

Faith Practices Encouragement

Introduction

Throughout the summer months Pastor Tom has been using the book *Faith Practices* as a foundation for a sermon series encouraging us to grow as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Faith practices are “repeated actions that help us grow in our love for God and our neighbor, listen to the Holy Spirit, and become more like Jesus” (*Faith Practices*, Faith Formation Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI, 2022).

The book *Faith Practices* provides many helpful tools for engaging twelve faith practices. These 3 sessions have been developed to help put into practice some of those tools giving attention to the faith practices of gratitude, engaging scripture, and prayer. Hopefully working through these 3 sessions will begin to establish a pattern or continue to nurture a pattern in one’s daily routine.

These sessions can be used in small groups, with a friend, or individually. A suggestion is to meet every other week to provide 2 weeks to focus on each faith practice highlighted.

Why did I select these 3 practices for these sessions?

Gratitude -Scripture tells us we are to be people of gratitude; and the science of gratitude emphasizes its importance for one’s well-being (see article in session one.) Several years ago, knowing the science of gratitude, I bought a journal and began a few daily entries listing things I am thankful for. The practice of keeping a gratitude journal did not become a well-established practice in my life.

A few months ago, a neurologist confirmed that I have ataxia; a rare genetic disease for which there is not yet a known cure. As I wrestle with the reality of this diagnosis, I knew returning to the practice of a gratitude journal could be a helpful practice. In such events how does one wrestle with a genuine lament and also rest in in a sure confidence of God’s presence and being kept in in His faithful care? I found my gratitude journal which I started a few years ago. This time the practice has lasted longer than a few days, and I continue to write in my gratitude journal regularly: almost every day. I am finding that being diligent in the practice of gratitude is helpful.

Engaging Scripture and prayer. These are practices that are foundational to all the other practices. These sessions provide a framework to help nurture these faith practices for a few weeks. For continuing to nurture the practice of Scripture reading, I recommend using the lectionary.

<https://hymnary.org/browse/lectionary>) For nurturing the practice of Scripture reading and prayer, a resource I have used for several years and greatly recommend is *Seeking God’s Face*, compiled by Philip Reindeers. This book is mentioned in the online resources.

A few sheets of paper are provided to encourage beginning a gratitude journal and Scripture reading journal.

Engaging other practices. You are encouraged to select another practice to nurture and incorporate into your life.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” 2 Peter 3:18

Grace and Peace in Christ,

Barb Sanders

August 2023

Faith Practices Encouragement
Session 1
Gratitude
(Faith Practices book, p.15-17)

Arrival and Fellowship

Invitation

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.” Psalm 107:1

Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you at the beginning of this journey. Fill us and shape us. (adapted from prayer in Faith Practices book, p. 8)

Share

- What are the behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics of grateful people? (from p. 16)
- Would you say you have an “abundance mentality” or a “scarcity mentality”? How might that affect gratitude? (from online resource)

Reflections on Gratitude

By Chris Schoon, director of Faith Formation Ministries

<https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/gratitude/gratitude-responding-gods-goodness>

- Gratitude: Responding to God’s Goodness
- The practice of gratitude is about recognizing, trusting, and responding to God’s goodness and abiding presence with us.
- Gratitude forms us as a people who look with confidence toward God as the One who loves us, who saves us in Jesus Christ, and who will ultimately deliver all of creation from our entanglement with sin and its consequences.
- More than simply saying thank you, practicing gratitude trains us to respond with all that we are to God’s generosity in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Lectio divina

(see Faith Practices book, page 10 – 11 for lectio divina overview)

Three passages are mentioned in the Gratitude session on page 16. A suggestion is to focus on Psalm 100 for lectio divina.

- Psalm 100: a song of thanksgiving

Practicing Gratitude

- Ann Voskamp writes, "Slapping a sloppy brush of thanksgiving over everything in my life leaves me deeply thankful for very few things in my life. A lifetime of sermons on

'thanks in all things' and the shelves sagging with books on these things and I testify: **life-changing gratitude does not fasten to a life unless nailed through with one very specific nail at a time."**

<https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/gratitude/practicing-gratitude-individually>

- Gratitude is good medicine (attached)
Printed and included with material for this session
https://health.ucdavis.edu/medicalcenter/features/2015-2016/11/20151125_gratitude.html

Prayer:

- Give thanks for God's generosity abundantly given to us in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- Give thanks for God's abiding presence with us.
- Other items you would like to lift in prayer.

Review between session overview - below

Blessing:

Colossians 3:17 "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Between sessions

1) Gratitude journal

Read the resource mentioned above: Gratitude is good medicine.

Each day you are encouraged to write down 2 or 3 things you are thankful for.

2) Gratitude: Scripture Readings (attached)

<https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/gratitude/gratitude-scripture-readings>

You are encouraged to read these Scripture passages and consider the questions. Write down a few thoughts in response to the questions provided.

3) Resources for continuing enrichment:

<https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/gratitude/gratitude-helpful-resources>

4) An encouragement: Perhaps volunteers in the group would be willing to explore a section on the website under How Can I Practice... and share takeaways at the next meeting. The practice section headings are the following: individually, with a group, as a family. Would a group member be willing to explore one of these sections?

Gratitude is good medicine

Practicing gratitude boosts emotional and physical well being

FEATURE | Posted Nov. 25, 2015

A growing body of research is confirming that an ounce of gratitude is worth a pound of cure.

“The practice of gratitude can have dramatic and lasting effects in a person’s life,” said [Robert A. Emmons](#), professor of psychology at UC Davis and a leading scientific expert on the science of gratitude.

“It can lower blood pressure, improve immune function and facilitate more efficient sleep. Gratitude reduces lifetime risk for depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders, and is a key resiliency factor in the prevention of suicide,” he said.

Practicing gratitude also affects behavior. Studies have shown that grateful people engage in more exercise, have better dietary behaviors, are less likely to smoke and abuse alcohol, and have higher rates of medication adherence – factors that translate into a healthier and happier life.

Gratitude works

Emmons believes gratitude works because it allows individuals to celebrate the present and be an active participant in their own lives. By valuing and appreciating friends, oneself, situations and circumstances, it focuses the mind on what an individual already has rather than something that’s absent and is needed, he said.

A person's mindset also affects the body's biochemistry, especially factors related to heart disease.

"Gratitude blocks toxic emotions, such as envy, resentment, regret and depression, which can destroy our happiness." —

Robert Emmons

Gratitude is associated with higher levels of good cholesterol (HDL), lower levels of bad cholesterol (LDL), and lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure, both at rest and in the face of stress. It also has been linked with higher levels of heart rate variability, a marker of cardiac coherence, or a state of harmony in the nervous system and heart rate that is equated with less stress and mental clarity.

Gratitude also lowers levels of creatinine, an indicator of the kidney's ability to filter waste from the bloodstream, and lowers levels of C-reactive protein, a marker of cardiac inflammation and heart disease.

"Gratitude blocks toxic emotions, such as envy, resentment, regret and depression, which can destroy our happiness," Emmons said. "It's impossible to feel envious and grateful at the same time."

Emmons believes a successful gratitude practice starts with recognizing what you're grateful for, acknowledging it and appreciating it. He recommends establishing a daily journaling practice to remember gifts, grace, benefits, and things enjoyed.

"Setting aside time on a daily basis to recall moments of gratitude associated with ordinary events, your personal attributes, or valued people in your life gives you the potential to interweave a sustainable life theme of gratefulness," he suggests.

Emmons is founding editor-in-chief of The Journal of Positive Psychology and author of the books *Gratitude Works!: A 21-Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity* and *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can*

Make You Happier.

The science of gratitude:

- Keeping a gratitude diary for two weeks produced sustained reductions in perceived stress (28 percent) and depression (16 percent) in health-care practitioners.
- Gratitude is related to 23 percent lower levels of stress hormones (cortisol).
- Practicing gratitude led to a 7-percent reduction in biomarkers of inflammation in patients with congestive heart failure.
- Two gratitude activities (counting blessings and gratitude letter writing) reduced the risk of depression in at-risk patients by 41 percent over a six month period.
- Dietary fat intake is reduced by as much as 25 percent when people are keeping a gratitude journal.
- A daily gratitude practice can decelerate the effects of neurodegeneration (as measured by a 9 percent increase in verbal fluency) that occurs with increasing age.
- Grateful people have 16 percent lower diastolic blood pressure and 10 percent lower systolic blood pressure compared to those less grateful.
- Grateful patients with Stage B asymptomatic heart failure were 16 percent less depressed, 20 percent less fatigued and 18 percent more likely to believe they could control the symptoms of their illness compared to those less grateful.
- Older adults administered the neuropeptide oxytocin showed a 12 percent increase in gratitude compared to those given a placebo
- Writing a letter of gratitude reduced feelings of hopelessness in 88 percent of suicidal inpatients and increased levels of optimism in 94 percent of them.

- Grateful people (including people grateful to God) have between 9-13 percent lower levels of Hemoglobin A1c, a key marker of glucose control that plays a significant role in the diagnosis of diabetes.
- Gratitude is related to a 10 percent improvement in sleep quality in patients with chronic pain, 76 percent of whom had insomnia, and 19 percent lower depression levels.

Related stories and resources:

[Expressing gratitude, UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services](#)

[Greater Good Science Center](#) studies the psychology, sociology and neuroscience of well-being, and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society.

Gratitude: Scripture Readings

Psalm 100: A song of thanksgiving

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Response

Consider the following questions:

- Did anything make you want to “shout for joy” this week? What was it, and how did you express gratitude to God?
- What does it mean to you to be one of the “sheep of [God’s] pasture”?
- How has God shown faithfulness to your family “through all generations”?

Luke 17:11-19: The healing of ten lepers

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus,

Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Response

Consider the following questions:

- Why do you think the "other nine" didn't express gratitude to Jesus for their healing? What might their reasons have been?
- Do you recognize yourself in this story? Where?
- How have you experienced healing in your life, whether physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual? How did you, or how might you, express your gratitude to God?

Luke 7:36-38: Lavish gratitude

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Response

Consider the following questions:

- If you can't remember a time when you didn't believe in God, it might be difficult to feel intense gratitude for what Jesus has done for you. Read [this story of self-sacrifice](#) on the part of four people who gave their lives for others. Think about what it means that Jesus gave his life, dying a painful and shameful death, for you.
- This passage is full of vivid sensory images: The wetness of tears. The woman using her own hair to dry Jesus' feet after she wept on them. An entire bottle of perfume poured out as an offering of gratitude. Open a bottle of perfume or essential oil or burn a scented candle as you read the entire story in verses 36-50 slowly, imagining that you were there in the room. What do you see, hear, smell, feel?
- What act of gratitude might you be long overdue in carrying out?

Colossians 3:15-17: Freely flowing gratitude

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Response

Consider the following questions:

- "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." Peace promotes gratitude; anxiety rarely does. How might you invite the peace of Christ into your heart more fully, in order that gratitude may flow more freely?
- "Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Think of the things you do in a

normal day or week. How might each of those things become an act of gratitude? For ideas, check out the book [Every Moment Holy](#) by Douglas Kaine McKelvey, which provides simple litanies for a variety of daily activities, such as preparing meals, changing diapers, listening to music, and more. Or write your own litanies of thanks for the things you do each day.

- If there are kids in your home, or even if there aren't, write down the letters of the alphabet and try to think of things you're grateful for that start with each of those letters.

Faith Practices Encouragement
Session 2 ~ Engaging Scripture
(Faith Practices book, p.24-26)

Arrival and Fellowship

Invitation

“For everything that was written in the past, was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4

Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you in this continuing journey. Fill us and shape us. Amen. (adapted from prayer in Faith Practices book, p. 8)

Reflections on last session – reflections on practicing gratitude

What is one item you would like to highlight as you reflect on gratitude.

Share

- How was Scripture engagement a part, or not a part, of my family life growing up?
- Do I generally learn best by seeing, hearing, or doing? How might that affect the ways I engage with Scripture?
- How might I live into the idea of Scripture being “a light to my path” in daily living (Ps. 119:105)? (question from online resource)

Reflections on Engaging Scripture

- What Is Scripture Engagement?
The practice of engaging Scripture immerses us in the true story of God's faithful love so that we become more like Jesus as we grow in recognizing God, ourselves, and the world around us. <https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/engaging-scripture>
- “The most important question we ask of [a Bible] text is not ‘What does this mean?’ but ‘What can I obey?’” – Eugene Peterson in *Eat This Book*
 - BibleGateway.com includes this interesting observation: “The Bible itself teaches us how we are to approach God’s Word. Words the Bible uses include ‘meditate’ ([Psalm 1:2](#); [Joshua 1:8](#)), ‘reflect’ ([2 Timothy 2:7](#)), ‘look intently’ ([James 1:25](#)), ‘dwell’ ([Colossians 3:16](#)), ‘ponder’ ([Psalm 119:95](#)), ‘consider’ ([Jeremiah 2:31](#)), and even ‘eat’ ([Jeremiah 15:16](#); [Revelation 10:9-11](#)). The phrase that summarizes this process is ‘Scripture engagement.’ (<https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/engaging-scripture/engaging-scripture-recommended-resources>)

Lectio divina

(see Faith Practices book, page 10 – 11 for lectio divina overview)

Three passages are mentioned in the Engaging Scripture session on page 25. A suggestion is to focus on Luke 24:45-49 for lectio divina. Luke 24:45-49 ~ Scripture fulfilled in Jesus.

Prayer:

- For fellowship with the risen Jesus
- For spiritual renewal and refreshment
- Other items you would like to lift in prayer.

Review between sessions overview -below

Blessing:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13

Between Sessions

1) Gratitude journal

Each day write down 2 or 3 things that you are thankful for.

2) Practicing Engaging Scripture

□ Wondering questions: Asking “wondering questions” is a powerful way to explore God’s story. These open-ended questions encourage curiosity and often spark deep discussion.

Sample wondering questions:

- What do you wonder about this story?
- What is God doing through the people and events in this story?
- If you were the main character in this story, what would you do?
- How might this story change the way you think or act?
- <https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/engaging-scripture/engaging-scripture-recommended-resources>

For the days, a suggestion is to read from the gospel of Mark, and as you read consider the above questions. You are encouraged to write down a few thoughts in response to above questions.

Mark 2: 1-12	Jesus heals a paralyzed man.
Mark 4: 35-41	Jesus calms a storm.
Mark 5:21-43	Jesus raises a dead girl.
Mark 6:45-56	Jesus walks on water.
Mark 8:1-10	Jesus feeds four thousand people.
Mark 9:14-32	Jesus heals a young boy.
Mark 14:12-26	Jesus holds the Lord’s Supper.
Mark 15:21-47	Jesus dies and is buried.
Mark 16:1-20	Jesus is raised again.

3) Additional suggested Scripture Readings for Engaging Scripture (attached)

From <https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/engaging-scripture/engaging-scripture-scripture-readings>

As you read these Scripture passages and questions, you are encouraged to write down a few thoughts in response to the questions provided.

4) Resources for continuing enrichment:

- <https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/engaging-scripture/engaging-scripture-recommended-resources>

An encouragement: Perhaps volunteers in the group would be willing to explore a section on the website under How Can I Practice... and share takeaways at the next meeting. The practice section headings are the following: individually, with a group, as a family. Would a group member be willing to explore one of these sections?

Engaging Scripture: Scripture Readings

Deuteronomy 11:18-20—God's Word nearby

"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. . . ."

Response

Consider the following questions:

- This passage envisions a community that is shaped and guided by God's Word—one in which God's people keep God's Word continually in front of themselves and pass it on to others. How do the Christian communities you are a part of (such as family, friends, church, other groups) live out God's commands in this passage?
- How might you "fix God's words" in places where you and others in your communities would see them often?
- How comfortable are you with talking about God's words with family, friends, and strangers? What has contributed to the way you feel about that?
- How might you share God's Word with someone in one of your communities today?

Isaiah 55:10-11—God's Word goes forth

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Response

Consider the following questions:

- The verses right before this passage are about forgiveness of sins, and the verses right after are about the joy of having the curse of sin lifted. How does this passage give you hope, both for your own life and for the world?
- In what ways have you felt God's Word helping you "bud and flourish"?
- Meditate on the statement "It will not return to me empty." What does this mean to you?
- Where do you see God's desires and purposes being accomplished today?

Luke 24:45-49—Scripture fulfilled in Jesus

[Jesus] said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised. . . ."

Response

Consider the following questions:

- Do a little research into what was written about the Messiah in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. How did Jesus fulfill those things?
- Luke says, "He opened [the disciples'] minds so they could understand the Scriptures." What do you think that revelation might have felt like to these friends of Jesus?
- What does it mean to you to be a "witness" to the truths of the gospel? How do you (or might you) do that in your everyday life?
- When Jesus says, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised. . . ." he is referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:8; 2:1-41). What difference does the Holy Spirit make in your life? Are there specific ways your life would change if you were more receptive to the Holy Spirit's presence and work in your life?

James 1:22-25—Doing what we hear

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Response

Consider the following questions:

- How might "merely listening to the word" cause us to deceive ourselves?
- The command to "do what it says" is pretty plain. But what if we disagree about what God's Word says or how to apply it? How do we

find clarity?

- What opportunities have you had recently to do what God's Word says?
- How does "the perfect law" give freedom?

Faith Practices Encouragement
Session 3 ~ Prayer
(Faith Practices book, p.36-38)

Arrival and Fellowship

Invitation

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” Luke 18:1

“. . . , he [Jesus] went up on a mountainside to pray.” Mark 6:46, Luke 6:12

Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I open my heart to you in this continuing journey. Fill me and shape me. (adapted from prayer in Faith Practices book, p. 8)

Reflections on last session – reflections on engaging Scripture

What is one item you would like to highlight on the practice of engaging Scripture.

Share

- Reflect on your life with God. Who taught you to pray? Who in your life today is a model of prayer?
- What character traits do you notice in people who are committed to prayer?
- At what times in your life have you felt that you were in “the depths,” as the writer of Psalm 130 says? Were you able to pray during those times? Why or why not?

Reflections on the practice of prayer

- What is the faith practice of prayer?

The faith practice of prayer is a way in which we actively submit ourselves and our world to God’s ongoing transformational work in Christ by expressing ourselves to God and listening for God to engage with us. <https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/prayer>

Four Formative Aspects of Prayer

Prayer forms us in many, many ways, but the practices of prayer contain at least four formative aspects that help us become more like Jesus Christ.

- Prayer involves listening for God to speak
- Prayer trains us to bring all of our circumstances and emotions before God
- Prayer forms us to desire wholeness and holiness
- Prayer realigns us with the character of God's mission in the world

<https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/prayer/putting-prayer-practice>

Lectio divina

(see Faith Practices book, page 10 – 11 for lectio divina overview)

A suggestion is to focus on Matthew 6:9-13 (The Lord's Prayer) for lectio divina.

- Matthew 6:9-13 ~ A Pattern for Prayer.

Prayer:

- Items for prayer that you would like to share.
- Close time of prayer with the Lord's Prayer.

Blessing:

"The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made." Psalm 145:13b.

Between sessions:

1) *Gratitude journal*

Each day write down 2 or 3 things that you are thankful for.

2) *Engaging Scripture: Scripture Readings focusing on prayer* (attached)

one is encouraged to use the attached scripture readings as a guide for devotion times during the next week.

<https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/prayer/prayer-scripture-readings>

3) *Another possible guide are the lectionary passages:*

<https://hymnary.org/browse/lectionary>

4) *Resources for continuing enrichment:*

<https://www.crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/prayer>

Prayer: Scripture Readings

Matthew 6:9-13—A Pattern for Prayer

“This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’”

Response

Consider these questions:

- In *The Prayer of the Lord*, R.C. Sproul observes, “The very beginning of godliness, the very beginning of transformation in our lives and in our society, begins with our posture before the character of God.” What is the appropriate posture before God, and how does the Lord’s Prayer help us approach God that way?
- In *Whistling in the Dark*, Frederick Buechner writes, “‘Thy kingdom come . . . on earth’ is what we are saying. And if that were suddenly to happen, what then? What would stand and what would fall? . . . To speak those words is to invite the tiger out of the cage, to unleash a power that makes atomic power look like a warm breeze.” What are we

asking when we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth?

- What aspects of this prayer come naturally to you when you pray? Which are harder to practice?
- Pray the Lord's Prayer using the [lectio divina](#) method. What insights does this method give you?

Psalm 145—A Prayer of Praise

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.
Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.

They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

They tell of the power of your awesome works—and I will proclaim your great deeds.

They celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. . . .

Response

Consider these questions:

- Of the four components of the ACTS model for prayer (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication), adoration seems to be the part of prayer that is difficult for many people in the Reformed tradition. Is that true for you? If so, why do you think that is?
- Do you struggle with the fact that God commands us to praise him? Many Christians do. In the article "[The Purpose of Praise](#)," David Koo

writes, "In essence, God's demand for us to praise Him is a call to join in the joy and celebration and loving adoration found within the Trinity. It is a call to join the Family. It is a call to joy!" How does this insight inform your perspective?

- How might you incorporate more adoration and praise into your prayer life?
- How does your congregation's prayer life include adoration and praise of God?

Psalm 130—A Cry for Help

Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;
Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.
If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.
I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.
Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

Response

Consider these questions:

- At what times in your life have you felt that you were in “the depths”? Were you able to pray during those times? Why or why not?
- The psalmist says, “I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits.” How might you practice this type of expectant waiting when you pray?
- The psalmist seems to experience despair and hope simultaneously. What role does hope play in our prayers—and in other parts of our faith formation?
- What lines of this psalm might you use as a “breath prayer”? For example, breathe in as you pray “Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD” and breathe out as you pray “Lord, hear my voice.”

Mark 9:14-24—A Prayer for Faith

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

“What are you arguing with them about?” he asked. A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit. . . . I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”

“You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”

“From childhood,” he answered. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

“If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

Response

Consider these questions:

- This father’s utterance, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” is an honest prayer. He’s not trying to impress Jesus; he’s asking Jesus to meet him where he is. In what areas of your faith do you experience doubt?
- Do you feel comfortable expressing doubts to God? To people you trust?
- How is doubt handled in your church family? Is there room for people to experience both belief and unbelief as they grow in faith?
- How might you incorporate this father’s words into your own prayer life?

Faith Practices Encouragement

Gratitude Journal

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.” Psalm 107:1

Faith Practices Encouragement

Scripture Reading Journal

An author has encouraged that the focus of a time of personal devotions is not about gaining information but that we are attentive to transformation. J. David Muyskens writes “Read not for information but for formation, not for comprehension, but for apprehension, not to think about God but to know God. Allow a word from the reading to speak to you. Meditate on the word that caught your attention. Reflect on the word, asking, “What does the word I am hearing mean for me?” (J. David Muyskens, *Forty Days to a Closer Walk With God: The Practice of Centering Prayer*. Nashville, Tennessee, Upper Room Books, 2006, 15). This book is one that is recommended in the prayer resources on the CRCNA Faith Practices website.