



W H E N   Y O U   P R A Y



DEVO

WEEK 3

# When You Pray

## Devotional & Next Steps

May 2/3

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 watch 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:

- What is your experience of forgiveness? How have your experiences impacted your relationship with self, God and others?
- What have you been taught or learned about forgiveness? Who taught you? Are the things you have learned based on the gospel or based on other things?
- The first two questions might be challenging to answer right away, especially if you haven't thought much about how you experience forgiveness– that's okay! Here are some questions that might give you insight on your experiences with forgiveness:
  - Is forgiveness a frequent and active part of your faith walk? Why or why not?

- Do you feel comfortable asking for forgiveness from God and others? Is this a regular part of your life?
- Do you feel comfortable receiving forgiveness from God and others? What does receiving forgiveness look like?
  - What does it look like for you to forgive yourself? Do you think it's possible to receive forgiveness from others if we do not forgive ourselves?
  - Do you feel comfortable extending forgiveness to others? Do you tend to withhold forgiveness from others?
- What might God be inviting you into this season?

## Scripture to Study

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

### Matthew 18:21-35

- The gospels include several stories like these, called parables. A parable is a comparison or illustration that uses a story to emphasize a moral or spiritual truth. In Matthew 18, Jesus talks about the practice of forgiveness after Peter essentially asks, "How often do I have to forgive?"
- In verses 21-22, Peter likely thought he was being very spiritual by saying he would forgive a brother seven times (Rabbi's taught 2-3 times of forgiveness was enough and in Jewish culture, the number seven represented completion).
  - What do you think it means that Jesus said we should forgive seventy-seven times? What is God's standard of forgiveness?
- In verses 23-27, the debt here would be impossible to pay – one talent was equal to about 20 years of wages and the number 'ten thousand' is the highest Greek numeral – Jesus is making the point that the debt owed by the servant could never be paid back to the king.
  - In this parable, who are each of the characters? The king? The servants? What does the debt represent?
  - What should happen to the servant if he cannot pay the debt?
  - What character does the king show when he forgives the debt?
- In verses 28-34, one hundred denarii is equal to 100 days wages, a large amount of money but substantially less than the first amount owed to the king.

- What character does the servant show when he doesn't forgive?
- What does this parable say about the importance of forgiveness?
- How can we show mercy to others as we have received mercy?
- If this parable is meant to instruct the disciples about the limits of forgiveness, what is emphasized?
- Look back at verse 23 – “the kingdom of heaven” is like this story... What does this passage teach us about God?
- How might a lack of forgiveness manifest itself in our lives? When do you find it hard to forgive others? How does the truth of the gospel change the way we view forgiveness?
- Is there anyone in your life you need to forgive?

### **Psalm 51 & 32**

- Read Psalm 51 first – you're likely familiar with parts of it, especially verse 10, “create in me a clean heart, O God” (throwback to 90's worship music!). This psalm is one of confession. Read through it slowly and use the below questions/prompts as they are helpful.
  - V.1-2: When the psalmist asks for mercy (or other things referring to washing or extending grace), ask God to extend you mercy. Do not merely read the psalm, but read it to God from your heart.
  - V. 3-6: When the psalm mentions sin and transgressions, become aware of the ways you have lived separate from God. When you read about transgressions and sin, bring your own sins forward to God.
  - V. 7-12: When the psalmist asks for things like a clean heart, the Holy Spirit, and restoration – ask God for those things for yourself. Receive things in the moment – do not be surprised if when you ask for joy to be restored, you feel joyful. Acknowledge those moments and thank God out of your joy.
  - V. 13-17: Be free to stop reading the psalm and apply what the psalm is saying. When it says “my mouth will declare your praise, “ allow yourself to pause, and praise God audibly.
  - V. 18-19: Think of Zion and Jerusalem as the Kingdom of God and the burnt sacrifices as God's people aligning their lives towards Him. Pray for the church and for God's people to orient their lives to God.

- Close by reading Psalm 32 – a blessing of those who are forgiven. Rest knowing that you are forgiven by a good God who delights in you and desires to give you good things.

## 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 Simplicity**

I don’t know about you, but I am often tempted to define who I am by what I have, what I have accomplished, who I am associated with and what I can do rather than defining myself by who God says I am. When we clutter our lives with more stuff, more production, more posts and more distractions, we rob ourselves of the joy and balance that God desires for us. I’ve often found that the less simple my life, the harder it is for me to live into my identity as a child of God – clutter and chaos make it that much harder to find time for a daily devotional, to speak the words “I’m sorry, please forgive me,” and to believe that what God says is actually true. That’s not the life we’re made for.

Simplicity is more of a lifestyle than a specific daily practice, but we can start practicing it with small steps. In a life of simplicity, we intentionally prioritize the things that really matter by removing what is not necessary. Simplicity allows us to abide in Jesus: we intentionally live with less stuff and less chaos in order to make more space for God and what God cares about.

I want to be clear – simplicity isn’t just getting rid of all of the junk in your house and living a #simplelife. Choosing a life of simplicity isn’t always easy or glamorous, but it is especially important during uncertain times like this. You see, a life of simplicity happens externally – minimizing our stuff, where our attention goes, etc. – so that we can achieve simplicity inwardly. If we only simplify our lives externally, but do not achieve a simplified inward life, we haven’t truly encountered the simplicity God has

designed for us. We express outward simplicity best when we can inwardly acknowledge God as center, our provider and sustainer.

Below are some ideas of steps you can take towards simplicity – but simplicity isn't about the steps in and of themselves, it's about what taking the steps leaves room for. Regardless of what step you take, pay attention to what you gain (inwardly and outwardly) in the simplicity.

- Choose one unnecessary activity and eliminate it from your schedule:
  - Fast from social media for one evening, one day or one week.
  - Refrain from watching the news one or a few days out of the week.
  - Eliminate non-essential screen time for one day.
- Actively think through your purchases, being mindful of simplicity. Do you need what you are purchasing? Are you buying because you feel you are bored, lonely, stir-crazy, etc.?
- Spend time de-cluttering an area of your house .
- Simplify or minimize your food consumption – focus on simple, healthy foods rather than processed or “treat” foods.

To learn more about Simplicity, check out the following:

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

## 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.*

### *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.*

*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.*

*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.