

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

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Monday

Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 5.1-21
- Psalm 119.49-56
- 1 Peter 2.4-10

Reflection:

According to tradition, the ten commandments were written on tablets of stone. These do not pretend to be the only rules to live by, though I often here them talked about as though they were. Indeed, these ten commandments and others are summed up in several places in scripture as "You shall love the Holy One your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself." It seems to me that the commandments are the sort of essential starting point of civilized religious culture, after which we can begin to discern what God really wants from those living stones Peter talks about. If God is not the focus of our love and devotion (the essence of the first couple of commandments), but rather other things are consuming our thoughts and actions (the rest of the commandments?), then we haven't time to discern what God is calling us to do and be in this time. The result is dead stones, not living ones. Dogmatic stones, not grace-full ones. But that first commandment is such a challenge when faced with gods that are so much more tangible. It is easier sometimes to worship the houses of God than the living God who might ask us to do something outside of the house.

Prayer:

God who commands
a living, breathing love,
help me come alive
through breathing in your love,
and give me renewed passion
for living out your caring ways.

Tuesday

Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 5.22-6.3
- Psalm 119.49-56
- 2 Corinthians 5.17-21

Reflection:

Many years ago, I had significant contempt for the whole concept of the "fear of God." It seemed to me to be a convenient theological justification for the centralization of power.

Then one day I was in a friend's cabin with no one else around but my partner. As I lay in bed that night, I felt what I can only describe as a "presence." It was more powerful and intense than I could ever have imagined. I was petrified, and yet at the same time I somehow knew there would be no harm. It was the sheer intensity and power of the presence that terrified me - that awed me. I remember distinctly wishing that the message would be conveyed to my wife in a dream. Upon the presence leaving, my terror turned instantly to gratitude.

How would you / do you react to God – something more intense than anything imaginable? How do we discern when others are speaking to us on God's behalf rather than in God's place?

Prayer:

Holy One,
the purity of your love
may be nothing to fear,
and yet it is so totally beyond
our finite comprehension.
I give you thanks for your speaking to me,
both through those who are open
to your speaking through them,
and especially those
who are totally unaware.

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 6.10-25
- Psalm 119.49-56
- John 11.45-57

Reflection:

The reading from Deut. is one of those that, with others like it from both testaments, give a bit of a bad name to the "fear of God" concept. There is such a big difference between trembling at the intensity of an experience that you're grateful for in the end, and being scared for you life or soul because of wrathful, vengeful deity.

In my brighter moments, I am reminded that people who utter threats are really simply desperate to get some kind of message across. Sometimes the message is just that things aren't going well for them and they're really upset and angry about it. In scripture, I always find that there's more to it than that.

We've been given so much by God. Life, for a start. No wonder some who've had a mystical connection with the depth of grace we've been given are a little zealous about it and about giving some reverence and token of thanksgiving to the Giver of all gifts. Keeping God's commandments seems like a reasonable start. Unless I'm beat over the head with it.

Prayer:

Divine Spark,
help me to hear the message
underneath people's threats,
including my own,
and help me to embrace more fully
your grace.

Thursday

Scripture:

- Exodus 24.1-8
- Psalm 106.1-6, 19-23
- 1 Peter 5.1-5, 12-14

Reflection:

The writer of 1 Peter has much to say about the functioning of the church. One phrase that catches me is a command to "tend the flock with oversight not lording over them, but as an example." I can't help but wonder what the church would be like if we could only consistently keep this in our hearts. I think we all have some concern about potential abuses of power. We've seen too many of them, both within and outside the church. But it seems to me that our tendency is to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. I've heard too many oversight reports that completely glossed over serious issues that a great many people know about, but we don't want to hurt anyone or make anyone uncomfortable.

What would it look like to speak the truth in love? Note the "in love" part. Not "because of love," nor "with love in your thoughts," but truly "in" love – holding the other's hand and being open and vulnerable to their feelings.

Not as easy as tending the flock with reports and motions and votes.

What would it take for us to be up to it?

Prayer:

Vulnerable God,
without being grounded – immersed –
in your love,
I can not dare to be vulnerable
with others.
Help me to take time and be open
to soaking up from you all that is needed
to live vulnerably with others.

Friday

Scripture:

- Exodus 24.9-11
- Psalm 106.1-6, 19-23
- James 4.4-10

Reflection:

I don't know about you, but I read the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, and I can't help but think that maybe, just maybe, we as a church have been just a little too comfortable for too long. Does James go a little far in suggesting that "friendship with the world is enmity with God?" Perhaps it's a pretty good example of hyperbole - an exaggeration to emphasize a point. And then there are times when I can't help but wonder where the slope turns slippery and whether we can even perceive the slide.

In what ways has society helped a stuck church (or even yourself!) move ahead either theologically or in our practice? Are there ways that you can think of that culture and society have tainted our theological reflection? (Residential schools may not be the only candidate here). How can we tell the difference from the inside? Is it possible to step outside of ourselves enough to have a fresh look, a fresh interpretation of the gospel in our time? How?

Prayer:

For you, all things are possible, O God.
Help me to embrace my past
and our past,
while learning new things
to inform my participation in your future.

Saturday

Scripture:

- Exodus 24.12-18
- Psalm 106.1-6, 19-23
- Mark 2.18-22

Reflection:

I once did a wedding for a couple whose wedding had been postponed almost a half dozen times because of a death in the family. The tradition in their culture was that during the time of grieving, no weddings should be taking place. It was a tradition that I grew to have a lot of respect for as I watched the honour and caring poured out on the grieving family as people focussed on them for more than a few days or weeks.

And then came this couple. A matter of days before their wedding, another relative died. They were devastated, and it kept them from grieving for their relative. Until grace. The wife of the deceased called the couple and said "If you don't get married this time, it would kill [Henry] again to think he'd spoiled it for you."

No matter how much one may think the earthly Jesus knew about his future, I can't think he was naive enough not to realize that ministry with a message as unwelcome as his in corners of power would be a time-limited ministry. What parts of discipleship do we "postpone" for a more convenient of proper time?

Prayer:

God of Sabbath rest and of passionate life and work, help me to discern my motives in resting and waiting as well as in doing.