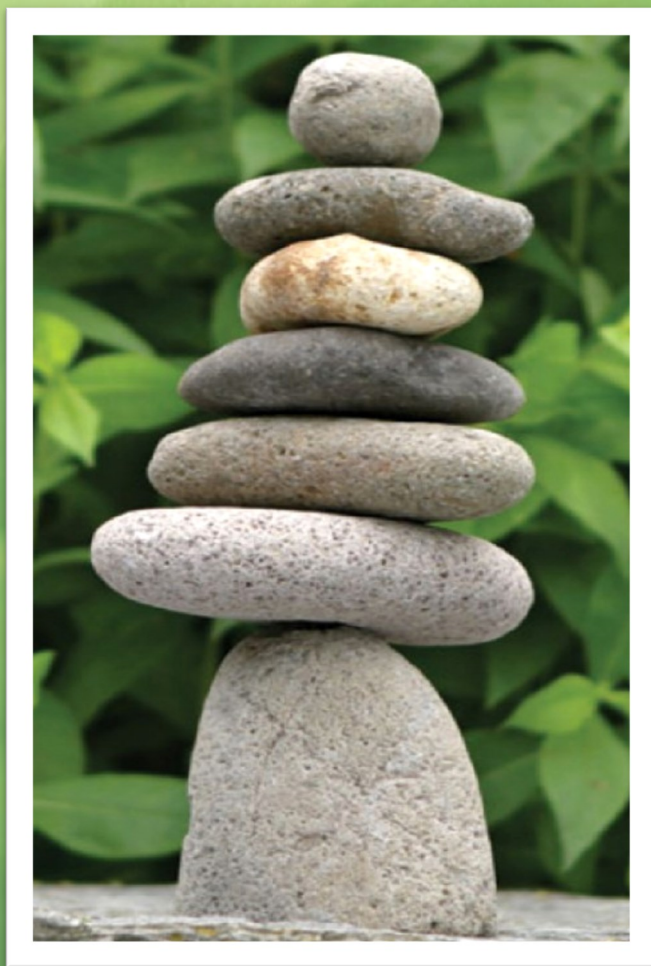
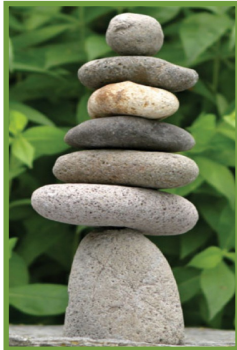


Prayers and Devotions

St. Olaf College ~ Fall 2021





Introduction

The book that you are holding is divided into three sections. The first section outlines seven aspects of **worship**. These short writings are designed for personal reflection or group interaction. They invite you to consider why we worship, but they also help you to worship - on your own or together. The second section includes twenty **devotions**. Each devotion is two pages in length and may be used alone or in groups. They are designed to focus your heart and mind on an issue of faith and college life. The third section offers **prayers**. The prayers are short and address life's many joys and complexities. They may be prayed quietly or aloud. They may be personal prayers or prayers that are shared with friends. However you choose to use them, they are written to speak to your college life.

May God bless you and keep you;
May God's grace and love always be with you;
And may you walk in God's peace. Amen.



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Worship



“Seeking the holy, the sacred”

We desire to experience the holy, the sacred.

When we call something “holy” or “sacred,” we typically mean that it is “set apart.” Rather than being ordinary; the holy, the sacred, is special. More specifically, the holy or the sacred is set apart due to its special relationship with God. Spaces can be sacred. There are holy grounds where we experience the fullness of God. Time can be sacred. There are moments during our day when we are especially aware of God’s presence. Practices can be sacred. There are behaviors – prayer, meditation, study, fasting, dance, musical expression – that lead us into a deeper relationship with God. We look for; we long to experience the holy.

God is present in all things ordinary.

Describing the holy, the sacred, seems to imply that God is present in some space, some time, some behavior and not in others. But, this is not the case. God is as present in the classroom as in the chapel. God is as present in worship as in play. While this is true, we have a deep, spiritual longing for those special connections with God, for those feelings of intense divine presence.

We desire to experience the holy, the sacred.

Seek out places and times and behaviors that draw you closer to God. Try new things. You might be surprised where and when and how you encounter God. You might experience the holy in things you once thought of as ordinary—chemistry or orchestra. You might experience the sacred in specifically designated religious activity—Bible study or daily chapel. Open yourself to God’s presence. *Seek the holy, the sacred.*

“Where two or three are gathered”

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus explains that “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” This simple statement serves as a powerful reminder that the size of a group does not matter; Jesus is present in the smallest and largest of gatherings. But isn’t Jesus present when we are alone? Of course. We are never outside of the loving embrace of God. So, what is so special about this verse?

We desire intimacy, and intimacy takes many forms. We look for social intimacy, the bond that occurs within a group. We look for intellectual intimacy, the bond that develops when we learn and grow together. We look for emotional intimacy, the bond that forms when we share what moves us; moves us to love, moves us to fear. We look for physical intimacy, the bond that is formed through embrace, through touch. And, we look for spiritual intimacy, the bond that forms when we experience together the love and grace of God.

Can you be a Christian and be alone? Yes. But a spiritual intimacy is shared when we pray together and worship together, when we serve together and live together. Sharing our faith can seem risky. But finding a faith community is always deeply rewarding.

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

“Prayers for Others”

We want to pray, but don't always feel that we know how. Sometimes it helps to follow a structure when we pray. Many churches around the world follow the same basic structure. During worship services, following the sermon and a hymn, those gathered offer “prayers of intercession.” These prayers are sometimes called the “Prayers of the People” or the “Prayers of the Church.” During worship, this is part of the liturgy – the work of the people. You are invited to follow the same structure in your personal, daily prayer.

You may wish to begin your prayer with some *opening words*.

“With the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, I pray for the church, those in need, and all of God’s creation.”

Or

“Strengthened by the Spirit who gives me words to speak and a heart to care, I bring my hopes and needs to you, O God.”

The *first petition* may be for world concerns. You may wish to pray for peace among warring nations, for health where there is illness or for food and water where there is poverty and need.

You may end each petition with *shared language*; common language used by Christians around the world.

“Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.”

Or

“Hear me, O God, for your mercy is great.”

The *second petition* may be for national concerns. Here, pray for areas of your nation impacted by severe weather or natural disasters, or for areas that are dealing with violence or for other topics (e.g. immigration or social services).

The *third petition* may be for those living with illness or grief. Pray broadly, for all who are dealing with sickness and issues of health. Pray specifically, for those who you know that are in need of healing and wholeness. You may wish to identify specific issues for your prayer, such as addiction or mental illness.

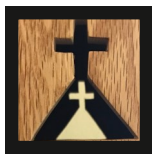
The *fourth petition* may be for your local community. This petition might include your family and friends at home, your college community, and the unique joys and struggles you are facing.

You may wish to end your prayer with *closing words*.

“Into your hands I commend my prayer, O God, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Or

“I lift my prayers to you, O God, confident in your grace and love. Amen.”



“Confession and Forgiveness”

Scripture

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your lovingkindness;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with your free Spirit. (Psalm 51:1, 11-13)*

Prayer of Confession

I come to you, God, to confess my sins. I am guilty of hurting others with my words and with my deeds. I am ashamed of the way I have acted. My heart is heavy. I feel the burden of my brokenness. A cloud hangs over me. Forgive me. Let your love and grace act as a resurrection; grant me new life. Fill me with your Holy Spirit; empower me to act with kindness and grace toward others. I praise you, O God, for your justice and mercy. Amen.

Words of Forgiveness

*By water and the Holy Spirit, God gives us a new birth.
Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
God forgives us all our sins.
We are sent forth to be children of God,
to love and serve our neighbors.*

“Remembering our baptism”

Words spoken ...

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Water poured ...

From a font or lake or river, water cold or water warm

Puts our sinful self to death ...

Forgiveness promised; eternal life with God awaits

Gives us new birth ...

Daily made new to live as children of God

Members of the body of Christ ...

Adopted into a new family, a global family, the family of God

How can we respond?

A free gift requires no payment

But we are filled with joy ...

So we worship and pray, study scripture and serve

Children of God ...

Forever being made new

Members together in the Body of Christ

Sent to love and serve the neighbor, the stranger, the world.



“Hearing the word”

God’s holy word is a gift.

We experience God’s word in the Bible, the Holy Scripture. In it, we hear the good news of God acting in our lives and throughout the world. In it, we hear of God’s grace and love in stories old and new.

In Advent and Christmas, we celebrate the Word made flesh.

In Epiphany, the mystery of this gift is revealed.

In Lent and Easter, the death and resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed.

During the season of Pentecost, the words and deeds of Jesus inspire us to grow in faith.

God’s holy word is a gift.

We experience God’s word in sermons and songs. In them, God’s word is interpreted for our context. We talk and listen, we sing and play. We are part of the interpretation process. God’s word is alive.

Sermons that challenge and sermons that comfort;
God’s word is alive.

Hymns familiar and hymns new;
God’s word is alive.

Listening and interacting; molding and shaping,
God’s word is alive.

God's holy word is a gift.

We experience God's word in creeds and prayers. We recite creeds together, with one voice. We offer prayers together, countless petitions said together as one.

In our creeds, we recount God's great deeds of love.

In our creeds, we proclaim together our faith.

In our prayers, we cry out for help, for ourselves and for our world.

In our prayers, we offer praise and thanksgiving.

God's holy word is a gift.

“Sharing the peace”

What happens when we share or pass the peace? We are not reciting “magic words” that eliminate fear or conflict. But, we are doing more than offering a greeting. So, what does it mean to pass the peace?

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

It is true that the word “peace” can mean the absence of conflict. A peaceful day can mean a day spent doing stress-free, conflict-free activities. But, this is not the only meaning of the word “peace.” To be at peace can mean to be confident and content, secure and powerful even in the face of great danger. There are people who live with illness; their bodies ravaged by disease. And yet, they are at peace. They are confident and content. Their lives are difficult, yet they are secure. They look powerless, yet live as though they are powerful. Why? How?

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

There is peace in knowing that we are not alone. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. There is peace in knowing that our sins are forgiven. The forgiveness of sins acts as a resurrection moment in our lives, offering new life in the midst of life's death. Consider Psalm 23.

*Even though I walk through the valley of death
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff – they comfort me.*

God does not promise that we will never experience “valleys of death.” God does promise to accompany us through life's most dangerous moments. This allows us to walk with confidence. This allows us to live in peace.

*The peace of the Lord be with you always.
And also with you.*







Devotions



Starting Something New

Matthew 4:18-22

Jesus calls the disciples to follow him, to leave what they know and do something new. What's it like for you when you start something new? A new semester, a new friendship?

We meet Peter and Andrew and James and John on their first day of following Jesus. They leave their nets, they leave their families, and follow him. Perhaps there are parallels to leaving your previous life and family and going to college.

Peter and Andrew and James and John may be starting something new, following Jesus, but they aren't just blank slates, empty voids, newly birthed human beings. They are people with backgrounds and experiences, relationships, thoughts, feelings. Though they are starting something new, and though they may be transformed by the experience, there is still much they carry with them, for example, their expertise as fishermen, which will come in handy. They carry their childhood experiences, their social networks, the people they love, the language they speak – who they have been up until this point is still with them, in this moment that they leave their nets and follow Jesus. They begin something, but they do not completely leave themselves behind.

They also start their ministry with Jesus in the broader context of the world they know in Galilee, the social and political systems that shape their lives. Fishing was regulated by the Roman Government during the time of Jesus. Sometimes royals or large landowners would contract with fishermen



for certain amounts of fish delivered on certain days – and records show complaints of unreliable or inadequate payment to the fisherman who did this. But more commonly, the government sold fishing rights to tax collectors and brokers – so fishermen had to pay these brokers, sometimes up to 40 percent of their catch, just to be able to fish. The fishermen did not even have the right to sell their fish directly at the market – the catch was traded to middlemen who then sold the fish. Fishermen were at the mercy of the weather and the catch, constantly dealing with that uncertainty – we hear of storms coming up in the gospels, of nights when the fishermen catch nothing. And then they made little money in a system that benefitted people with more political connections and wealth. This is just a glimpse into the world the disciples were living in when they started following Jesus, which no doubt shaped how they saw this new preacher who called for repentance and claimed that the kingdom of God was coming near.

When we start something new, we too are starting something not as newly birthed people. Into any new situation, we start as unique people, with our own backgrounds, experiences, cultures. We come as ourselves, navigating in a new time and place. We also have a context, just like the disciples. We have societal forces, like the pandemic and white supremacy, that impact us. We have the networks of people around us, near and far. And we have all that we bring with us, strengths we draw on, and wounds we carry.

We come into new beginnings with all of these things and so much more. Remember that into any new beginning, God is with you. God calls you, in this moment, with all of your backgrounds, memories, experiences, the systems that weigh you down and the people that lift you up – God calls you to follow Jesus. Into any new situation, a new school year, a new major, a new job or new relationship, God calls us, to love and to serve, with our whole selves.

Who Are You Called To Be Today?

I Corinthians 12:12-14

Perhaps the most popular image for community in the New Testament is that of a body. When Paul invited early Christ-followers to imagine themselves as an eye or an ear or a hand, he was writing to a community in conflict. He was urging them to work as one and to find value in one another. Whether your life context is one of conflict or not, this metaphor invites us to think deeply about what it means to live in community.

If we understand Paul's description of the body to be flat (almost a caricature of a body) we could assign parts or roles. You are the brain. Your roommate is the ear (because they're a good listener). The person down the hall is the armpit (because ...). But perhaps the reason why the metaphor of body works so well to describe communities, is because we are all aware that both bodies and communities change. Every time that a band or orchestra or choir or team changes even one member, the body is different. Neither a coach nor a conductor can direct in the exact same way year after year. They have to learn what that particular body is capable of, what it can do. What are the strengths? What are its limitations? Moreover, the groups of which you are a member are not the same every year. They might not even be the same every day! This is not only true for our classes and student organizations, it may also be true for our friend groups and families. This means that we have to train ourselves to look around and to assess the gifts of those around us. What do they bring to this moment? It also means that we, by necessity, have to imagine vocation to be a dynamic process rather than a flat destination. As each of your communities are constantly changing, you must ask, "Who am I called to be today? To what tasks am I called? What gifts do I bring to this body at this moment?"

Who are you called to be today? To what task are you being invited?
Your answers may be different than they would have been last year.
Your answers may be different tomorrow.



God's Love For All

Acts 8:26-40

This is the rare devotion that is going to talk about human genitals, because it is a story centered around a person who is identified as a eunuch. Philip is thrown out onto a wilderness road by the Holy Spirit, meets a eunuch from Ethiopia reading Isaiah, and after some discussion of Jesus, the eunuch is joyfully baptized.

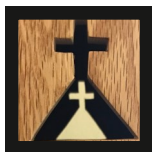
Eunuchs in the ancient world were men who were unable to reproduce or had been castrated. This could be from birth, or by injury, a choice for religious reasons, or by force, as sometimes happened in war. In many cases this refers not to a man's penis being cut off, but to his testicles being tied off, crushed, or removed. The employment of court eunuchs was well documented in the courts of Persia, China, India, Rome, and Byzantium. Eunuchs were also generally disliked by the wider culture because they did not neatly fit into categories of gender and sexuality, which made them dependent on the rulers they served. This eunuch clearly has money and power – he oversaw the treasury.

Eunuchs are mentioned in the Bible a few times. In Deuteronomy, the law says that no one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. But, if this eunuch and Philip had kept reading the scroll they read together, they would have come to some words of comfort a little later in the prophet Isaiah (56:3): “Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from God's people’ and do not let the eunuch say, ‘I am just a dry tree.’ For thus says the Lord: to the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast to my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an

everlasting name that shall not be cut off.” Those who once were excluded are lifted up.

Jesus even mentions eunuchs. In Matthew 19 Jesus says, “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let any accept this who can.” Jesus does not say anything is wrong with eunuchs, he says we should accept them for who they are.

The writer of Acts was taking pains to point out that this man was a eunuch, so we could recognize the Spirit’s deliberate work in bringing the Good News of the kingdom of God particularly to those who do not find themselves within the bounds of the way others define who’s in and who’s out. One’s relationship with God was not determined by identity categories in the gospels, or in Acts, and should not be now. For anyone, inclusive of gender or sexuality, or race or ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, anything you can think of, the answer to the question, “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” is, nothing! God loves you, God values you, the Good News of Jesus Christ is for you, whether you are male or female or intersex or non-binary or cisgender or transgender, whether you are gay or lesbian or bisexual or pansexual or asexual or straight, name your category, whether you identify with a category or not, God embraces you. The word of God is for you. You are loved. You are a valuable and beautiful human being. The Holy Spirit is on the lookout for you.



All Are One in Christ

Galatians 3:26-29

Paul uses the metaphor of clothing to emphasize the unity we experience as children of God. He invites us to imagine that we are clothed in Christ. It is like we are all wearing the same thing, emphasizing what draws us together rather than what tears us apart.

While Paul's metaphor is appealing, we tend to favor fellow members of our own group(s) and tend to show indifference or even hostility toward members of other groups. There are examples of this in every aspect of our lives. Politically, we tend to favor members of our own political party while we treat members of other parties with hostility. This occurs between religions and within a single religion. Social identity theorists argue that we like to divide our world between "who's in" and "who's out" and we treat each group accordingly.

The language that we use to talk about one another directly impacts the ways that we imagine or categorize our world. If we think of political parties as opposing one another, it is easy to imagine that they occupy different bodies wearing different colors or uniforms: a red body and a blue body. However, if we imagine that we are all clothed in Christ, over time, our thinking begins to change from "us and them" to "we." We see our interconnectedness and strive to work together.

This is not naïve or wishful thinking. We have tremendous power over the ways that we categorize the world, and this directly impacts the ways that we treat one another. So, as you look at this campus, ask yourself where you make distinctions between bodies.

Do you imagine there to be athletes and musicians? Bio majors and English majors? International students and domestic students? Next, ask whether or not such a conceptualization creates or breaks down community? Finally, seize the power to reimagine your categorization process. This will invite you to extend grace that is all-too-often reserved only for ingroup members to those who you previously defined as “other.”



Beloved Identity

Matthew 3:13-17

The baptism of Jesus is meant to tell us something about who Jesus is. And who Jesus is, tells us something about who we are.

We hear that Jesus is the Son of God. He is loved. And God is pleased with him.

This is the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Right after this, Jesus is thrown out into the wilderness and tested. Jesus begins preaching and healing, he has his whole ministry ahead of him. The baptism, God's claiming of Jesus as beloved child of God, is a catalyst that propels the rest of the gospel story. It is the identity that grounds who Jesus is for all that is to come. It does not mean that Jesus has a smooth, free and easy life from here on out. God's claiming and the sending of the Spirit are what propel Jesus into an uncertain, dangerous, faithful, and life-changing future. It is an identity he will keep through his life and his death and resurrection. And it is an identity he will pass on to us, when at the end of Matthew, he calls on the disciples to baptize all people in his name.

We too, of course, have been given the gift of baptism. We, when we are baptized, are claimed as beloved children of God, not because of anything we have done, but because of what Jesus has done, because God declares us so. We unite our lives with the life of Jesus, we experience his presence, here and now. That identity, Beloved, Son, Daughter, Child of God, is *our* identity, in life and in death.

Identity is not something that we claim or that claims us and then we're done with it. It's not like when I got married, I thought, "I'm a spouse! Now I never have to think about that again." I will spend the

rest of my life living out that identity. When you came here you became a student, and now you are living into what that identity means. What are you studying? How much are you studying? How much of your self-worth is tied to how you do on a test, or a paper? You are spending your life navigating and living out identities, as siblings, as children, as friends, as people with different genders and sexualities and cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Identities live and breathe with us.

And so, beloved children of God, you are claimed, as Jesus was, to live out that identity. To live out that relationship of love. What does this mean?

Imagine some possibilities of what it would mean to live into the identity that you are God's beloved. Imagine it meant noticing and accepting grace and love in your own life more – to see and feel and acknowledge the care that comes at you as real, more real than the criticism and self-critique. Imagine it meant you looked at other people and tried to, when you see them, also see them as beloved. Imagine investing in relationship, in prayer, in hearing stories of God, learning to trust in God, and imagine God also knowing you. Imagine that being a beloved child of God, united with Jesus, meant that you looked to Jesus for how to live as someone who is loved, someone who has been given the Holy Spirit, someone who is called. You follow his example, to walk alongside others in need of forgiveness and acceptance. You share the message of God's love. Imagine.



Facing Fear

Daniel 6:2-13

What does it mean to face your fears? Why would we want to? The fears that we face are varied, complex, and can be different for each of us. Sometimes we choose to enter situations where we know we will be afraid, but we do it because we think it's important or necessary. There are times when fears we do not choose overtake us. There are situations where some of us feel safe and some of us feel afraid – based on race, culture, sexual identity, or our previous experiences. Fear is normal, fear is necessary to survive. Moderate fear can even sharpen our thinking or focus, but it can also harm us. When fear becomes chronic, it can lead to digestive issues, sleep problems, anxiety, and depression.

When it comes to facing our fears, the goal is not to suddenly make fear go away – that's hard to do, it's an automatic reaction – but to explore how to navigate and move through fear so we can do what we need to do and recover after. This applies to everything from starting a new job to asking someone on a date to standing up for things you believe in.

Daniel decides to face fear, the fear of being killed for his beliefs, because he refuses to worship anyone but God. He trusts God, he is thrown to the lions, and he comes out safely on the other side.

When you are afraid, focusing on the goal or mission can help you through it. Daniel's goal was to worship God and serve others well, and he kept that in mind, even when he was afraid of the consequences. If you are afraid of an exam, remind yourself of your goals – how are you doing in the class overall? Study to give yourself all the information you can before facing the unknown work. Or

remember that the goal is to finish college, not do everything perfectly. Or your mission in life is not to ace everything, but to love God and love and serve your neighbor. In situations where you are afraid, thinking about what's most important to you can help you focus.

Having spiritual support is also helpful when we feel afraid. Being grounded in God's love for us, that we are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth, no matter what happens, can help us face our fears. I don't think that means God will protect us in any scary situation; the world is too sinful for that, but Daniel's trust in God was so strong it even influenced the king to believe! Faith is very powerful.

We can also find it easier to face our fears when we are with people we know and trust, when we have God and friends or family who will walk with us. It is often very difficult for us to share our fears with others. We worry they will dismiss them, or not listen, or we think we are being a burden, or it's just too vulnerable a thing to do. But sharing our fears means others can bring us new perspectives, be in it with us, and help us navigate the situation. Daniel had God, we have God, and we have people around us – even during this pandemic, you are not alone. When you feel afraid, pray. And tell someone you trust.

We cannot banish fear. But we can, with God, face it together.



Steadfast Love and Mercy

Psalm 25

In Psalm 25, the psalmist calls upon God. “Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.” With these words we are invited to consider the interplay between God’s mercy and God’s steadfast love, between that which is circumstantial and that which is constant.

The steadfast love of God is the unmovable, unshakable, faithfulness that God has toward us and toward all of creation. When we declare that our God is a God of steadfast love, we are declaring that we cannot escape from God’s loving presence and care. God’s steadfast love is with us before we rise in the morning and it is with us after we fall asleep at night. This is God’s promise to us. So, why do we need a God who is also merciful? If mercy is the circumstantial, the momentary, what role does this play in our lives with God and with one another? In short, if God’s love is constant, why do we need mercy?

Mercy describes the one-off acts of love that we call out for when we are afflicted. Imagine a close friend or family member, someone to whom you are truly committed. You know, and they know, that you will be with one another when times are good and when times are bad. You share an earthly version of steadfast love. Still, there are times in all of our relationships when we call out in need. This may be when we let the other person down. We say, “I know that you we are best friends, but I hurt you. Please forgive me.” This may be when we need reassurance of their presence. “I am having a terrible day. Can we do something together?” This may be when we need to be reminded that we are seen, appreciated, loved. “You still like me, right?”

We know that God is always faithful to us. We declare that our God is a God of steadfast love. Yet, there are times when we are afflicted. There are times when our pain is acute. When we are facing something that is severe, intense and we long for relief, for God's love and presence to be especially known. Even with the promise of God's steadfast love, we echo the Psalmist "be mindful of your mercy, O Lord."



Grace and Accountability

John 21:7-17

Grace, in its simplest definition for Christians, is God's love and acceptance for people. It is unmerited and unearned – God loves you and accepts you for who you are. God sees your beauty and worth and loves you, not in spite of any perceived flaws, but because that's who God is and how God acts for people. God sent Jesus out of divine love, not because human beings were finally good enough for God to be human with us. God's abundant grace, even when people mess up, never seems to run out. This does not mean that God's judgement and justice are not real, it means that God's judgement always happens within the context of God's grace.

When people ask for others to show grace, they usually mean to remember that the other person is a human being, assume the other person had good intentions, be kind to them and to not be too harsh in meting out judgement. This is generally good advice, but it can also be complex. Often, it is people who are marginalized or who have little power who are asked to show some grace, and to keep on showing grace, rather than those who have power or privilege. Sometimes there are concerns that to rush to show someone grace means that a person won't be held accountable for their actions, or be called upon to change, and will do further harm because of it.

This is why accountability, taking responsibility for one's actions and working to change, is so important. And it is not antithetical to the concept of grace.



Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about the concept of “cheap grace” – he wrote in his book, *“The Cost of Discipleship”* – “cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance.” He goes on to say, “cheap grace is grace without discipleship.” In other words, grace is indeed free, and real, and God is loving and gracious, and our response to that grace is discipleship – following Jesus. This necessarily means we will be accountable for our actions because Jesus calls us to love our neighbors just as Jesus loves us. It is, in fact, because of the grace of God that we can face being held accountable. No matter what you have done, God loves you. God came into the world and lived and died and rose from the dead for you. Nothing can change that. It is because we are rooted in that grace and love of God that instead of being ashamed and running away or denying what we have done, we have the strength to be held accountable.

We can see this play out in the story of Peter. Peter denied Jesus, wounding their relationship and himself. Jesus responds with grace. Peter is still a disciple. Jesus cooks him breakfast. Peter is shown that Jesus is still gracious and loving toward him. You can probably imagine Peter’s relief, that he has not been rejected. But Jesus does not just leave it there. Grace is real, and it is a gift, God’s love is real and unmerited, but Peter also has obligations as a disciple. “Feed my lambs,” Jesus says. “Tend my sheep.”

God’s grace flows out in abundance, for you and for me. It is this grace that allows us to be accountable to one another. We can respond to grace by tending to one other, by responding to Christ’s call to love and serve our neighbor.

An Optimistic, But Realistic Outlook

Psalm 23

Those who study resilience are quick to point out that it is complex. We might be quite resilient in one area of life (like responding to the stress of school), but less resilient in other areas (like relationship stress). Similarly, our life context informs our resiliency. We might be more resilient at the start of the semester and less resilient near the end. Even things like hunger and time of day can change our ability to navigate challenges. Perhaps you are less able to handle stress late at night or when we are running on too-little sleep. It's not that we are or aren't resilient, we are all more and less resilient at different times and in different contexts.

In their book, *“Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenges,”* Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney identify ten coping strategies that help when confronting high levels of stress. Their discussion of these strategies begins with the proposition that resilient people maintain an optimistic, but realistic outlook.

In Psalm 23, the psalmist declares that, “even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you [O God] are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me.” This is a Biblical example of an optimistic, but realistic outlook. The author looks around and sees death. They live in a valley of shadows, blocked by the hope and promise that comes with the sun. We know what this feels like. Whether literally or figuratively, we know the sting of death.

The psalmist is also optimistic. It isn't a denial of reality. The psalmist proclaims optimism even in the darkest valley, because they know that they are not there alone. God is present and God is active. More importantly, when the psalmist proclaims that all that they can see is

the darkness of the valley, there is also the belief that God can see further. God can see what is over the hill. God’s vision is bigger. And God’s vision always includes resurrection and the promise of new life. This is an optimistic, but realistic outlook.



Grief, Compassion, and Love

Matthew 14

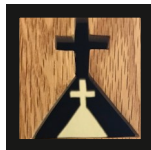
Matthew 14 begins with the story of the death of John the Baptist and the response of Jesus. Jesus grieves. After hearing of the death of the one who had baptized him, Jesus withdraws in a boat to a deserted place by himself. He wants – no, he *needs* – to be alone.

When the crowds of people hear that Jesus is near, they walk to find him. Still full of his own grief, Jesus is filled with compassion and cures all who are sick. When evening comes, he feeds the great crowd. So, it was a long day. Jesus heard about the death of John and went away to be alone. Instead, he was filled with compassion and met the needs of others.

When everyone had been cared for, cured and well-fed, Jesus makes the disciples get into a boat to go ahead without him. He dismisses the crowds. He climbs up a mountain to finally be by himself to pray. When evening arrives, he is alone. But by this time, the wind has picked up and the boat occupied by the disciples is being battered by waves. Earlier in the day, Jesus – filled with compassion, left his own grieving to love and serve others. Now again, Jesus – filled with compassion, leaves his own grieving to love and serve others. He walks toward them, on the water, meeting them in the midst of their storm and fear.

There is so much to consider in this chapter, but I will make two observations. First, Jesus grieves. Grieving is a part of being alive. Grieving is difficult, but it is also natural and even a part of what it means to be faithful. Some people feel guilty for grieving. Maybe they think that grief is inconsistent with resurrection. Like, “how can we be sad if we believe in eternal life?” But, loss is hard and so we grieve.

Second, Jesus meets the disciples, and meets us, in the midst of our storms and fear. I like that the Gospel of Matthew wants to show both that Jesus needs time alone, but also that he is always filled with compassion. This is really a perfect theological balancing act. Imagine that God, too, gets exhausted by the weight of the hurt of the world. There is something very comforting in knowing that we are not alone in feeling tired by the storms of life. Yet, in God there is a limitless well of compassion. God's love for the world is always stronger and more abundant than God's grief. This is good news. God always meets our grief with compassion and love.



Feeling Low

1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15

If you have ever felt low, if you've ever felt frustrated, if you've ever despaired because things haven't turned out like you thought they would, meet Elijah. He just showed Israel that God is God by defeating the prophets of Ba'al, but now Queen Jezebel wants him dead.

Elijah gets scared and runs. He leaves his servant, wanders into the wilderness, and prays. He has had enough. He prays to die. "It's enough now, Lord," he says. "Take away my life. I'm done." Elijah is totally honest about what he is feeling and talks to God.

One of the holiest things we can do is come to God truly as we are. We can connect with God when we are at our most vulnerable, when we are open and honest. When we pray, we are talking with God, and when we confess what we are truly feeling, that is a sacred moment. Tell God all about your joys and sorrows.

God comes in this holy moment and tends to Elijah. He is not abandoned for his feelings. God takes care of him. Angels come and give him enough to eat and drink to keep up his strength. So instead of dying in the middle of the wilderness, he goes to hide in a cave.

And then, God comes to him again. Not in winds or earthquakes or thunderstorms, but in silence. In a whisper. In peace. And God asks again, "What are you doing here?" And again, Elijah says the same thing. "I have been zealous for the Lord and it hasn't worked. I'm done."

God's first response to Elijah is to tell him that his is not alone. God is there with him. There are other leaders who will help him, and later in

this chapter God tells him there are 7000 other faithful people around, that he's not the only one. It's always a good message: no matter what happens, we are not alone. God is with us, and so are all these friends and neighbors. There are more people around to support us than we often realize. No matter what happens, God is with us, and we are with each other.

God also has another message for Elijah: You have work to do. Elijah's work was appointing kings and prophets, like Elisha, but God gives Elijah some time to feel a bit better – he's in that cave for forty days. But even though things are scary, even though Elijah feels discouraged, there is work to be done, good work, God's work. Even though things have been bad, Elijah can still do good.

This story has many insights to offer us. We can enter into the presence of God and just be ourselves, and when we confess how we are feeling and what we are thinking, God doesn't reject us but tends to us in that moment, as God tended to Elijah when he was feeling down. We are never alone, even when we go through hard times and uncertainty, even when we want to withdraw and hide from the world, God and other faithful people are with us. And, even when we feel like we have given everything, and we think we have nothing left



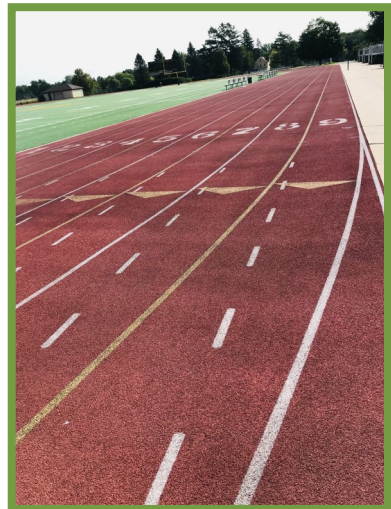
to offer, when it feels like the whole world is against us, there is rest and retreat to be had, and there is work to be done. God gives us a hope and a future.

Running the Race of Faith

Philippians 3:4b-14

In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul compares living a life of faithfulness to running a race. He doesn't look back, but keeps his eyes on the finish line. He presses on. The race isn't described in detail. We don't know the length of the race. We don't know if, at the moment, the race is difficult or if Paul is hitting his stride. Presumably, every race, like every life, has moments that are hard and moments that are easier. What is important is that we imagine that living a life of faith is being compared to running a race.

This race image follows a list of Paul's accomplishments and credentials. He acknowledges what we all know is true. This world asks us to assemble an impressive resume. We have to build ourselves up. Not everybody gets the job, not everybody wins the race. Life is hard and sometimes we win and sometimes we lose. But here is where the strength of Paul's theology comes in, he invites us to imagine that there are two very different races being run. There is the life race where what we do matters. And, there is the faith race, where we are strengthened by the love and grace of God and we are all winners because of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. For Paul, we must not confuse the two. You might feel that you have to work hard in chemistry to prove to your professor that you are worthy of an A, but God's



race looks entirely different. We run a race of faithfulness by loving and serving our neighbor, in worship and prayer, in praise and thanksgiving to God. We don't do these things to prove that we are worthy, we do these things because in God's race, we are already the recipients of God's love and eternal life with Christ is awaiting at the end of the race for every runner.

Paul opens with a list that may seem arrogant. He lists his accomplishments. He acknowledges his privilege. But he urges us to consider that as Christians we are called to run a different kind of race. A race where we are all together on a single team. We are not competing against each other. There isn't one, single winner. Rather, we are called to support one another. To see that in Christ, we are better together. And so we push on, we run together a race of faithfulness always supported by love and grace of God.

Sometimes You Need to Cry

Genesis 45:1-15

Genesis 45 tells the story of Joseph being united with his brothers, and he cries a couple of times – once so loudly that it seems like the whole neighborhood can hear. Joseph had visions as a kid that one day he would rule over his family, and his brothers didn't like that, they hated him, so they sold him as a slave into Egypt and told their father he was dead. Joseph, however, with the help of God, eventually became the most powerful person in Egypt besides Pharaoh, rationing food during a famine. When Joseph's brothers arrive looking for food, they don't recognize him, so he tests them to see if they have changed, and when he finds out they have, he breaks down, crying, and tells them who he is.

It's nice to have a biblical character like Joseph who cries. He cries seven times in the book of Genesis, which is unusual! But Joseph doesn't start all this crying until near the end of his story, when he starts running into his family members again all those years after they wronged him. Joseph went through some incredibly difficult things in his life. The stories tell us that God was always with him, which must have been one of the ways he managed to get through it all. But something about being with his family again really hit something for Joseph emotionally, perhaps pain from what they had done, and relief in being reunited.

Crying doesn't mean that you don't handle something well; sometimes crying is the best thing you can do. Sometimes it can be hard to do at college because you feel like you are never alone, and crying should be done in private. Even Joseph tries to escape to do it a few times. And some of you due to gender expectations or cultural expectations may find it hard to cry at all. But crying is simply our

body's way of coping with stress and strong emotions. Joseph needed to cry, and so do we.

At no point in the story does anyone think Joseph crying is wrong or inappropriate. It just is what it is. It's what happens sometimes. God is with Joseph in prison, God is with Joseph leading Egypt, God is with Joseph when he weeps over his brothers. Joseph may react in different ways to different things, but God is with him always. There is no predicting how this year will go for you. There will be joy and laughter and fun. There will be days that are hard. At some point you will feel like you are freaking out over nothing, and at some point there will be things to get upset about. Sometimes you may cry. Other times you might think, huh, I'm doing ok. You may feel more anxious than usual. Sometimes you may feel like you have it all together and other times like you don't have a clue what is going on. You will be full of energy, and you will be tired, you will feel smart and you will feel like everyone is smarter than you, you will feel infused with faith and you will doubt, you will feel happiness and you will feel anger – it is all part of the life that is being a college student. And just like with Joseph, no matter what, God is here for you, loving you, standing beside you in joy and in tears, and working good even when it seems impossible.



God Changes

Exodus 32

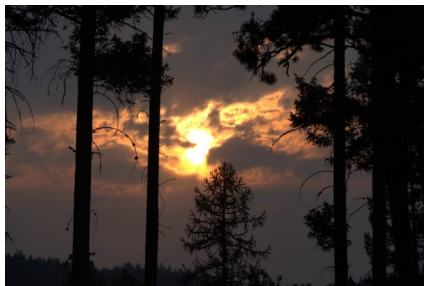
God changes God's mind now and again in the Bible, and God even, occasionally, has regrets. God decides in the book of Jonah not to bring disaster on Nineveh. At the beginning of Genesis, Adam and Eve are told they will die if they eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but they don't – God clothes them and expels them from the garden, but they live. God regrets the flood that covers the whole earth in Genesis and promises never to do it again.

Whenever God changes God's mind, God is angry at people and wants to use that anger against people, and instead, decides to be merciful. In this story, Moses reminds God to be merciful, and reminds God of God's own promises that cannot be violated. Moses reminds God that God's own divine actions, like liberation, are who God is and how God wants to be in the world. God would violate God's own self if God chose to destroy the people. So, God doesn't.

You may wonder how this story relates to our present lives.

First, it is clear that arguing with God is okay. Go for it. God does not mind.

Second, God gets angry at human beings when we sin. This is good news. God is not passive and uncaring. God is deeply invested in what human beings do.



Third, God, even when angry, will choose mercy, or at least can be reminded of and talked into mercy. God will never stop loving even when angry; even when human beings are unfaithful, God is still faithful, and God will always keep God's promises even if we give God every good reason to give up on us.

Fourth it's a good reminder to us that, when we get angry, our first impulses as well might be to be destructive – and to be reminded of who we have been, how we have acted in the past, the promises we have made, how we want the world to see us – all of these things can be important to ground us so we act out of who we are, and not let wrath and destruction take over. If Moses is reminding God of anything, he is reminding God to be God. Sometimes we have to be reminded of how we want to be in the world.

Finally, remember that even GOD has to work on that whole “be gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” thing. God's love and mercy is continually being stretched by human beings who just can't seem to get it together. So, if you feel your ability to love and be gracious to others being stretched to its limit, perhaps you understand a bit of what God is feeling here. And remember that perhaps others feel stretched due to something you're doing.

Also remember, you are God's own people. Even when you screw up. Jesus has claimed us and calls us his own, and that, much like God's promise to Abraham, is an unbreakable relationship. No consuming wrath awaits you. You are loved, and even when you do something wrong, you are forgiven. What now will you choose to do? If God can change, what is possible for you?

God Is Not Fair

Matthew 20:1-16

Matthew 20 begins with a parable. A vineyard owner goes out and hires people for the usual daily wage, and then keeps going and finding people that need work and inviting them in, telling them they will be paid what is right. But at the end of the day, he pays everyone the daily wage, whether they worked an hour or twelve. This is messed up. People were content with their daily wage until someone else got the same amount for less work. What is going on? The workers are fine until they see generosity directed toward someone else. Then they're mad. Of course they are!

This is what we are like. Sit and think for a moment about someone who makes you angry. Just bothers you to no end ... that person is a beloved child of God. That person is loved and valued by God, that person receives God's generosity, mercy, and care. And, even worse, God calls you to love that person too. God does not call us to abusive relationships, or to be in close contact with those who could harm us, but God does call us to love, whatever that might look like.

Isn't that galling? Doesn't that just drive you up a wall? That's the point. God's grace and love is not just beautiful, and comforting, and reassuring. Sometimes, it can also be really challenging. Even maddening.

Because, as this parable describes, God is not fair.

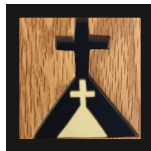
The world is not fair, either, but the world is unfair in the opposite way of God. The world is unfair in ways that create injustice. It is not fair that many essential workers don't make enough money to cover medical costs if they get sick. It is not fair that Black people in the

US are not safe when doing ordinary things like jogging, or walking home from work, or buying things at the store, or sleeping. It is not fair that our Jewish neighbors have to worry about anti-Semitism during their High Holy Days, or our transgender siblings are at greater risk of unemployment and poverty. Our world is not fair. It is not fair that people cannot feed their families, or have a roof over their head, or earn a living wage, or have proper healthcare. That is not the way God is unfair.

God is unfair in ways that are too generous, too merciful, too inclusive, too gracious, too loving. God will forgive anyone. God loves everyone. In God's world, people would feel safe. They would feel free. The kingdom of heaven is like a vineyard owner who would rather honor a person's dignity by having them come and work an hour and make a daily wage, enough to feed their family, than let anyone go hungry. God will honor you and do what is fair, unless what is fair isn't right. God will give what is just, what is right, and what is right is not always fair. In God's world, everyone has enough. That's what's right, in an unjust world. This unfair world too often tips the scales against people who struggle to have enough.

So, what do we do in response to God's extravagant grace and mercy?

We try to be unfair not in the way the world is, but unfair the way God is. To do what is right, what is just, and what brings people life. It may make some people angry, but it will be a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven on earth.



Bearing Much Fruit

John 12:24-26

Jesus says that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” These words are most often used as an earthy metaphor for death and resurrection. When a seed goes into the ground, it appears that the story is finished. The single grain is buried deep into the ground. But, just as the seed will sprout in a wholly different form – stronger, more beautiful, transformed – we too will experience the transformation that comes with life eternal.

This metaphor, however, can shape the ways that we think about life and how we are called to live today. Consider that Jesus may also be saying that when we live our lives for ourselves, concerned with our own needs and wants and desires, we are like a single grain. But, when we put to death this self-centeredness, when we bury our tendency to serve only ourselves, we are transformed. As a single grain, once buried, becomes a mighty plant which bears fruit; we too are capable of providing previously unimaginable service and love. When we bury ourselves deep in the promises of God, every day of our life is transformed. We see the world differently. We love more deeply. We see beauty in others. We respond to a hurting world.

This is, of course, is easier said than done. Placing ourselves first comes naturally. We feel our own hunger. We experience our own pain. It takes work to notice and respond to the needs of others. Moreover, this is not a one-time experience. We must daily fight the desire to live as a single grain. Perhaps, then, the image of a single grain falling into the earth and dying so that it might bear much fruit, has the power to both challenge us and sustain us when we imagine

our daily activities and when we imagine our future vocational callings.

To live deeply, to love selflessly, to see beauty, you must first experience a sort of death. When you bury yourself deep in the promises of God, when you die to Christ, you live as seed that is capable of bearing much fruit. And that is truly living.



What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus?

Mark 8:31-38

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? He instructs his disciples that they must deny themselves and take up their cross. The command to deny oneself can be troubling. It implies that we have two distinct realities, a good and pure and holy self, and a sinful and broken self. In turn, we need to discern the difference between the two and deny that which gets in the way of discipleship. This creates a sort-of theological perfectionism, a drive to deny all that we deem to be bad so that all that remains is the holy. Since this is not ever possible, we are left feeling unworthy and guilty and full of shame.

This is very different from the understanding that we are simultaneously saints and sinners, where we are always both. Being simultaneously saint and sinner can be liberating, because it acknowledges that we are always sinful and always forgiven. But the language of denial functions differently. Because we continue to sin, we reason that we are perpetual failures of denial, the command that we have so closely linked to discipleship. Following Jesus, then, is something we may assume that we never fully realize.



The Inclusive Bible translates the words of Jesus as, “What would you gain if you were to win the whole world but lose yourself in the process? What can you offer in exchange for your soul?” These questions open up a whole new world of possibility. “What would you gain if you were to win the whole world but lose yourself in the process?” This question invites us to consider that perhaps we are being asked to deny the self that the world would construct for us, so that we can live into the self that that is the child of God.

The world calls us to be the best at all costs. It forces upon us the deceptive notion of perfectionism. It is all too happy to see us lose ourselves in the process of become something and someone else. This is not discipleship. This is not following Jesus. This isn't winning, it is a loss. But when we deny the self that the world would construct, the self that strives to be the perfect winner, we are able to grow into the fullness of who we are called to be. We are beloved children of God, forgiven and blessed.

A Vocation Not of Our Choosing

Exodus 3:1-12

Whether you have been at college for three or four days or three or four years, you are likely not only thinking about life today (Will they have corndogs in Stav?), you are also thinking about your future (Who will I be? Will I have a partner? What will be my career?).

Reflections on our future are often hopeful and optimistic, but our experiences over the last two years have also taught us that we can be called to work that is not of our choosing. Maybe your bedroom became your classroom. Maybe you are still grieving the things that you were forced to miss.

The story of the call of Moses is a dramatic narrative with a burning bush that is not consumed by flames. God speaks. Moses receives his vocation. This call does not occur when Moses is “job hunting.” God doesn’t seek out Moses because this call is a good fit with his sense of skills, passions, and interests. There was a need, a job to do, and Moses is asked to accomplish the task. Moses objects, “Who am I that I should go?” With that, Moses is called to a vocation that is not of his choosing.

When Moses and many other individuals in the Bible are called to vocations not of their choosing, they receive a two-fold promise. First, they do not go alone. God promises to accompany them on their journey. When Moses asks, “Who am I that I should go?” God explains that God will go, too. Second, they grow into their calling. Perhaps they are called into situations not of their choosing. Perhaps they are called to tasks that do not seem to match their passions and skills, but they grow into the work for which they are called. Just as surely as God accompanies them in their calling, so God also equips them to be able to fulfill this calling.

Throughout our lives, we will enjoy vocations that seem to be a good fit. However, we also may be called to tasks that are not of our choosing. In each case, in all that we do, God accompanies us and equips us to do this work.



The Kingdom of God Has Come Near

Mark 1:14-20

Jesus proclaims good news, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe.” So, what is the Kingdom of God? Notice, I didn’t ask, “where is the Kingdom of God?” God’s kingdom is not described of as a place. Rather, the kingdom of God is an existence, a reality, a way of being.

When those who are most vulnerable in our earthly kingdoms are cared for, God’s kingdom is present. When those who are neglected or abused in our earthly kingdoms are shown affection, God’s kingdom is present. While our earthly kingdoms often proclaim that black lives do not matter, Black Lives Matter in God’s kingdom. While LGBTQIA+ individuals are continually pushed to the margins of our earthly kingdoms, they are declared beloved children in God’s kingdom. In God’s kingdom, those who feel forgotten are seen. In God’s kingdom, those who are made to feel worthless are prized.

Jesus says that this kingdom of God has come near, that the time has been fulfilled. Fulfilled? Doesn’t that mean that something is finished? Like it should already be here? Well, now here is the catch. On one hand, it is already here; and on the other hand, we are still waiting for it to be perfected. Our own experiences tell us that this is true. We do already experience this kingdom. When brokenness and sin and pain and grief are met with love and grace, the kingdom of God is present. Unfortunately, we have also experienced the opposite. When we have sought welcome only to be rejected, the kingdom of God feels so far away.

It is into this paradox, this “already-and-not-yet” reality that Jesus calls us to repent and believe. It starts with repentance. We must name and seek to change every time that we push the kingdom of God away. We must repent of those times that we avert our eyes from the needs of others. We start with repentance, but we also believe. This word “believe” is in the same word-family as “faith.” We are called to believe or have faith that God is working to usher in this longed-for Kingdom. It isn’t too good to be true. We are called to believe that it is true. More importantly, we are called to follow Jesus. To follow doesn’t mean that Jesus does all of the work and we follow behind. To follow Jesus means to engage in the same work. To follow Jesus means to re-orient ourselves to see the world the way that Jesus sees the world. When Jesus declares that the kingdom of God has come near and invites us to follow, he is inviting us to help inaugurate God’s kingdom.



The Resurrection We Need

Mark 16:1-8

The end of Mark's gospel, the end of his story of Jesus, his life, ministry, death, and resurrection, has for many people over many generations felt incomplete. Kind of jagged. Messy. How can you just end with the women fleeing, afraid? What does it mean? Clearly someone told somebody something, we just read the story!

Jesus said multiple times in Mark that he must suffer and die and be raised, that that's what the world needs of the one who is going to turn the world right-side up again – for God to go through death and come out alive on the other side. We do need the resurrection. We need new life. We need death and earthly powers of violence and injustice to not ultimately win. Do not be alarmed, you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised, he is not here. You might come to the tomb, you might come to a situation in your own life where you are expecting hurt or failure or sadness or anxiety or even violence or death, and in those situations God is there, and God will work new life, even if it takes some time. This does not erase the pain that was caused. The resurrection does not erase the crucifixion, but it does mean that something new is possible on the other side. The resurrection is needed, and true, and it is a joy and amazement.

But the women flee, because the resurrection is true in a world where there is still much to be afraid of. These women knew how to do grief and proper burials, they had not planned on a resurrection and don't know what to do. The resurrection is true in a world where death is still real, in a world where women telling true stories are unlikely to be believed, in a world that would still contain for Mary, Mary, and Salome many fears and perils. Mark does not tell a resurrection

story that imagines his readers now live in some kind of parallel universe – Mark tells a resurrection story where God acts, definitively and powerfully, in this real actual world with real actual people, who can live their lives in light of the resurrection, but who still live in the world. And that’s going to be messy.

Being people of the resurrection, people that proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, that life is stronger than death, that love is stronger than hate, in the midst of a pandemic, in the midst of ongoing racialized violence, in the midst of a time when so many are suffering, is bold, and messy, and will never be over – our story, as people of God, is ongoing, without a neat ending in the foreseeable future. But much like sin and death and pain are ongoing, the resurrection is ongoing.

The resurrection of Jesus is active every single day, and we are invited to look for it and share it. Wherever we see new life springing up. Whenever a new, life-giving relationship is formed. Wherever we witness forgiveness. Whenever we see people come together in love, solidarity, and support when there has been an act of violence or a death. Whenever people have lost a fight for justice, get up and try all over again ... Whenever we help each other, wherever hope is still held when everything seems hopeless. Be on the lookout not just for God’s presence in suffering, but for the ways God brings new life, sometimes where and when we least expect it.







Prayers



Morning Prayer

You have made this day,
Creator God,
and I give you thanks for it.
Each day is a new day with you,
full of uncertainty, hope and possibility.

May my words and actions today
reflect the love and mercy you have for me.

Fill me with strength to meet
today's challenges and joy for today's graces.

Bless us all as we go about our day,
trusting that you are with us.

Amen.



New Beginnings

Be with me, O God.

I am excited and nervous at the same time.

This is the start of something new and I hope it is wonderful,
but it could also be very different from what I have imagined.

If something doesn't go the way I would like,

help me process it and find new hopes.

Give me courage to move through this day,

to experience it fully,

and to try things even when they seem scary.

When everything around me seems overwhelming,

comfort me with something familiar.

Help me see you as I venture into this new situation.

Amen.



An Ordinary Day

God of the great,
God of the ordinary,
today is a perfectly average day.
My best college memories may not be made today!

Yet, you are here.
You are my constant companion.
We journey together through all of life,
even the ordinary.
Help me to recognize your activity in the world,
even in the calm,
the basic,
the unremarkable.

Help me to be grateful for all of life,
even today,
even now.

Amen.

Tired

I am tired.
I am exhausted.
My schedule is full
and assignments
weigh heavy on my mind.

Grant me rest, O God.
O God, grant me peace.
Restore me.
When this day is over
and a new day has broken,
bless me with energy
and a renewed sense of purpose.

But for now,
slow my body,
slow my mind,
and let me sleep.

Amen.

Giving Thanks for Friends

Loving God, I am so grateful for my friends.
They make being at college feel like home.
I am so happy to have found people who support me
and that I can trust.
Thank you for the laughter, the fun,
the good and bad advice,
the deep conversations.



Continue to build the friendships in my life.
When we have disagreements,
help us work them out with respect and kindness.
Inspire me to be an honest, caring,
and trustworthy friend,
and may all of us nurture each other
in becoming the people you call us to be.
Amen.

One-sided Friendship

I love my friends, God, but I am tired
of being the one who is always listening,
who is always leaned on,
who is always there for everyone else.

I feel poured out.

I feel like I do all the giving,
and no one is giving that same care back to me.

I want to continue

to be there for my friends.

I care about them.

But I also need support.

I pray someone will reach out to me.

I pray that I will find a way to share my feelings
with my friends,

because I need them, too.

Amen.



Friends Making Bad Decisions

I don't know
about the decisions some of my friends
are making, O God.

And I don't know
if I should talk to them about it.

I don't think
the ways they treat themselves
or others is right.

I worry about their safety.

I wonder how
or if I can help.

God,

I trust in you,

and I come to you for guidance.

Give me courage to speak up if I need to,
or wisdom to give them space if that's what is right.

Show me how to care for them
and still be the person I want to be.

Surround me with support
to know what to do.

Amen.

When Friends Drift Apart

I'm hurt, God, and I turn to you.
Something just isn't right with my friend.

We used to talk all the time, but now we barely see each other.
When we do talk, it seems awkward,
and not natural, like it used to be.
I feel like we're drifting apart.
I miss "us."
I'm not sure we're going to stay friends.

Help me see a way forward.
If we are going to reconnect, help us laugh together,
enjoy each other, share our lives again.
If we are going in different directions,
help us both heal and move on,
and find other friendships.
Keep us both in your loving care.
Amen.



Concern for a Friend Far Away

I am praying for a friend, God.

We have shared so much,

but today my heart is heavy.

I am concerned and I am not sure what to do.

I feel helpless and frustrated.

I wish that we could be together;

just being together has always made us feel better.

We can text,

but it isn't the same.

You know our hearts.

You know our pain.

Please bring your grace and love into this situation.

Finally, where I may have difficulty

in expressing my thoughts and my feelings,

grant me the wisdom to know how to serve as a long-distance friend. Amen.

Grateful for My Roommate

Thank you, God, for my relationship with my roommate.
We get along so well and have fun together.
We respect each other's time and space and
have found a way to live together that is so comfortable.

Even when we have disagreements, we can work them out.
I know that no matter what happens to me during the day,
I can come home to a safe space and
to someone who understands me.

My roommate has been a great gift in my life and
I am grateful.
Continue to build our relationship of trust,
caring, and grace.
Amen.

Roommate Problems

Holy God,
things are really hard with my roommate right now.
We are not communicating well.
We irritate each other.
I try to compromise but it just doesn't seem to be working.
We're too different.
We can't accommodate each other.

You, O God, are gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
Please grant me some of your graciousness,
patience, and forgiveness.

Guide us in how we might work through our problems,
and give us wisdom to know when we might need help.
Send friends to support us,
and fill us with your love.
Amen.

Family

You make us to live in community, God.

Today I pray for my family.

Where there is love and affection,

I give you thanks and praise.

Where there is distance and hurt,

I ask for the strength and commitment

to be kind to those whom I love.

We are often the hardest on those

with whom we are the closest.

Where I need to let go,

where I need to forgive;

grant me patience and grace.

Where I need to change my actions

and change my heart;

grant me the courage to grow.

We are also the most silly and

most carefree and

most loving with those to whom we are closest.

Thank you for those times of abundant joy.

Amen.

A Family Illness

God, someone that I love is
sick.

I want to help, but I feel
helpless.

When I am in class,
I think that I should be at home.

When I am with friends,
I feel like there is something else,
something better I should be doing with my time.

Let your presence bring some calm to this storm.
Be with the health care professionals
as they perform their gracious work.
Be with my family as we all attempt
to provide love and support.

Where healing is possible,
God, grant that it may be so.



I Wish I Was Dating

Loving God, I really want someone to date.
I want to like someone and have them like me,
and then spend time with them!
It sounds easy, but it's harder than I imagined.
I want that kind of intimacy and affection and excitement
in my life, but it's not happening.

Give me confidence in myself,
courage to keep trying,
and openness to see new possibilities.
When I am filled with longing,
remind me of your love,
and help me to be grateful for the healthy relationships
I do have in my life.
Amen.

Giving Thanks for Dating

I am so happy to be dating, God.
I love spending time with this person and being affectionate.

I love the feeling when we're together,
that it's comfortable and exciting at the same time.

I don't know where this is going,
but I am so grateful to be with this person.

Please guide me,
because even though we enjoy being together
I am not always sure what to do or what to say.

Help me
to express my own needs and desires,
and grant me the ability to listen well.
Inspire me to be considerate, kind, thoughtful,
faithful and honest.

Amen.

When a Relationship Ends

Out of the deep, I cry to you, O Lord.
Hear my voice.

I am in such pain.
It hurts so much when a relationship ends,
even when it's the right thing.

Sometimes I feel like I don't want to get out of bed.
I want to talk to my friends about it,
but I don't want to keep saying the same things over and over.
I am sad and I just want to feel better.

I know it will take time.
Show me healthy ways to start moving forward.

Draw near to me, O God,
and bring me your comfort and your peace.
Give me a heart big enough to be gracious to the one who hurt me.
Help me to heal and to rest in your unfailing love.
Amen.

Belonging

O God, I thought college would be a place
where I would feel comfortable and accepted.

But I feel like no one really understands
who I am.

Everyone seems to have their own group
except me.

It feels like if you don't
look a certain way
or act a certain way
that you're not a part of things.

Remind me that I am
your beloved child.

Give me the confidence to be
the person that I am
and trust that other people
will appreciate and care about me.

Grant me patience and hope
as I continue to seek out relationships and
find a sense of belonging.

Amen.



Body Image

O God, is anyone content with how they look?

I never hear anyone talk about how beautiful they are.
Yet I look at others and think they look good, but I don't.

I don't see much that I like when I look in the mirror.

I see things I wish I could change.

I don't want to feel this way.

I want to see myself positively.

I want to feel confident and appreciate my appearance.

Help me see myself, O God, the way you see me.

Help me be happy with this body you have formed and love.

Open my eyes to see my own beauty and worth.

Amen.

Doubt

I am filled with questions.

I am filled with doubt.

Why is there so much evil and pain and suffering in the world?

Why do my prayers seem to fall on deaf ears?

Is there any consistency between what I hear in church
and what I learn in my lab?

Are you even real?

I am praying,

God,

and that means that I am seeking,
looking for answers.

I don't need everything to make sense,
but I do long for a sign of your presence in the world.

Open my eyes and stir my heart
to recognize your grace and love
during my time of confusion
and searching.

Amen.

I Don't Know What to Pray

God of words,
God of silence,
I don't know what to pray.
I don't know what to pray,
but I want to connect with you.
So, I open myself to this time and
this place;
read my heart.

You know the struggles
and
you know the joys of the world.
Even if I do not have the words to pray today,
you know your creation.
Grant your peace.

You know my life.
Even if I do not know how
to articulate my thoughts today,
you are my God.
In you I find my strength.

Amen.



Knowing Right From Wrong

God of action, I am struggling with my own sense of ethics.

How do I distinguish between right and wrong?

I am not looking for easy answers,

because I know that the complexity of life requires
a complex road map.

And, yet, I want to know where I should draw the line.

How should I act?

Grant me the ability to listen for voices that I trust.

And, grant me the courage to disregard
those that do not have my wellbeing in mind.

Help me to discern what you would have me do.

Help me to ask the hard questions.

Does this build me up or tear me down?

Does this contribute to the health and wholeness of others?

Does this bring joy or sorrow?

Will this lead to regret or hope?

Finally, when I do let myself and others down,
give me the strength to confess and
the openness to receive your forgiveness.

Amen.

Last Night

What can I say?
I am embarrassed, God.
I wish that I could take last night back.
I wish that I could hit reset.
I wish that I could erase the past.
You are the source of grace and forgiveness.
Forgive my thoughts and words and deeds.
Where I have hurt or offended others;
sow the seeds of reconciliation.

Finally, help *me* to extend grace to *me*;
that I might forgive myself and live today
as a new day,
a day of grace.

Amen.



Money

God of all of creation,
I find myself preoccupied with the thought of money.

I think about the money that I do not have.

College is expensive. Life is expensive.

I am worried about the financial burden
that I am placing on myself and my family.

I think about money and my future.

I want to live comfortably,
but I worry that money is becoming my focus, my idol.

Help me, O God, to establish a healthy
relationship with money.

Help me to see that it must play a role in my life,
but must not become the focus or goal of my life.

You are my compass.

Help me to keep my life oriented toward you.

Amen.



My Future

O God,
I think about the future all the time.
I wonder what's ahead for me.
I think about what I might want to do,
where I want to live,
the relationships I want in my life.
Sometimes the answers are clear,
sometimes I'm excited,
but often I am confused
and anxious about what lies ahead.

Help me when my anxiety about my future
prevents me from making decisions.
When I am discouraged, send me support.
When I need advice, send me wise counsel.
When I need to relax, grant me rest.
Surround me with your love,
wherever my future might lead.

Amen.



Opportunities

It's hard to know
which opportunities to take, O God.
I want to try many things,
to find a path for myself.

Grant me wisdom to discern what to do,
and *give me courage* to ask those I trust for advice.

Empower me to make choices,
and if they are right, rejoice,
and if they are not, to simply learn from them
and choose something new.

Fill me with a sense of openness
to what you may be calling me to do.

Amen.

Service

I want my life to be one of service, God.

Grant me a commitment to my community.

Help me to see the joys and the struggles
of those around me and

open my eyes to see how I might be of service.

Grant me a commitment to love the stranger.

Help me to see beyond the boundaries of my life and
my world and open my heart to those in need.

Finally, where I am hurting and

where there are needs in my life,

open me to the generous service of others.

Amen.



Sickness/Health/Healing

Merciful God, I long to feel healthy and whole.

It seems like my body is at war with itself.

It is strange how quickly we forget how awful it feels to be sick.

Today is awful.

Where I am weary,
grant me strength.

Where I am anxious,
grant me confidence in you.

Where I am tired,
grant me rest.

Where I am lonely and afraid,
grant me peace in your presence.

Amen.

Who Am I?

God of grace, I am not sure who I am,
and I'm not sure who I want to be.
My life has changed so much, so fast.
I feel like a new person all the time.

No matter how I am feeling,
remind me that I belong to you,
that the core of my identity
is that you claim me as your child.

Give me a vision for how to live my life rooted in your love,
your generosity, and your forgiveness.

As I am on this journey of discovering who I am,
calm my anxiety, and fill me with joy
and a sense of adventure.

Amen.



Homesick

I am homesick, God. I miss my family and my friends.
I miss the comfort that I feel when I am home.
Sometimes it is about the space.
My dorm room seems so small.
But more often, it is about the feeling of connection.
At home, people know me.
I can be myself.
I am supported and loved.

I thank you for the gift of a family and a home.
But I also pray that I may feel at home here on campus.
Help my relationships to grow, to deepen.
Help me to make meaningful connections
with those around me.

I know that you are always with me
and for that I give my thanks.
Amen.

Happy to Go Home!

Loving God, I am so excited to go home!
I miss my family,
my room,
my favorite foods,
my pets,
my old friends,
the neighborhood and streets I know so well.
It will feel good to rest,
to do laundry,
to remind myself of where I come from and
how much I value home now that I am away.

Help me be gracious to my family and friends as we all adjust
to how things are different now,
even though some things seem the same.
Surround us with joy and laughter.
Let me soak in all that I love about being home,
while still appreciating that I will leave again.

Amen.

I Dread Going Home

I am not looking forward to going home, God.

I love my family, but, I feel like there is so much

I cannot share with them.

Instead of feeling warm and comfortable there, I feel alone.

Give me eyes to see all that my family means to me,
even when things are awkward.

Help me be gracious and try to understand their perspective.

When we don't get along, grant us space.

As you love and forgive me,
help me to love and forgive them. Amen.

Feeling Lonely

God of all, I feel alone.

It seems like no one really knows me.

I can be surrounded by people at lunch
but feel like I am not really connecting.

My family is far away.

Sometimes it feels good to be alone,

but these days, it feels like there's something wrong.

Lift me out of this hole, God,

and help me look around and see the people who care about me.

Remind me of your abiding presence,

and renew my spirit to initiate relationships,

knowing that you created us to be in community.

Amen.



Grief

My world has forever changed, God.

In my loss, I feel lost.

I can't imagine tomorrow.

All I can think about is today,

and today I feel scared and alone and hopeless.

Everybody else is going on

as if everything is normal.

Sometimes I resent them.

Can't they see that I am hurting?

Sometimes I am jealous.

I wish that I could forget my pain for a while.

Fill me with the promise of Easter.

Remind me over and over again

that you have power over death;

that your forgiveness and grace

are stronger than my confession and sin,

that your love is stronger than my despair.

In you, I find my strength.

Amen.

Jealousy

I wish that I did not feel jealous, O God, but I do.
I look at others and I compare myself.

Sometimes I want to yell, “It isn’t fair!”
Some people seem to get special treatment,
while I feel ignored.

Some people seem to have it all.
But when I look at myself and my life,
I only see what is missing.

Grant me clarity of vision,
that I might more clearly see others and myself.

Help me to release my feelings of resentment
and replace them with peace.

Help me to realize that it is in you
that I will find my deepest sense of worth and meaning.

Amen.

Joy

I am happy, O God.
But it is more than that.

I am content.
I feel full of hope and promise and love.
I feel like laughing and talking and sharing
my joy with the world.

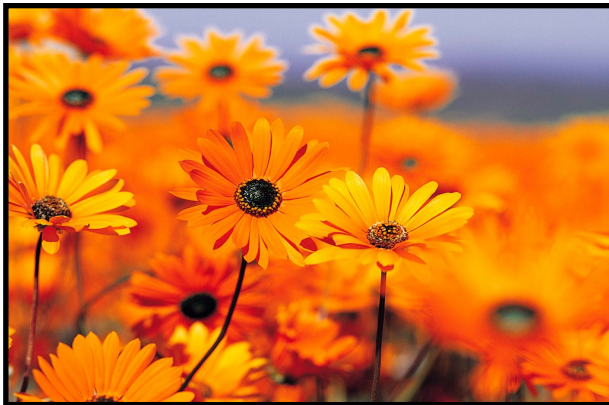
I have been around long enough
to know that this feeling isn't permanent.

That is okay.

Thank you for this moment,
for this overwhelming feeling.

You are my God
and I give you thanks and praise!

Amen.



Perpetrating Prejudice

I may not want to say it out loud, God,
but in the privacy of this prayer
I confess my prejudice.
I use categories, labels, values for
everything and everyone.

When I am in class,
when I am walking through Buntrock,
and when I see the people in my hall,
I judge them.

Give me the wisdom and strength
to see every person as your child.
Help me to overcome my feelings of superiority.
Open my eyes to see beauty in all of your creation.

I acknowledge that this will not be easy,
but I open my heart and my mind to this challenge.
Amen.

Experiencing Prejudice

Sometimes, God, I get so tired of people judging me.

I get tired of assumptions.

I get angry at wrong things people say,
sometimes when they don't even know it.

I feel like there are spaces where people both watch
me too much and don't see me.

I just want it to stop. I deserve to be treated well.

I deserve to be honored for who I am.

You know, O God, all that is in my heart.

I bring it all to you.

Surround me with people who love and value me.

Remind me that I am your beloved, that with you
I always belong, that I am always enough.

Bring an end to the prejudices that harm us,

And lift me up as your child.

Amen.

Procrastination

I can't do it, God.

I know I have work to do,
there are deadlines looming,
I am feeling the pressure, and yet ...
I just can't seem to get it done.
I tell myself there is plenty of time,
I try to get organized, and then,
I put things off.
I want to do better.
But, here I am.

Forgive me my shortcomings.
Help me create new habits so
I feel less stressed.
Give me the strength to move forward
and the insight to set priorities.
Surround me with others who will set good examples
and who will help me use my time well.

Amen.



Regret

My regret weighs heavy on my heart, God.
I want to live in the present.
I want to think constructively about my future.
But my past casts a shadow over everything in my life.

Grant me the wisdom to understand
that I cannot change the past.

No matter how much I would like to go back and
do things differently, this is impossible.

Grant me hope.

Help me to see that my past has not left me
without options.

Help me to see that my past will not
inform all of my future relationships.

Help me to see that your resurrection promise
extends even to my life today.

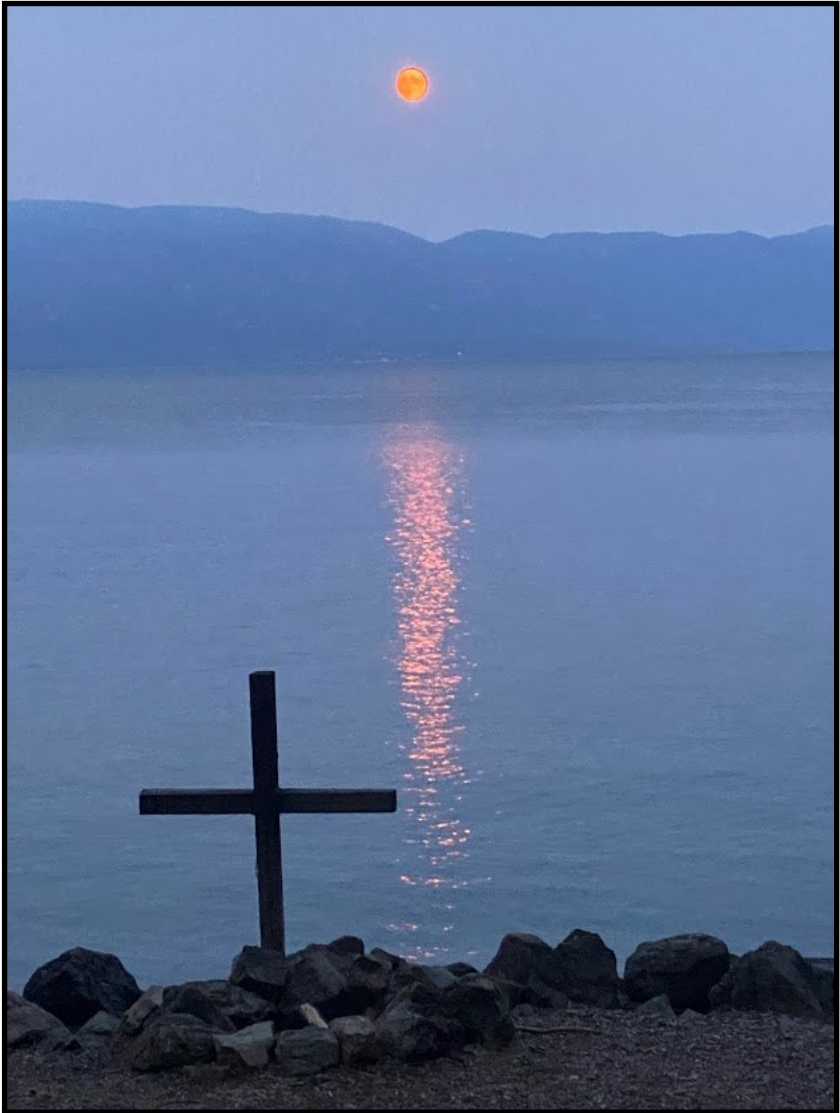
Ground me in your promise of new life.

Amen.

Stress

Merciful God,
I have so much to do and
I don't know how it's all going to get done.
I feel like I should be able to handle things
– everyone else seems to –
but I am not keeping up.
I don't sleep or eat well and
I am starting to feel a sense of despair.

I need a deep breath.
Help me get through this.
Instill in me,
even for a few minutes,
a sense of calm.
Give me self-confidence and
determination to keep going.
Send me support and encouragement.
I know you are with me,
and I have hope.
Amen.



Burden to Succeed

I
feel
buried
by the burden to succeed.
Some days it feels like a weight on my shoulders
that I can no longer bear.

When I look at other people, I see their successes.
My friends and my family seem preoccupied with making
plans
and setting goals and achievement,
or at least that is how it feels to me.

Grant me rest, God.

I always seem to see things more clearly when I am not so
tired.

Grant me the wisdom to see
that there is no such thing as perfection.

My days will be filled with both large and small
failures and successes.

Help me to find this liberating rather than frightening.

Finally, grant me a healthy understanding of success,
so that I may move forward with confidence and love.

Amen.

Success Achieved

I did it!

I worked hard and I succeeded.

But to be honest, God, I am torn.

Part of me is exhausted and surprised
that I am done and that everything went so well.

I had doubts in myself and I still do.

Part of me is confident and happy with my achievement.

Thank you for walking with me during this long journey.
Thank you for gifting me with both perseverance and talent.

But, I did not do this alone.

Open my eyes; that I might recognize
and thank all of those people who have helped
to make my success possible.

I have a tendency to look too quickly at the next challenge.

Help me to live in this moment,
to savor this time.

Tomorrow and all of its tasks will come soon enough.

With a happy and a thankful heart,

I sing your praise.

Amen.

Getting Homework Done

God of wisdom, sometimes I can't wait to work on a paper,
to do the reading, or get into the lab.
Other times, I dread opening a book.
I get frustrated with group projects because
others aren't putting in the time.
It's hard to get everything done,
especially when some of it seems like a waste of time.

You have called me here, O God, to be a student.

Continue to nurture me as I learn.

Build up my perseverance for studying when I am uninspired,
and spark my imagination for further study in the work I love.
Help me see how all of it is shaping the person I am becoming.

Amen.

Before a Test

I am nervous about this test, God. I always am!
My classes are so important to me. I want to do well.
I feel prepared and yet always want more time to feel ready.

*Do not let me be consumed by worry.
Help me bring all that I can to this moment, O God,
and then put this test in perspective.
While it is important, a test is not who I am.
I am a child of God, and my life is defined by
being loved unconditionally and being called to love others.*

But, if my nerves start to get the best of me,
center me, O God, in you.
Amen.



When Homework is Difficult

I really like what I am learning, God,
but this homework is so hard.
I thought that if I studied something I loved it would be easy,
but it takes much more effort than I realized.
Sometimes I think it means this isn't what I am meant to do.
Other times I am determined to work hard and
keep pursuing my goals.

When I get frustrated, O God, be with me.
Encourage me to take a break and refocus.
Give me the determination to finish my work,
strengthen me in my vocation as a student and
help me discern which work I truly love to do.

Amen.

Help

I know I need help, God, and yet I don't want to ask for it.

Why is that? Why is it so hard?

I want to do everything on my own,

but deep down I know I can't.

I need you and other people.

Let me see you in those around me.

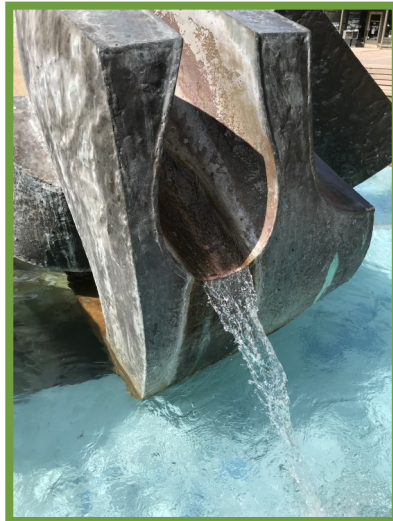
Open my heart to let others in.

Remove my stubbornness or my shame.

You have called us to love and serve our neighbors,
and right now I am the neighbor that needs love and service.

When I do reach out,
may I be met with kindness and understanding.

Amen.



Failing

I am failing, God.

I am in denial

and I don't know what to tell others.

But, I know that *I am failing*.

This situation feels so permanent.

I am not sure how to get out of this hole

and it is hard to imagine future success.

Give me the courage to look for help.

Give me the courage to be honest.

Remind me that there are always options,

even when I feel desperate or alone.

Most importantly,

thank you for being my rock.

I am relying on your strength and your hope.

Amen.

In Time of Natural Disaster

Your world,
your creation,
is wondrously made.

But today, God,
we experienced its power and devastation.

The wind, the water,
and the land can be sources of life.

But today,
we experience
that they can also bring despair and death.

Help us to see your presence in the midst of so much chaos.

Help us to find your peace
in the midst of so much
confusion and pain.

Where we can help, where we can serve,
grant us a willing spirit with eager hands and feet.

Where we can be generous with our resources,
open us to share.

And always,
give us the strength to pray.
Even when we have no words,
listen to our sighs and silence.

Amen.

In Time of Conflict or War

Once again, our world is plagued by warring nations.
O God, it seems that we are designed to fight.
Greed and ill will come so naturally.
Fear and the lust for revenge seem more natural
than the desire to stand as one.

We fight over land.
We fight over religion.
We fight over natural resources.
We simply fight.

We pray for peace among nations.
Work in all hearts a desire
for community and cooperation
that is stronger than any inclination
toward hatred and violence.

Today, I pray especially for all
who are living in fear
and with the threat of harm.
May your good and gracious presence
bring a sense of calm and peace.
Amen.

In Time of Crisis or Disaster

Our world is hurting and I feel so helpless, O God.
The terrible events of this day make me feel
weak and vulnerable.

Hear the cries of those who are in pain,
of those who are experiencing loss,
of those who are struggling to find hope.

Where there is anxiety,
grant the peace and reassurance
of your presence.

Grant strength and courage
to all who are called to provide assistance;
that they may serve with resilience and grace.

I too, want to do something, God.

Let this prayer rise like incense,
adding to the prayers of
countless others.

Let this prayer give voice to our
fear and pain.

Let this prayer give voice to our
hope and faith in you.



Amen.



Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,

now and forever. ***Amen.***

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,

forever and ever. ***Amen.***

A Guide for Public Prayer

1. There is a difference between the prayers that we offer in private and those that we offer in public. In our public prayers, we attempt to represent the community gathered in worship. This means that while we lift up shared experiences, we limit our descriptions of accompanying emotions. For example, while we might pray for the beginning of a new academic year, we do not assign specific emotions to that beginning. Some people are certainly eager, while others are filled with uncertainty. In contrast, our private prayers are often built upon our emotional responses to our individual experiences.

Accompany us, O God, as we begin this academic year.

2. Prayers often take one of two forms. On one hand, we are free to identify specific prayer petitions and accompany those petitions with specific prayer requests. For example, we might pray for those who are grieving. In addition, we might call upon God to grant a sureness of the resurrection. In contrast, we may identify a specific prayer petition without a specific accompanying request. This is often the case when we do not know what or how to pray, but we do wish to lift up our concern to the care of God. For example, we might pray for those living with mental illness. The weight of the prayer

concern is great. Therefore, we simply state the concern; we put the petition in the hands of God.

For those who grieve; grant them a sense of peace and hope that is grounded in the promise of the resurrection.

Or,

We pray for those living with mental illness.

3. Prayers ought to reflect the individual who is praying. Are you poetic? Let the beauty of your words rise up like incense. Are you succinct? The length of a prayer says nothing about its weight. Use your words, your vocabulary, your social location. With this said, it is the role of a prayer leader to be inclusive. Ask yourself, am I using my voice to speak for the community gathered?

4. Finally, there are no rules to what must be included in our prayers. We often pray for the world, for the nation, for health and wholeness, and for our local community. With this said, there are times that a single issue dominates our prayer. Regardless of the topic, we always proclaim that God is active in our world. Prayer is our opportunity to communicate with God. It is our opportunity to offer our thanks and praise; to lift up our wants and needs, our hopes and fears. It can be a time of confession. We ought to feel liberated in our prayer. It is our time to bring our whole selves to our God who loves us.

Table Prayers

Sharing a meal is an intimate act. It is often appropriate to use a short, familiar prayer. Many families begin their meals with the prayer, “Come Lord Jesus be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.” There is no reason that these words must be confined to small family gatherings. The prayers below are similar prayers for small and large gatherings.

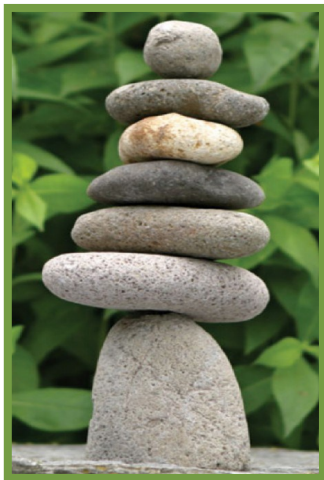
Bless our food, dear God we pray. And bless us, too,
throughout the day. Keep us safe and close to you.
Keep us just in all we do. Amen.

God, bless this food we are about to receive. Give
bread to those who hunger, and hunger for charity
and justice to us who have bread. Amen.

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts which we are
about to receive from thy bounty. Amen

For life and food, for love and friends, for everything
thy goodness sends, almighty God, we thank you.
Amen.

We thank you Lord for generous hearts, for sun and
rainy weather, we thank you Lord for drink and
food and that we are together. Amen.





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