

Lent 2017 Discipleship Group Materials



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Contents

Introduction	1
Week 1: Life Through the Lens of Prayer	4
Week 2: Prayer as Worship	7
Week 3: The Healing Power of Prayer	9
Week 4: Hearing God through Prayer	11
Week 5: Prayer in Community	14
Annex 1: Suggested Reading	18
Annex 2: Additional Prayer Practices	19

Introduction

Lent is traditionally a time for self-reflection, and an opportunity to conduct an honest appraisal of our spiritual progress as individuals and as a church. We believe prayer is key to deepening our relationship with God, but what exactly is prayer? Why do we pray? What can we expect from prayer? Through this series we will consider various ways of understanding prayer, including prayer as way of changing our perspective on life, prayer as a relationship and as creative expression, prayers for healing and guidance, and prayer as a way of deepening community. We will explore what Scripture says about prayer, share our own stories, and learn different practices to make prayer more integral to our daily lives.

Overview

Through this series we hope to arrive at a deeper understanding of the meaning, purpose and power of prayer. Our desire is that through the study of Scripture and by hearing one another's stories, we will be inspired to pray, and disciplined to make prayer an integral part of our daily lives. The messages, discussions and other activities that accompany this series are intended to help us gain both the confidence and the motivation to engage in prayer through proven practices, as well as through openness to the many varied ways in which God communicates to and through us individually and corporately.

The five weeks of the series will cover the following themes:

- *March 5: Life Through the Lens of Prayer*
Prayer as both a means of noticing God's presence in all of life, and a means of nurturing our presence to God through deliberate practices; and praying through times when God seems absent.
- *March 12: Prayer as Worship*
Sung prayer as a means of joining the symphony of nature, surrendering to God in worship, and authentically expressing community.
- *March 19: The Healing Power of Prayer*
Prayer brings awareness of where we are falling short of God's dreams for us, gives us the courage to become willing to change, and connects us to the healing power of the Holy Spirit.
- *March 26: Hearing God through Prayer*
Prayer is intended to be two-way communication, and God can "speak" to us in many (often non-verbal) ways, but sometimes God seems silent or absent.

- *April 2: Prayer in Community*
Corporate prayer binds us together, strengthens and encourages us, and reflects the loving, interconnected relationship we see in God.

During the series, we will have an opportunity to learn from the personal experiences of different members of our community. In addition, each week we will engage in a prayer practice as part of the Sunday service, during our group discussion, and individually during the week. We hope that these and other prayer practices will become an integral part of our daily lives so that we grow into a community that increasingly experiences God's presence through a life of prayer.

Practicalities

- In this packet you will find the discussion questions for each week. Each of them assumes you have heard the message for that week, so if you were not able to be at Cedar Ridge that Sunday, **please listen or watch the message online** (www.crcc.org/messages/).
- Some of the discussion material suggests reading passages from specific versions of the Bible. www.biblegateway.com is a great site for accessing many different translations of the Bible.
- In all discipleship series, but particularly for a series focused on prayer, we encourage you to leave ample time to pray together as a group. As with the previous series on prayer, the intention is not just to *learn* about prayer, but to actually pray!
- Prayer is for all of God's children—whatever our age! Older children and youth will be covering similar, age-appropriate material during their Sunday morning groups. We encourage you to find creative ways to incorporate children and youth in your discipleship group meetings, and to engage with them on the topic of prayer throughout the week. To support this, each week contains a prayer practice that is suitable for children.
- Through prayer, we can be perfectly honest with ourselves and with God about our thoughts and feelings. Writing out these thoughts and feelings causes us to slow down enough to attend to our inner being, and can help us gain a clearer perspective. In journals, we can express ourselves to God and remind ourselves of God's greatness, love and mercy. Journals can also be a source of encouragement during hard times, reminding us of God's past faithfulness. We encourage you during this season of Lent to use a journal to record your discussions, reflections and prayers, and to share elements of them as appropriate during your group meetings.

- Annex 1 contains suggestions for additional reading on prayer. Annex 2 contains information on some additional prayer practices that have proved useful to followers of Jesus over the centuries.
- In addition to the materials in this book, Lenten prayer cards will be available in the Commons. These sets of seven cards—one for each day of the week—include suggestions for ways to pray during this season of Lent, and are suitable for use with all ages.

Additional Lenten Activities

- **Ash Wednesday service—March 1, 7 – 8 p.m.**
Join in an hour of prayer and reflection as we enter the forty-day Lenten season of self-examination, which mirrors Christ’s forty days in the wilderness. We will acknowledge our mortality with the refrain, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” and receive the mark of ashes as a physical sign of our frailty. When we surrender to this humbling reality, we open ourselves to God’s healing power to transform us and make us into “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”
- **Restorative Lenten Quiet Day—Saturday, March 25 from 10 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.**
In the busyness of our day-to-day lives, we often get distracted from our spiritual journeys. Lent is a time for us to return to our center — to Jesus — and check in with our true selves. During this Quiet Day in the historic barn, we will engage in group contemplative practices and have plenty of time in silence for prayer, self-examination, and walking the labyrinth. A simple breakfast will be provided; please bring your own lunch. Sorry, no childcare available. RSVP on the website, or contact melanieg@crcc.org. “If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored.” Job 22:23
- **Good Friday service—April 14, 7 – 8 pm**
On this, the darkest of nights, we will remember the surrender, suffering, and death of Jesus. Through sacred reading and music, prayerful reflection and holy communion, we will journey through the darkness to the cross, while keeping the hope of resurrection in our hearts and experiencing the community of hope around us.
- **The *Quarterly* Newsletter**
Also be sure to read the Cedar Ridge *Quarterly* newsletter, which is all about the season of Lent. It can be found on the Cedar Ridge website under the Connect With Us tab.

Lent Discipleship Series 2017
And All The People Said Amen

Week 1: Life Through the Lens of Prayer

Scripture tells us that God is always present with us, and as followers of Jesus we believe him to be the fullest expression of the presence of God (Immanuel: "God with us"). Jesus said he would never leave us, and that the Holy Spirit would be his ongoing companionship with us. We will look at prayer as both a means of noticing God's presence every day in all of life, and also as a means of nurturing our presence to God through deliberate practices. In this way we hope to deepen our love for God and grow in our sensitivity to God's leading and desire.

But life is rarely straightforward, and very often we do not experience God's presence. There are many times when we feel distant or assume God has withdrawn. This often leads to self-doubt, blaming ourselves, or blaming God, which only adds to our sense of alienation. We might feel God has given up on us or that we are too insensitive to feel God. Instead of apportioning blame, or even looking for a reason, we will seek to allow these feelings of absence to nurture desire within us. We will let them engage and stir up our deepest senses of longing for divine presence. We will also consider the vulnerability of God who wishes to be loved and pursued rather than forsaken. By awakening to both presence and absence we will seek to see and live all of life through the lens of prayer.

This week's discussion questions

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What was difficult for you?

2. The speaker on Sunday suggested we often conceive of God as either a person or as a mysterious force. Read the following passages and discuss how the above concepts apply to each:
 - Matthew 1:22-25
 - Colossians 1:15-17
 - John 14:17-18
 - John 3:8

3. How might conceiving of God as a person help us become more aware of God in everyday life? How might understanding God as a force or energy help us become more aware of God in everyday life?

4. What was your reaction to the theme of God's "absence" in the message on Sunday? Read Song of Songs 3:1-5. How might this apply here?
5. This week we are seeking to experience God's presence more fully and more often in everyday life. If God is present and God is love, it would not be surprising to find that God is communicating with us much more than we are aware. The prayer practice this week is a simple way to quiet our hearts and minds to be more sensitive to God's presence. In this place of quiet, we will aim to be intentionally conscious of our thoughts, emotions, feelings, promptings and intuition and be open to the possibility that these have a divine source. This takes courage because there is always the chance we will be mistaken. But we will also be humble enough to be open to this too, and recognize mistakes as yet another means for us to grow as we develop a deeper understanding of our own unique way of experiencing and communicating with God.

It is recommended that the group reads through all these guidelines together first and then assigns a leader to prompt and lead the group through each stage. In this group exercise, we will open ourselves to the possibility of receiving something from God that might be specifically for us personally or might be for someone else in the group.

Stage 1: Quiet (about 2 minutes)

Sit quietly with eyes closed, back straight and body relaxed. Become conscious of your breathing and flow with its rhythm. Take one or two slightly deeper breaths than normal and then settle back into a normal rhythm. Feel your feet on the floor, and be aware of your presence where you are. Relax.

Stage 2: Invite (about 2 minutes)

Continue to breathe in a relaxed way. With each breath, breathe in God's love. Invite God's presence and consciously open your heart and mind.

Stage 3: Notice (about 5 minutes)

Be aware of feelings, emotions, thoughts and insights. Don't try to analyze them but let them come. These might seem strange: they could be a fleeting or recurring thought, or a feeling or sensation in a certain part of your body (including pain). You might "see" something in your mind's eye, like a picture or a vision (even just briefly). You might have a "hunch" or intuition about something, or just feel as a certain word, phrase, sentence or even a scripture impressed upon you. You might hear something (which feels audible to you). You might sense a strong emotion like joy or sadness or anger or a deep sense of love. Try to open all your external senses and your internal being to this. Don't inhibit anything or try to understand it yet. Just receive it as a gift.

Stage 4: Reflect (about 3 minutes)

Reflect quietly on what you just experienced. Ask God to show you what these experiences mean, and consider whether and how they apply to you personally. Don't

jump to conclusions and hold them lightly. Put the pressure on God to help you, rather than on you to understand. In all your interpretations, even if they feel somewhat challenging, ask yourself, "Does this sound like love?" If the answer is no, let go of that interpretation.

Stage 5: Share (about 10-15 minutes)

Go around the group and each share what you experienced (saw, heard, felt etc.). Be careful to share only what you experienced rather than applying any meaning to it, unless you think the meaning applies to you personally (in which case feel free to share that). This is very important. Let God impress the meaning onto someone else rather than trying to do that yourself. Be courageous: this will feel awkward and uncomfortable but you may be sharing God's loving communication with someone else. Be light-hearted: Let's not take ourselves too seriously as we may also be mistaken, but making mistakes in an atmosphere of love and humility is not a problem. As each person shares, be open to how what they share might apply to you and what God might be communicating to you. Remember to use the same filter, "Does this sound like love?" but don't be afraid of loving challenges!

Stage 6: Reflect as a Group (about 10-15 minutes)

Once everyone has shared, take 2 minutes of reflective silence. Then go back around the group and all express if you felt that anything shared applies to you, and how. You don't need to go into detail (unless you would like to), but be courageous to share at least what seemed relevant. That way the person that shared it can validate what they experienced as a most likely a real expression of God's love. This helps each of us to begin to discern what is from God and what is not. That takes a lifetime of constant learning, but this kind of feedback really helps. It is important again that people only share how they think something applies to them and not to someone else.

Stage 7: Personal Prayer (about 10 minutes)

Take a few moments to pray for one another (out loud and in silence are both good). Pray for the different things that have come up and any needs or challenges people have expressed.

Prayer practice during the week

During the week, set aside a time daily to do the above practice for yourself. Keep a journal of your experiences to help you see patterns in the way you experience God.

Prayer practice with children

Sit quietly in a comfortable position with your eyes closed. Focus on breathing in and out and relax. Invite God to speak to you, and wait patiently. With your eyes still closed, be aware of what you inwardly feel or hear or see. After 3 minutes open your eyes and share what you felt or heard or saw. What do you think this means and why? What might God be saying to you? Thank God for speaking to you and being with you. Begin a prayer journal where your child can draw what they see and experience, or write prayers and impressions.

Lent Discipleship Series 2017 And All The People Said Amen

Week 2: Prayer as Worship

We are surrounded by an orchestra of sound, and are created to join in this universal symphony through song. As we take time to experience the sounds of nature, we can embrace the place for song in our lives. Singing reduces stress and elevates our mood, and can reinforce a sense of community. While participation in secular choruses is on the rise in the U.S., singing in church is on the decline. Many people feel disconnected from church singing, which has confused authentic communal worship with a performance approach to music. Gospel music has much to teach us about how to worship in authentic community.

Scripture abounds with sung prayer, including examples from Moses and Hannah, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. These sung prayers reflect various aspects of worship, such as an attitude of service, a commitment to social justice, inward transformation, and a deliberate choice to honor God through our whole lives. We can offer up our own sung prayer by taking time to listen to sounds in nature, developing a personal practice of worship that includes song, and opening our hearts to the community worship experience.

This week's discussion questions

1. What was your experience with the prayer practice over the course of the past week? What thoughts or insights do you want to share with the group?
2. What stood out to you from the message on Sunday? What resonated with you? Was anything challenging or difficult for you?
3. What are the sounds from nature that you enjoy? How often do you get to experience that (either in nature or through recordings)? When you listen to rushing water and birds, how do you feel?
4. What do you usually experience when music starts on a Sunday morning? This could be an emotional and/or physical sensation.
 - Do you ever "go through the motions"? Why do you think this is?
 - Do you ever hold back from heartfelt expression in worship because of a critical comment about your singing, either as a child or adult?
 - Have you had an experience that made worship less enjoyable?

5. Read Ephesians 5:19-20 (preferably from The Message version of the Bible).
 - What does it mean to sing a song from your heart?
 - Have you ever felt that you were not singing from the heart? If so, can you recognize why?
6. Choose a favorite simple worship song and sing it as a prayer to God together, without music or instruments. Repeat the song twice or more. Some ideas include Jesus Be the Center and Open the Eyes of my Heart. (If you are shy about singing without accompaniment, you can find these—together with the lyrics—on YouTube.)
7. Read Amos 5:21-24 (preferably from The Message version of the Bible).
 - How do you understand the relationship between prayer, worship and social justice?
 - What are areas of social justice where you can be more active, as an act of worship?
 - As a group, consider doing an “Act of Worship” by participating together in a social justice cause in your community.

Prayer practice during the week

Take five minutes each day to meditate on sounds from nature as part of your time of prayer and worship. Sit in a comfortable position and breathe deeply. Feel the sounds of birds, rushing water, and let the vibrations move through you. If time or accessibility to nature make that difficult, try this recording: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzM7R6Vzp4s

Alternatively, play the multimedia “Orchestra” poem posted on our website (www.crc.org/what-were-doing-this-month/). Again, sit in a comfortable position, breathe deeply, and even close your eyes and listen if you like.

Singing prayer exercise, written by Scott and Caroline, from Psalm 104:10-12:

- With your family or on your own, sing the simple words with the recording on the webpage for this series (www.crc.org/what-were-doing-this-month/). Breathe deeply between phrases.
- If you feel inspired, choose one of your favorite Bible verses and sing your own unique melody.

Prayer practice with children

When you listen to rushing water and birds, how do you feel? Take five minutes and draw while you listen to music in nature by sitting outside or listening to this recording: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzM7R6Vzp4s. Share what you drew and felt. Thank God for all the wonderful sounds in creation.

**Lent Discipleship Series 2017
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Week 3: The Healing Power of Prayer

Healing through prayer is a cornerstone of discipleship and transformation. Prayer brings awareness of where we are falling short of God's dreams for us, it gives us the courage to become willing to change and heal, and it connects us to the healing power of the Holy Spirit. The source of this healing power is the love and compassion of God, as personified by Jesus Christ, and this love can heal us mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

There are many mysteries surrounding healing prayer, but we can be certain that Jesus was a powerful healer who revealed God's love and compassion by healing multitudes, and he expected his followers to do the same. For many centuries, healing ministries were central to the church's work, but for various reasons, few churches engage in such ministry these days. Since each of us has Christ's Spirit within us, we can all be channels for the Holy Spirit's healing power if we have the chutzpah (faith) to persistently pray for healing for ourselves and others and expect God to hear us. We may pray for release from emotional burdens, from mental illness, from guilt and shame, or from physical infirmities through hands-on prayer. We leave the outcome of our prayers to God, knowing that we have brought more divine love to the world, and that God will be glorified through our compassionate actions, one way or another.

This week's discussion questions

1. What was your experience with the sounds of nature of singing prayer exercise this past week? What thoughts or insights do you want to share with the group?
2. What was your response to this week's message? Were there parts that resonated with you or that surprised you? Did elements of the message cause you anxiety or discomfort?
3. What has been your personal experience with the power of healing prayer and/or with "hands-on" prayer?
4. Is there someone in your group who is willing to be a recipient of "hands-on" prayer right now? If so, ask what they would like healing for and then gather around and gently place your hands on them. (Make sure they are comfortable with this physical contact.) Ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you with compassion for that person and then pray for their prayer requests. Ask Jesus to give the person whatever it is they need for health and wholeness. This is not a time for giving advice or offering insights, and silent prayer is most welcome as you minister to the person.

5. The speaker on Sunday mentioned a number of potential obstacles to the power of healing prayer that involve our understandings and expectations of God and our own faith. Consider the following questions and discuss whether any of them might hinder your own openness to offering or receiving healing prayer:
 - Does God send sickness?
 - Why does God allow suffering?
 - Does God even want to heal us?
 - Are you willing to ask for help?
 - Do you think you need more faith to pray for others or to receive healing prayer?
6. Which seems more of a stretch for you: to trust others to pray for your healing, or to open yourself to be a channel for the Holy Spirit to heal others? Why?
7. Where could you use God's healing power right now? Emotional balance, psychological health, forgiveness, physical ailments? Something else? See if anyone would like to share with the group, and pray for one another in the time remaining.

Prayer practice during the week

During the week, repeat the group "hands-on" prayer practice (question #4) with family members or friends. Ask God to give that person whatever they need for health and wholeness. Your motivation should be compassion. Release the outcome to God. Again, ask permission before touching anyone and refrain from giving advice.

Alternatively, set aside time to send healing prayers to someone you care for who is troubled or sick. Close your eyes and imagine that person sitting in front of you. Relax and take a few deep breaths. Let yourself feel compassion and empathy for them, even if it hurts. Now imagine reaching out and gently placing your hands on the person. Sit quietly and ask Jesus to send healing power through your hands and into your loved one. Allow yourself to feel hopeful and expectant that God wants to heal them and that your concern and compassion can help. Take your time and relax. Surrender the outcome to God and thank God for allowing you to be a channel of love and comfort.

Prayer practice with children

Ask your child(ren) to help you pray for someone that you both know and care for, perhaps one of their grandparents. Have them close their eyes and imagine their loved one sitting in front of them, or have them draw a picture. Ask your child(ren) to imagine gently placing their hands on the person's knees. Tell them they can use their hands as special "love senders" to send Jesus' love straight from their hearts to the other person. Assure them they can do this anytime for anyone, when they ask Jesus to help them pray in this special way. Send the picture to your friend or loved one to let them know you prayed for them.

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And All The People Said Amen**

Week 4: Hearing God Through Prayer

Jesus has not left us as orphans (John 14:18), but has sent the Spirit to teach us, guide us, and reveal Jesus to us. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we long to draw closer to Jesus and “hear” God in all areas of our life. This “hearing” can take many forms: sometimes verses from Scripture resonate with us in a special way, or lyrics from a song come to mind. Sometimes God speaks to us through other people, through dreams or mental pictures, or through a sense of peace, warmth or comfort. We need to test what we believe God is saying to us by asking if it sounds like something Jesus would say in light of Scripture and tradition, and by seeking the advice of friends you trust.

Nevertheless, there are many times when we do not “hear” (or feel) God—when God seems silent or absent. While this is sometimes because we do not make time and space to quiet our minds and listen to God, at other times, God seems to withdraw a sense of the divine presence. We can respond to this “absence” in various ways. Our disappointment can lead us to lower our expectations, and no longer expect to experience God, as a way of guarding our hearts against future disappointment. Alternatively, we can embrace this sense of absence as an opportunity to consider why we pursue a relationship with God, and as a means of strengthening our resolve and increasing our sense of longing for God’s presence.

This week’s discussion questions

1. What was your experience with the imagined or literal “hands on” prayer practice this past week? What thoughts or insights do you want to share?
2. What stood out to you as significant from the message and panel discussion on Sunday? Was there anything that you disagreed with or found difficult?
3. The speaker on Sunday claimed that God is still speaking to people today. Do you agree with this? In what ways do you think God still speaks today? In what ways do you think this differs (if at all) from ways people believe God has spoken in the past?
4. Read John 16:12-15.
 - Why did Jesus say he had more to say than the disciples could bear?
 - What might this tell us about how God progressively reveals truth to us (i) as individuals, and (ii) as the church collectively?
 - What do you think it means for the Spirit to guide us “into all truth”?

- This short passage is highly relational, connecting Jesus, the Father, the Spirit and the disciples. What do you think this oneness and interconnectedness tells us about the truth the Spirit will reveal to us?
5. The speaker on Sunday made the point that God often speaks in non-verbal or aural ways. In what ways have you “heard” (or felt) God?
 6. One important way that God speaks to us is through Scripture. Take some time now to listen for God by reading and meditating on Luke 5:1-11. We will use the traditional Benedictine practice known as Lectio Divina (“divine reading”).
 - Have someone read Luke 5:1-11 twice through, slowly.
 - The group leader should then say: “Let the words flow over you. Savor each phrase, believing that God is present and has something for you. There is no need to search; simply listen for a word or phrase that somehow speaks to you or touches you. It might attract or even disturb you. Spend some time in silence with the word or phrase, just resting in it and allowing it to sink into your heart.”
 - After a few minutes of silence, have someone read the passage slowly again.
 - The group leader should then say, “Reflect or meditate on the word or phrase that stood out. How might it be speaking to you or challenging you? Allow memories, thoughts or situations evoked by the word to rise up gently. Allow God to reveal to you how the word or phrase applies to your life. Ask, “What meaning does this have for me here and now? What does God want me to know or to see?” Spend time in silence, reflecting on the phrase and allowing it to interact with your life.”
 - After a few minutes of silence, have someone read the passage again.
 - The group leader should then say, “Open your heart to God and openly and honestly share with God how you feel about your experience with the passage.”
 - After a few minutes, the group leader should say, “Allow your prayers to gently fade away and move into a time of simply resting in God’s arms. Allow yourself freedom from thoughts, both mundane and holy. Open your mind, heart and soul to the fullness of God’s love and peace. Rest.”
 7. How did you feel about this prayer practice? Was this a helpful exercise for you? Is there anything you would like to share with the group?

Prayer practice during the week

During the week, take some time to repeat the Lectio Divina practice, focusing on one or more of the following scriptures (you may want to read from The Message version):

- Matthew 4:17-22
- Matthew 8:5-13

- Matthew 11:28-30
- Mark 4:35-41

Remember:

- Read the passage twice through, slowly.
- Let the words flow over you. Savor each phrase, believing that God is present and has something for you. Listen for a word or phrase that somehow speaks to you or touches you. Spend some time in silence with the word or phrase, just resting in it and allowing it to sink into your heart
- Read the passage a third time.
- Reflect on the word or phrase that stood out. How might it be speaking to you? Allow memories, thoughts or situations evoked by the word to rise up gently. Allow God to reveal to you how the word or phrase applies to your life. Spend time in silence, reflecting on the phrase and allowing it to interact with your life.
- Read the passage a fourth time.
- Open your heart to God and openly and honestly share with God how you feel about your experience with the passage.
- After a few minutes, allow your prayers to gently fade away and move into a time of simply resting in God's arms. Open your mind, heart and soul to the fullness of God's love and peace. Rest

Is there anything you feel God is communicating to you through this passage? Note any reactions, emotions, sensations or thoughts in your journal.

Prayer practice with children

Lectio Divina can help children experience God through the Bible. Read to your child(ren) a short Bible story, such as one of the following (you may want to read from the International Children's Version or from a children's Bible, depending on the age of the child):

- Jesus calms a storm (Mark 4:35-41)
- Jesus heals a blind man (Mark 10:46-52)
- Jesus feeds 5,000 people (John 6:1-14)

Depending on the age of your child(ren) and their willingness to sit still, read the story a couple of times. Then talk to your child(ren) about the story:

- What did Jesus do in the story? Have them act it out as you read.
- What was the most interesting part of the story?
- What can we learn from this story?
- What shall we say to Jesus about this story? Very young children might like to draw a picture of themselves in the story with Jesus, or sing a song to Jesus.

Pray together, reflecting on the answer to this last question.

**Lent Discipleship Series 2017
And All The People Said Amen**

Week 5: Prayer in Community

Prayer is a gift, not only for individual followers of Jesus, but also for the church as a whole. In praying together, we declare our collective dependence on God, and extend our perspective beyond our own needs to the needs of others. As we pray together, we recognize that we are all weak and broken—in need of forgiveness, encouragement and love. “Their” problem becomes “our” problem as we pray for one another, share the emotional weight of situations, and respond practically through action and support. Corporate prayer thus binds us together and reflects the loving, interconnected relationship we see in God.

Praising God together through song, spoken words, creative activity or shared silence can be a form of prayer that unites us in our love for God and exhorts us to live from the reality of that love. Through prayers of confession, we find the assurance of forgiveness, develop humility and empathy, and foster mutual accountability. And as we intercede together for the deep needs of our world, we gain clarity in expressing God’s desire for justice and mercy, and find hope and strength in our unity of purpose.

This week’s discussion questions

1. What was your experience with Lectio Divina this past week? What thoughts or insights do you want to share?
2. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What was difficult for you?
3. Private prayer can be honest and unguarded, since God already knows everything in our hearts and minds. But corporate prayer can sometimes feel awkward or embarrassing.
 - Do you find it easy to pray with other people?
 - What helps you pray with others?
 - Can you think of a time that was special to you when you prayed with others? What made it special?
4. Read Ephesians 1:15-21.
 - What does Paul pray for the followers of Jesus in Ephesus?
 - What do you think is the motivation for this prayer?
 - How might this inform our prayers for one another?

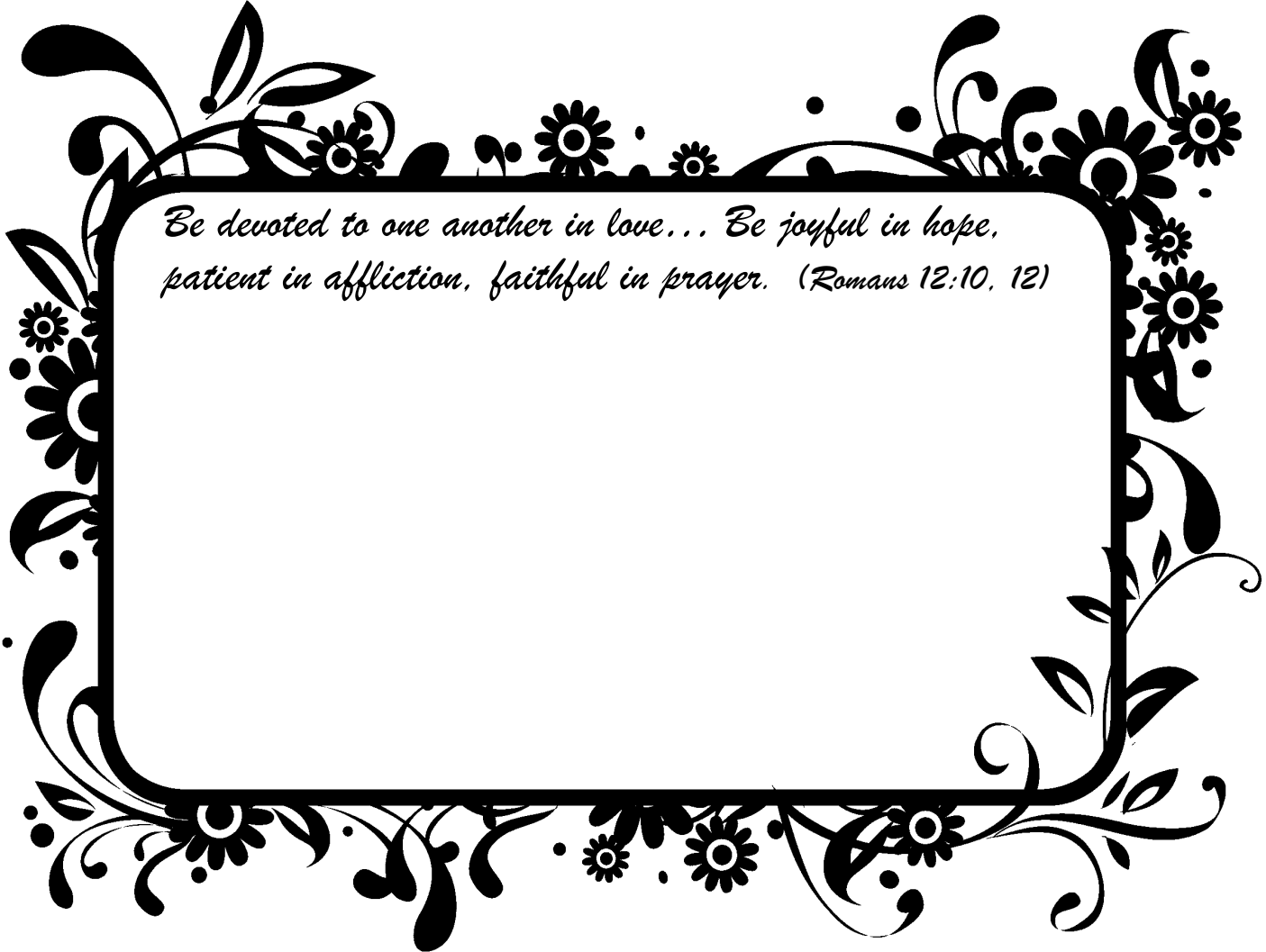
5. As we have discussed throughout this series, prayer is so much more than specific words we say to God. Read Romans 12:10-16.
 - What different forms of prayer do you see in this passage?
 - The Message translates verse 13b as “Be inventive with hospitality.” How can hospitality link to prayer? Is there someone for whom you could be inventive with hospitality?
6. Take some time to pray for one another. Take turns sharing something you would like the group to pray about for you personally. This could be an area of thanksgiving, a spiritual or emotional concern, a practical need, a request for guidance, etc. Note the prayer requests in the frame on the following page in this book. Pray for one another as a group, and commit to continue to pray for one another during the week.

Prayer practice during the week

Cut out the framed prayer list on the next page and keep it somewhere you can find it easily during the week. Continue to pray for one another, using this list.

Prayer practice with children

Using the template on the next page, help your child(ren) write a prayer for your family. Pray the prayer together each day—perhaps at dinnertime, while driving in the car, or before bed.



*Be devoted to one another in love... Be joyful in hope,
patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:10, 12)*



A Prayer for My Family

Dear God,

Thank you for...

Please help us...

May we always remember that you...

Amen!

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And All The People Said Amen**

Annex 1: Suggested Reading

Prayer (General)

- The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence
- Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God by Dallas Willard (1999)
- Surprised by the Voice of God: How God Speaks Today Through Prophecies, Dreams, and Visions by Jack Deere (1997)

Prayer and Worship

- The Unquenchable Worshipper by Matt Redmond (2001)
- Indescribable: Encountering the Glory of God in the Beauty of the Universe by Louie Giglio and Matt Redmond (2011)
- The 6 Marks of Progressive Christian Worship Music by Bryan Sirchio (2012)

Prayer and Healing

- Healing & Christianity: A Classic Study by Morton Kelsey (1995)
- The Healing Gifts of the Spirit by Agnes Sanford (1966)
- The Practice of Healing Prayer by Francis MacNutt (2010)
- Power Healing by John Wimber and Kevin Springer (1987)

**Lent Discipleship Series 2017
And All The People Said Amen**

Annex 2: Additional Prayer Practices

Breathing the breath of life

Sit comfortably with your back straight, your shoulders back, and your feet on the floor. Listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. Breathing accompanied by prayer will awaken you to God’s presence as you “breathe in” the love of God and calm your mind, heart and body. Use a short phrase that can be repeated interiorly in rhythm with breathing. Pray a prayer from scripture or from your heart, like “I breathe in Christ and all that is good,” and then “I breathe out Christ and release all that is fearful and false.” Continue the practice for five or ten minutes, always conscious of God’s love infusing your being. (Children can engage with this kind of prayer. Ask them to lie down and watch their stomach rise and fall as they breathe, or to close their eyes and listen to the sound of their breathing through their mouth or nostrils.)

The Examen

This is best practiced in the evening as you look back over that day’s activities. Sit comfortably in silence with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed and hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes and relax your shoulders. To begin, listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. Continue with regular deep breathing. Allow tension to fade from your body, and your spirit to be at peace.

Think back over the previous day (or the period of time since your last Examen). Trace the story of your life during this period of time and observe what happened. As you do so, consider the following two questions but remember not to evaluate or judge yourself; just be honest:

- 1) At what times during your story did you experience God’s presence? What happened? How was God present? Were you aware of God being present at the time, or is it only now as you look back that you realize it? What did you do that enabled you to experience God? What was the outcome?
- 2) At what times during your story were you resistant to God’s presence? What happened? How did you resist? Were you aware of resisting, or is it only now as you look back that you realize it? What were your feelings or beliefs about the situation and any person(s) involved, including yourself and God? What was the outcome? How could you have thought, acted or believed in a way that would have embraced the reality of God’s presence, and channeled more love into the situation, with the person or yourself?

When you have finished reflecting on your story, continue with deep breathing for a few more minutes. Consider what these reflections reveal to you about what God is like. Invite God into the story that lies ahead of you, and ask God to reveal more of God's being to you. Ask God to help you be more embracing of God's presence tomorrow.

Centering prayer

Find a time and place where you can sit comfortably with as few distractions as possible. Ideally, you will be able to set aside 20 minutes for this practice. Set a timer so you do not have to think about it. Select a "sacred word" or "prayer word" that will symbolize your intent and consent to focus only on God during this time. It should be short and not distract you. Something simple like love, God, Jesus, peace will be fine. The word itself is not important—the intent to surrender is what's important.

Close your eyes and tell God that you are willing to release your whole being in order to be one with God and that you are offering your sacred word to signify your intent. Ask Jesus to help you. Begin by slowly and silently letting the word rest in your mind. This is not a mantra to be repeated, it is only to signify intent, and your word will slowly drift away along with your thoughts. Whenever you notice a thought, emotion or memory, silently and gently offer your prayer word to replace it. Let your thoughts float by—do not be distressed by their presence, just acknowledge them and let them go with the help of your sacred word. Even "spiritual" thoughts or prayers—let them all go and allow God to work in your mind and heart, unencumbered by your "self." At the end of your time, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a few minutes, allowing your thoughts to return.

Practicing presence

Prepare. Begin to let go of all thought of the future or past. Focus on your breathing. As you inhale, allow the Holy Spirit to come in as you breathe. As you exhale, let go of anxiety, stress and fear.

Be present to where you are. Consider the environment around you—your space, the natural beauty you may see, smells, sounds, the people nearby. Truly notice these things and thank God for providing them.

Be present to who you are. Ask God to show you what you are feeling at this moment. Where is there anxiety or concern? What are your emotions? Are you happy or sad? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you are trying to control, and release it.

Be present to God. Rest in this awareness, being mindful of where you are and who you are, and that God loves you and is present with you.

To close this time of prayer, thank God for being present and for loving you, and slowly return to your activities, bringing the Holy Spirit with you. Repeat often.