimed at the controversy that was growing in the communities over the nature of salvation - the 'works' of the Law, versus the saving grace of God, through the faith of Christ. It has, therefore, been an important letter in Protestant theology.

I don't know about you, but I'm always a bit uncomfortable when passages talking about circumcision are read on Sunday morning. I am reminded, however, of the importance of context and how central it is to biblical interpretation. In what ways do we, as God's (Christian) People today, still (want to) find physical ways of easily distinguishing 'who's in and who's out?' Do we still (want to) look for ways to just 'know' about people based on their physical appearance? What kinds of things do we still feel we have to do in order to 'earn' God's favour? Shouldn't it be the other way around? Instead of trying to merit our freedom, wouldn't it be awesome to accept it and live into it?

Prayer:

God, grant me a glimpse today, I pray, of how wonderful your grace is, how amazing it is.

Friday

Scripture:

- 2 Chronicles 20.5-12
- Psalm 13
- Galatians 5.7-12

Reflection:

This is a psalm of individual lament. It is an impatient, utterly desperate cry to God, 'How long?' But what, I wonder, is the psalmist's source of pain? Perhaps it's a physical disease, or perhaps it's death itself. Maybe, on the other hand, the 'enemies and foes' here are real people. Does it matter? Either way, the poet is lost in mournful, powerful wondering about the promise of God's blessing that would have been then and still is well-known: The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. (Numbers 6:24) What ever happened to that? Reflecting a bit more on Psalm 86 from Wednesday, I wonder what happened to this particular person of faith. Were her prayers not good enough? Were his times of prayer not strong or eloquently-phrased enough? Why the loss of faith?

But that's not what this psalm is about. This lament is a song of faith. It tells the story of someone who is in pain, to be sure. There are times when we all wonder where Love is, when we question whether God even cares about us at all. There will be times when we are weak, deflated and seemingly defeated. At the bleakest of times though, the Spirit comes to us - in one form or another. I wonder what kind of conversation the writer of Psalm 86 and the writer of this one might be able to have, given the situation.

Prayer:

O Love that will not let me go, I rest my weary eyes on thee... O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee. I trace the rainbow through the rain and feel the promise not vain, that morn shall tearless be.

Saturday

Scripture:

- Genesis 26.23-25
- Psalm 13
- Luke 17.1-4

Reflection:

"Some Sayings of Jesus," it's entitled in NRSV. These four verses, although they're not the whole unit, have a lot in them. We stumble... but what makes us stumble? Is it our own 'weaknesses,' or are we 'corrupted' by outside forces? (Or both?) To what extent is sin my own? To what extent is it something I 'sign onto,' just because I live in the situation I do? How do I/we exploit others? There's a monestary close to where I live. On a tour there, a boy once asked, "What do you guys do here?" The brother looked at him and answered, "We fall down and, by God's grace, we get up again." That was good enough for the child. Is it good enough for us?

But what about this business about 'offenders?' Specifically, what about those who ask for our forgiveness? What about those who don't? Let's turn the tables for a minute. What if the 'offender' is me? What if I didn't mean it? What if I was acting in a way that actually betrays who I am? What if I wasn't being the person I know God wants me to be? Jesus seems to say that they/I should be forgiven, especially if the request of the offender (another? me?) are considered to have been made in earnest. But who are they, who am I, to evaluate such things? How am I, how are they supposed to know the thoughts of another, especially about the validity of repentance? Also, aren't there things that are inappropriate for human forgiveness and must be thrown upon God's mercy?

Prayer:

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. (Repeat.)