



W H E N Y O U P R A Y



DEVO

WEEK 4

When You Pray

Devotional & Next Steps

May 16/17

Below you will find several ways to engage with the series and grow your spiritual life. Here are some important things to remember as you engage:

- **We're all in different seasons right now** – some of us are home with little to do, some have added new jobs as homeschool teachers, others are putting in extra hours at work and accomplishing essential tasks for the sake of others, and still others are sick and navigating other hardships. *Wherever you are, we see you.*
- **Based on your current situation, you might find you can only implement one of the suggestions below.** *That is okay.* Others of you might be able to implement each suggestion every single day. *That is also okay.*
 - Potential Ways to Engage: Try one practice each day OR choose one or two practices to focus on throughout the week
- **Use this guide as it's helpful and know that the Lord sees you and honors your dedication to Him.**

Reflection

If you haven't listened to or watched the message from the weekend, take some time to do that. Then, spend some time reflecting about the main points of the message.

Here are some questions to guide you:

- Since following Jesus, where have you encountered freedom? From what temptation and sin have you found freedom?
- What has it looked like for you to have a Kingdom perspective? How have you oriented your perspective to focus on ourselves as citizens of God's Kingdom rather than the world's kingdom?
- How has freedom and Christ changed your Kingdom perspective on life?
- In the midst of Coronavirus and "Safer at Home," where has your reliance on the world faltered? In what ways has God led you towards Kingdom perspective? Where have you found the most hope in this season?

- What evidence of transformation have you seen in your life? How do you look, think and act differently today compared to before you followed Jesus or when you were newly following Jesus?
 - What evidence of transformation in your life have you seen in the last months?
 - What transformation might God be planning to take place in your life? How might you make yourself available to God's Kingdom work?

Scripture to Study

For further study on the Kingdom of God, dig deeply into the following passages and use the questions as they are helpful.

Mark 4:26-29

- What aspects of planting does this parable emphasize?
- The man is working night and day but says "he does not know how" the seed sprouts.
 - What does this say about the role of man in planting?
 - What does this say about the role of God in planting?
- Look at verse 28 – why do you think Jesus emphasizes the stages of a seeds' growth?
 - How are you different now than when you first decided to follow Jesus – when your life with Jesus first sprouted? What transformation have you encountered?
- The parable doesn't stop at growth, it moves to harvest in verse 29. Why does it matter that the plants are growing in preparation for harvest?
 - How does our spiritual growth prepare us for God's presence?
- How might God be inviting you into deeper partnership with Him?
- What seed sowing might you need to begin, relying on Him to grow us in a process we cannot fully see or understand?
- What seeds need to be sown in order for people to see the Kingdom of God? Where might Jesus ask you to sow seeds?
 - Do you need to deepen your own study of Scripture? Is there someone in your life you need to share with? How can we depend on God to grow these things?

Luke 17:20-21

- The Pharisees likely thought they were asking an easy question – “When will God reveal Himself and start His plan?” They would have expected a powerful arrival of a Messiah to come and save the Jewish people. Instead, they were encountering Jesus, the friend of sinners. They continued to doubt Jesus as the Messiah, inevitably resulting in Jesus’ crucifixion.
- Why would it have been tempting to believe that the arrival of Jesus would be obvious and loud?
 - When have you longed for the presence of God to be obvious and loud? What have you encountered instead?
- Instead of the Kingdom of God being observed as something the Pharisees could examine or question Jesus about, Jesus says the Kingdom of God is “in the midst of you” (or in your midst or among you).
 - Why would Jesus say that the Kingdom of God was in the present? What does this say about who Jesus is?
 - The Pharisees longed for the Kingdom of God (the promises of God to be completed) but they wanted nothing to do with the King. When have you felt similarly? Have you ever felt like you wanted the benefits of God, but been unmotivated for a relationship with God?
 - While Jesus is physically with the Pharisees in this text, we know He is still with us today – the Holy Spirit is our advocate, the one who comes alongside. How do you encounter Jesus in your midst each day?

A Spiritual Practice to Try

One of the best ways to grow our relationship with God is to try different spiritual practices. Think of it like spending time with a friend – ideally, you do many different types of activities with friends, not just one thing over and over again. Every spiritual practice brings something unique and a new way to engage with God. Some practices will stretch you more than others, and that’s a good thing!

This week: Try the Spiritual Practice of Presence

In the message this weekend, we learned that we find freedom from temptation and sin when we are immersed in God's presence and see ourselves as citizens of God's Kingdom. The more we grow in awareness of God's Kingdom and our part in it, the more we encounter transformation in ourselves and the world around us. Encountering God's presence is at the center of this; to truly live into the Kingdom of God and to truly find freedom in God, we must simply encounter the presence of God.

Like any spiritual practice, we can learn how to practice the presence of God. To be clear – practicing the presence of God isn't about summoning God to be with us in a moment like it's magic or something. God is always with us whether we acknowledge it or not. Rather, the practice of presence is about acknowledging our God who is already there, ahead of us and beside us. It's about growing in awareness of where God is and how He is moving so we can more closely align our lives with His intentions. The more we practice the presence of God, the more aware of Him we are, and the more we can become aware of and participate in His transformation of our world.

It's easy to feel like practicing the presence of God is a super spiritual activity for spiritual directors and monks and priests and pastors... but it's really quite normal. Like I said, practicing the presence of God is about acknowledging where God already is present and when done correctly, is quite normal and simple. You might even find yourself saying "how did I not realize God was in that before?" Learn to be with God and find sacredness in the every day.

Take a few of these ideas:

- Take a walk around your neighborhood. During your walk, be mindful to experience everything around you. Instead of getting lost in your thoughts or the activities of your day, pay attention to the world around you and use as many of your senses as you can. Notice way plants are growing, the varied shades of flowers, trees and grass. Pay attention to the feeling and smell of the air. God has created you to sense all of these things and our awareness of Him as Creator helps us practice being present with Him.
- If you have encountered something difficult in your day or week, think about what made it difficult. Spend time journaling or thinking about the issue. After some time of reflection, write yourself a very short prayer – 3-5 words even. The next time the difficult situation comes up, use the prayer you wrote to re-center yourself of God. This is a way of choosing to be present with God as we move in our day, even in difficult moments.

- Practice a daily or weekly Examen (tips later on in this devotional) and practice becoming more aware of where God is in your day and week.

To learn more about Practicing the Presence of God, check out the following:

- [Podcast with Diane Bryant -- JW Grow: Spiritual Practices – Presence](#)

The Lord's Prayer & Apostles Creed

You might find it comforting to return to The Lord's Prayer or The Apostles Creed during the week, even on a daily basis. You could even practice Lectio Divina with the Lord's Prayer, as it's taken from Matthew 6.

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

Give us this day our daily bread.

*And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against
us.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

The Apostles Creed

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our
Lord.*

*He was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.*

*He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.*

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

*and is seated at the right hand of the
Father.*

*He will come again to judge the living and
the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
One holy United Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,*

*the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

Weekly or Daily Examen

Practicing the Examen is also a spiritual practice – but it’s so helpful as a daily or weekly exercise, that it’s worth naming distinctly. The Examen is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It’s a time set aside for thankful reflection of where God is and has been. It’s especially helpful to do this on a weekly basis during your Sabbath day. Once you get used to the practice, it’s easy and helpful to implement daily, either in the morning or evening. It has five steps, which most people take in order and takes about 15-20 minutes.

1. Quiet yourself and remember you are in God’s presence.
2. Ask God to give you eyes to see. We want to see our day or week with God’s eyes, not just our own.
3. Practice gratitude. Enter with a posture of gratitude, reminding yourself that the day or week you have lived is a gift from God.
4. Review your day or week. Think back on the things that happened during your day or week – allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in your thinking.
 - a. Desolation: Where in your day or week did you find yourself moving away from God? When did I not love? When did I not experience God?
 - b. Consolation: Where in your day or week did you find yourself moving towards God? When did I love? When did I experience God?
5. Resolve any pattern or concern that came up during the examination. Look toward the day to come and ask “Where do I need God in the day to come?” Close in prayer.