

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

(September 1st to 6th, 2008)

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Monday

Scripture:

- Exodus 4.10-31
- Psalm 83.1-4-13-18
- Revelation 3.1-6

Reflection:

One commentator called the Exodus passage the most "perplexing passage in the Torah". Would God really have killed Moses because he didn't circumcise his children. The story - out of context, with little explanation is almost impenetrable. Yet it asks in some ways, a common question. What is the outward sign of God's grace? The Exodus story happens as Moses has finally accepted God's commission. And now, on his way to speak to Pharaoh for Yahweh, the bible says that there is required, a visible, bodily sign of the knowledge of God., not just for Moses, but for all God's people. For thousands of years, this was the understanding of the people of God. Circumcision was required. But in the New Testament, in Acts 15, Peter states that circumcision was unnecessary - that God purifies the hearts of disciples both Jews and Gentiles, by faith, and that each of us is saved by Christ as we are.

We struggle still with the question of what God wants. How will we mark ourselves as the ones who choose God? Does a WWJD bracelet do it? A tattoo maybe? I'm reminded of a hymn popular in the 70's. "They'll know we are Christians by our Love". It is by our acts that we are known - acts of love and acts of faith.

Prayer:

We are one in the spirit
We are one in the Lord, Yahweh
O God, mark me as your own,
and fill and purify my heart with faith
so that my acts reflect that faith
and grow from love. Amen

Tuesday

Scripture:

- Exodus 5.1-6, 13
- Psalm 83.1-4-13-18
- Revelation 3.7-13

Reflection:

In Exodus 5 the slave drivers demand the Jews make the same number of bricks, without being given straw. They had to glean the straw, wandering the countryside and then returning to meet their quota. It's sounds painfully familiar. Produce more, with less! Produce more, get paid less! Produce more, give less to your families. Produce more or die trying. This story, reminds us it wasn't just about more bricks. It was about reinforcing the idea of helplessness. The point of the rule wasn't just to make more money, it was to force the slaves to agree they had no options. Many did. Many of us do. We continue to try to do the impossible, just for the right to try to do the impossible tomorrow, and in the process give up all that makes life meaningful. Saying "Yes" to God and to life, can mean pushing away fear and saying "No" to what enslaves us.

Prayer:

Great God,
You see our labour and our struggle.

Help us to find what is good, and meaningful about our work, and yet leave time, energy and joy for the life that working is for.

Give us strength to stand up for our ethics in the working world, and to care for others who work for us as we wish to be cared for.

Amen

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Exodus 7.14-25
- Psalm 83.1-4-13-18
- Matthew 12.22-32

Reflection:

When authorities accuse Jesus of casting out demons through Beelzebub, Jesus first laughs at their contradictions. Why would the prince of demons cast out demons? How can a kingdom stand that is divided against itself. Jesus knows Israel itself is divided. The Pharisees believed in the oral Torah, a progressive law, that evolved, and the Sadducees, held to the written letter of the Torah as a fixed tradition. The kingdom of Judea was divided against its own king, Herod - the Roman puppet. We, too, so often try to recreate the kingdom of God in communities divided against themselves. As individuals we struggle, divided against ourselves, pitting our bodies against our minds, and our minds against our souls. This is not a morality tale, but a truth, that only through the grace of God can we reconcile the factions within ourselves. We don't do it by beating or suppressing one part, but by loving ourselves and each other into unity.

Prayer:

God of grace
we pray that you will love us into unity,
teaching us to love ourselves enough
that we will not set aside one part,
nor exclude another but will
find meaning and love in each part,
in the sensuality of the body,
the strength of the spirit
and the radiant love of the soul...

so that You can work through
all aspects of our lives
and being. Amen

Thursday

Scripture:

- Exodus 9.1-7
- Psalm 149
- 2 Corinthians 12.11-21

Reflection:

From ancient Egypt, to Paul's friends at the church in Corinth, we are reminded that although human culture has changed beyond imagining, human nature - not so much! In the face of terrible plagues and God's punishments, Pharaoh will not give up power over the people he has enslaved. Paul, writes to the Corinthians, worrying they think he's after their money. He reassures them, but also worries that despite their allegiance to the church, and the teachings of Paul about Christ, that there may still "be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder." Funny how Paul's world sounds so much like ours, even without the I-Pods and cell-phones. Paul constantly calls for repentance - literally for people to "turn back". Turn back, in the midst of the anger, gossip, cliques and disorder and look to God.

Prayer:

Christ you who were wounded by our transgressions,
you were wounded by our anger,
factions, slander and arrogance,
and yet love us.

Help us to respond to your love,
with love -
reaching beyond the fear and self-interest,
towards joy. Amen

Friday

Scripture:

- Exodus 10.21-29
- Psalm 149
- Romans 10.15b-21

Reflection:

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! I love this little line Paul quotes to the Romans. Paul reminds us that the good news comes unexpectedly, to people who don't expect it, who have not asked for it, who may not hear or understand it. In many semitic cultures feet are seen as unclean, you keep the soles of your feet hidden. In ancient times when everyone walked everywhere, the feet of most people were hard, calloused, bony - not beautiful. Yet in this phrase, these feet that are ugly and hidden, are beautiful for the news that they bear. I often find people in my office talking with shame about a part of themselves that brings good news, a part I see as beautiful. The callused hands that built a house, the scarred hands of a cook, the mind that learned scripture in prison. God wrests beauty from the scars and the calluses and good news is carried in the strangest of parcels.

Prayer:

We Praise you O God.
Each day offers us
a new song to sing to you,
new praise and new opportunities
to meet the unexpected saints.

Let us rejoice in our Maker;
let the people be glad in our God.

Let us praise God's name with dancing
even when it's kind of embarrassing.

For God takes delight in all God's people.

Amen

Saturday

Scripture:

- Exodus 11.1-10
- Psalm 149
- Matthew 23.29-36

Reflection:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law, and Pharisees", for you declare you are better than your forefathers, you would never have persecuted the prophets of old, yet you persecute the prophets of today. Matthew quotes Jesus harangue of the Pharisees, we might call it the sermon on the hypocrites. I shudder at his words, for I fear he speaks to me. If I had lived in Mississippi in the 1950s would I have supported segregation? If I had been born a Roman noble woman, would I have thought nothing of flogging my slaves? What pious acts do I participate in, that will be seen as terrible in future times? What acts of kindness, compassion and grace, am I called to that I turn away from, or even fail to see? But when I'm most worried, I remember, that's why Christ came - for me - the blind, fearful, sometimes ignorant, often obtuse person that I am. Christ came to call me home, and offer me that same compassion, kindness and grace.

Prayer:

Christ Jesus we ask you,
gather us under your wings
as a hen gathers her chicks.
Shelter us in the warmth of your mothering.
Teach us the strength for compassion
the courage for kindness,
and the joy of grace. Amen