

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. JOHN'S
UNITED CHURCH

Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

(November 3rd to 8th, 2008)

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Monday

Scripture:

- Joshua 4.1-24
- Psalm 128
- 1 Thessalonians 2.13-20

Reflection:

From a woman's perspective, the Joshua reading like most of the bible, is male centered. The 12 men are appointed one from each tribe of the Israelite people. The Lord appears to be present as another male human being who dictates his wishes to Joshua. Two things occur to me and the first is the physical presence of the Lord and the second has to do with the ritual of the 12 stones. I sometimes hear from people that they wish the Lord was standing beside them telling them what to do. Of course it is never quite that simple. The voice of the Holy can only be heard within when the mind is quiet. Regarding the 12 stones, I like the question that the next generation of Israelites are going to ask their parents: what do these stones mean to you? and the adults will tell their children the story of how the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant. We can ask ourselves the same question about mementos and objects we hold dear. What does this mean to me? How do I describe its meaning in depth to the next generation? Could we ever describe the meaning of Christian worship as we experience it to a generation of young people for whom church is irrelevant?

Prayer:

God of Love, who holds us in the palm of your hand, bless our coming and going this day. Nourish us in all the duties we perform and all our relationships with others. At the day's end may we reflect upon our activities and recall when you have spoken to us and guided us in our choices. Amen

Tuesday

Scripture:

- Joshua 6.1-16,20
- Psalm 128
- Acts 13.1-12

Reflection:

Peter gives a speech from the heart to convince the believers that the new Gentiles recently converted need not be circumcised. This lifts a great burden off the shoulders of the early church. To say that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for their salvation is a big step forward away from the restrictions of the rules of the Pharisees.

In the United church we try not to have restrictions for membership: we prefer to put our requirements in positive terms. In accepting that Jesus Christ is Lord and that we will accept the duties and responsibilities of membership are all that we ask. It is no small thing, but at least it is not painful! Peter understands the essence of the body of Christ. We are one at the table of the Lord even in our diversity.

Prayer:

O God, may your blessing fall upon us this day. May the sun shine in our hearts until strangers and friends come and warm themselves, and may our own light shine out through our eyes so that we see Christ in all people and in all Creation. Amen

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Joshua 10.12-14
- Psalm 128
- Matthew 15.1-19

Reflection:

"It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." (Matt. 15.11) Food that enters the mouth is used to nourish the body and the leftovers leave the body. But our speech, the words we use, come out of our mouths and can either bless or curse. The power of speech is seldom realized in our culture. When one attempts through meditation to purify the body and purify the mind eventually the sound of coarse speech is hurtful and harmful. The highest form of speech is poetry and prophecy. All speech begins with our inner thoughts. We can ask ourselves what we create with our words. Speech is humanity's greatest performance. May we speak always with the best of intentions, leaving behind hurtful gossip and slander. May we always praise God in our speaking.

Prayer:

God be in my head
and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes
and in my looking;
God be in my mouth,
and in my speaking.
God be in my heart
and in my thinking;
God be at mine end
and at my departing.

(#430 Voices United)

Thursday

Scripture:

- Joshua 5.10-12
- Psalm 78.1-17
- Revelation 8.6-9,12

Reflection:

From the reading in Joshua we learn that the Israelites celebrated the Passover in the plains of Jericho and on that very day they began to eat the produce of the land. As soon as they could rely on their own food source the manna from heaven ceased. God had supported them throughout their journey and now they were self sufficient, at least in the area of having enough food.

We rely on God when we feel vulnerable, and when we feel comfortable and filled with abundance we sometimes forget the Giver. The Israelites are not a very good example for us, but their humanity reflects our own condition. It is easy to take the credit for all our accomplishments and for our successes and all too easy to take ownership for all that we do. But God is not a temporary part of our lives. God is in all that we are and all that we do. We can cultivate an attitude of gratitude that lasts throughout our lives.

Prayer:

God of Abundance, may we never forget your divine generosity. May we remember that you are the great Giver of all gifts. You are in our struggles as well as our triumphs. Most of all we thank you for your child, Jesus the Christ, who showed us how to offer thanks continually. Amen

Friday

Scripture:

- Joshua 8.30-35
- Psalm 78.1-17
- Revelation 9.13-23

Reflection:

Joshua built an altar to the Lord on Mount Ebal. Burnt offerings were made and Joshua wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses and this was read before the entire assembly of Israel, the women and children and the aliens who resided among them.

When immigrants to our country want to become citizens they learn the laws of our land. Where is the balance between retaining the customs of one's nationality or religion and merging into Canadian society? Many people wrestle with this issue. All we learn from our reading is that the aliens were included in this great event which reads like it could have been staged in Hollywood. No one was left out. It would seem that the best response in our time is to do our best to make everyone feel welcome, not only in our country but in our churches. There is always strength in diversity. There is always blessing in sensitivity and consideration for others. There is always breaking down of walls when there is honest communication.

Prayer:

O God of Blessings, help us to see a new heaven and a new earth, to envision how our world might be when your kingdom comes. As you include everyone in your love, may we too build understanding, tolerance, and consideration for all. Amen

Saturday

Scripture:

- Joshua 20.1-9
- Psalm 78.1-17
- Matthew 24.1-14

Reflection:

From Matthew's gospel Jesus talks about being aware of false prophets. Matthew puts the words on Jesus' lips that have sent many to the hilltops proclaiming the end of the world. There will be persecutions, he says, and people will be tortured and be put to death because of my name. What can we take from this reading that makes sense in this postmodern time? I would suggest the false prophets, namely those who promise success, wealth, and fortune if only we buy their products. As I write this, North America is reeling from a severe downturn in the markets because, (for one reason) people bought real estate they couldn't afford because the false prophets said there was no problem and there'd be lots of money. No problem! Except that of course there is a problem; a major problem. Without blaming false prophets, we need to take responsibility for our own choices and not be seduced by greed. We need to listen instead to our inner wisdom and learn to match our input with our output, to use computer language.

Prayer:

We believe in you, O God, whose love is the source of all life and the desire of our lives; whose love was given a human face in Jesus of Nazareth, whose love was crucified by the evil that waits to enslave us all. Lead us not into temptation, O God, and may we choose the peace that only you can give. Amen

The "Daily Scripture and Prayer Brochure" will be taking a brief break during Advent this year. This is to support a project of the General Council to help people across Canada build the practice you've already been working on, through a book entitled, "**Advent Awakenings.**" Please consider purchasing a copy (\$8.95+GST) from the United Church Resource Distribution Centre at 1-800-288-7365, (or talk with your minister about how to get a copy!)