



## Prayer Practices for the Week

## Week 1: Earth

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*

Psalm 8:3-4 (NIV)

*God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature, so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth." God created human beings; God created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. God created them male and female.*

Genesis 1:26-27 (The Message)

In the message this week we explored different ways in which God can be experienced through the metaphor of earth—as the Creator of our beautiful planet, as the One in whose image we are made, as a Gardener who encourages us to grow good things, and as divine Clothing that covers our shame and vulnerability, and gives us confidence and a new identity. Below are a few suggestions of ways to further explore this metaphor during the coming week.

### Experiencing God as a Person

God was fully present in a human body that—despite different ethnicity, gender, or age—was very much like yours. Throughout Scripture there are many anthropomorphisms. God is described as holding our hand, and carrying us; listening, seeing, and speaking to us; ruling, guarding, fighting, judging, etc. Look at your body and/or place your hand on different parts—hands, arms, ears, eyes, mouth, etc.—and meditate on how God metaphorically and literally (in Jesus) uses a body.

### Mountains as Holy Places

Throughout Scripture, people have had special encounters with God on mountains. There is perhaps something about “rising above” everyday life that opens us up in a new way to the presence of God. Make time this week to climb a hill to gain a new perspective. What might God be saying to you right now?

### Create an “Altar”

We were created with senses that are constantly interacting with our highly stimulating and often distracting world. Identify some objects that help you to quiet your mind, center on God, and feel God's love. These could be traditional objects such as candles, scented oils, natural objects (shells, rocks, etc.), or photos of people and places, or other reminders of your faith journey. Place them on a shelf or in a box and use them to meditate on God's unending love for you.

## Week 2: Wind and Air

*Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*

John 3: 7-8 (NRSV)

In the message this week, we explored different ways in which wind and air can be metaphors that help us experience God – in a gentle breeze, storms, sailing, flying, our breath, and our voices. This week, be intentionally aware of wind and air movement around you as a way to be more aware of God's presence. There are so many ways to do this and each of us will have a different preference, but here are a few suggestions to get started:

### Absence and Longing

When you are outside in the heat and humidity of these summer days and find yourself longing for a cool breeze, reflect on your own longing for God. Be aware of it and let it well up within you.

### Gentle Breeze

When you feel a refreshing cool breeze, receive it as God's love and affection for you. Consciously breathe it in and let it invigorate your whole being.

### Storms

During one of the early-evening storms we often have at this time of year, watch through a window, or even stand safely outside to feel the power and apparent chaos of the wind as it moves the clouds and trees and rattles all around you. Reflect on what storms might be going on in your own life and how God might be present in them (perhaps in a way you've not previously been aware of). What parts of your life need to be disrupted? What needs to be blown away or blown down?

### Passengers

Be aware of what is being physically carried by the wind and air around you. Some leaves have begun to fall, seeds are floating, spirally and flying. There's even still some pollen in the air, and look for spiders letting the wind transport them as they release a trail of gossamer behind. Look out for unexpected and apparently random opportunities to give and receive God's love with the people and situations you encounter this week.

## Week 3: Fire

*I will bring [the people] through the fire and make them pure. I will refine them like silver and purify them like gold. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'These are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'*

Zechariah 13:9 (NLT)

*Never let the fire in your heart go out. Keep it alive. Serve the Lord.*

Romans 12:11 (NIRV)

In the message on Sunday, we explored different ways in which fire can be a metaphor that help us experience God. This includes a refiner's fire that purifies precious metals, a forest fire that burns up deadwood to make way for new growth, a bonfire that captivates us, live coals as a gift to those around us, and a fiery passion to bring more of God's light and warmth to our world. Below are a few suggestions of ways to further explore this metaphor during the coming week.

### Cooking

When you cook meals this week, notice how heat transforms the food—making some things softer, others harder or more brittle, bringing out the flavor of some ingredients, and muting that of others. How has life's "heat" impacted you? Where have you softened or hardened? Where has flavor been intensified or lessened? Talk to God about this.

### Transfiguration

In the story of the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), the disciples recognized Jesus' true nature as "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." Take a walk and look at the shadows and areas of sunlight. Note how light illuminates and transfigures different objects. How might divine light reveal your true nature as a child of God?

### Attention

Make some time this week to watch a candle burn, or to sit outside by a small fire. Quiet your mind and simply watch; feel the warmth; listen to any crackling. Give this time to God without any expectations.

## Week 4: Water

*On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."*

John 7: 37-38 (NIV)

In the message this week, we explored different ways in which water can help us experience God—as an ocean of love, as an agent of cleansing and refreshing, or as the object of our thirst, our desires and deepest longings. Water in its various forms is commonplace and ever present to us, so this week be intentionally aware of your interaction with water in your daily life. Here are some ways to do that:

### Thirst and Longing

Whenever you have a drink of water (or some other liquid refreshment) imbibe it mindfully. Drink slowly, taste it, feel it in your mouth and throat and as you swallow it. Reflect on your thirst and what made you want to have a drink. Allow this to awaken your own longing for God—for meaning, for purpose, for belonging, for peace. How are you responding to these longings in daily life?

### Rain

It will most likely rain at least sometime this week. When it does, take a moment to experience it. Stand outside and let it shower you, or watch it through a window. What are the dry and barren areas of your life that need to come alive? Invite God into those places. Be aware of any hardness or resistance on your part, and let them go to receive God's love.

### Washing

When you shower, or bathe, or even when you are washing items in the kitchen sink, be mindful of God's love and allow it to wash over you. Receive it as total acceptance of you and without judgment. Let it wash away the marks and stains of the day (or week); let it soothe and restore your cuts and bruises. As you receive God's love, let go of fear, release your failings to God, let go of bitterness, and receive healing. Let God's love wash and refresh you.

### Rivers and Oceans

If you pass a body of water this week, perhaps a river, lake or pond (or even the ocean, if you are at the coast), pause and take a moment to reflect. If the water is moving (like a creek or river) imagine yourself in the flow of God's love. Don't overthink this, just align yourself in God's love—receive it and posture your heart to give it away to friends and enemies alike. If the water is more still (like a lake or the ocean) imagine yourself immersed in God, and let yourself wake up to the reality that God is all around us, holding us, and holding everyone else too—friends and enemies alike.