

Xtreme Lenten Series: Prayer March 8, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Start point:

Lent 2020, the period of 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays), begins on Ash Wednesday, February 26, and ends at sundown on the Saturday, April 11, before Easter. The penitential season of Lent is a season of the church year which commemorates the forty days Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness before he began his public ministry.

During Lent, we enter into a season of preparation, which includes self-reflection and repentance. Ideally, we seek to literally "turn around" and realign our lives and focus towards God. Most people think of Lent as a time to give up things, however, it can be a time to take on new life-giving practices. Lent helps rid ourselves of distractions and our own selfish desires to focus more clearly on God. For example, a person may give up sweets for 40 days and when the temptation to eat a sweet hits, that person instead prays to God for strength.

Practically speaking, Lent is a good way to form a new habit that helps an individual to live and love as more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. I use to hear that it takes 21 days to form a new habit. Actually, for me, it took longer. Only you know how long it takes you to form a new habit. So, the intentional practice of incorporating a new Godly habit during Lent allows time for that habit to become a part of your life.

During the Sundays of Lent, we will focus on the following practices: Compassion, Prayer, Simplicity, Forgiveness, Servanthood, and Discipleship.

Gospel of Luke:

The Gospel of Luke was written sometime after 60 A.D. and before 70 A.D. The Gospel narratives were probably written to help people remember the story from actual witnesses. Most likely, decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the stories about Jesus had morphed into half-truths. Each Gospel had many similar stories but with a unique perspective from the eye witness. The author, Luke, was most likely a physician and worked with Paul on a missionary journey. Luke wrote a companion letter, which is called Acts, after the Gospel of Luke was written. Both letters, Luke wrote to Theophilus which means "God's Friend." There is speculation that Theophilus was a wealthy influential believer, or a name for a group of people receiving the letter. We really do not know for sure. The purpose for Luke writing the Gospel letter is explained in chapter 1 verses 1-4. Luke wrote to give an orderly and researched account of what was fulfilled in the eyewitness account of Christ Jesus. The people that received the Gospel of Luke were most likely gentile Christians struggling to journey as a Christian and understand the fullness of Jesus.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Luke 11:1-13 (NRSV)

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

² He said to them, "When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial."

⁵ And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.'⁷ And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'

⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹ "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Romans 12:12

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Ephesians 6:18

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Romans 8:26-27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Questions to ponder about the passages:

What jumps out at you from these passages?

What do you see is common to all these passages?

What do you think prayer does according to the scriptures?

Why should we pray?

What should the activity of a prayer life look like?

Commentary:

This second week of Lent, we are going to focus on prayer. In the Luke passage, we experience Jesus teaching his intimate group of followers how to pray. We first have the "Lord's Prayer" in which we, as United Methodists, recite every week in the worship services. Through the prayer, we focus on our dependency upon God as the one who provides food for sustenance, forgiveness of sin, spiritual strength to forgive others, and deliverance from trials as the Kingdom of God presents itself through us. Prayer puts us in the right place before God, dependent. Like a parent to a child, God is like that to us. God, as creator and sustainer of life, will lead and guide us to be that better person through followership. Prayer is a dynamic process of conversation between us and God. A conversation in which we seek the power of God, through the Holy Spirit, to be active in our lives to develop relationship, seek guidance, and effect change. Prayer is a dialogue with God of what is on our heart, while we listen for what is on God's heart. The fundamental activity of prayer is a time of speaking and listening.

Our Jewish ancestors in the faith would have set times each day to pray as an act of devotion. As Christians, we are encouraged by scripture to live a life of continual prayer. What does that mean? Well, it means to have a continual dialogue with God as you progress through the day. Whether you are at work, school, play, or church always be ready to listen and seek God in all we do. If you

have a difficulty with this concept, then you may want to practice the activity of prayer with God at specific times during the day. If you have difficulty praying in front of people because you think you don't know how to pray, then encourage yourself by knowing the prayer can be short, and it is just speaking your heart to God. No one can argue about that prayer. The most important part of prayer is realizing the power of the Holy Spirit that is involved. Through the asking, God blesses us with the Spirit power from above as we live into the ways of God through Christ. You want power to live, then pray.

A.C.T.S.

If you have trouble with developing a prayer life, you may use the **A.C.T.S.** method. "Christians often use a simple acrostic as a guide to prayer: A.C.T.S. Each of the letters in this acrostic stands for one of the key elements of prayer:

(A) Adoration

(C) Confession

(T) Thanksgiving

(S) Supplication

But not only does this acrostic remind us of the elements of prayer, it shows us the priority we ought to give to each.

The first element of prayer should be adoration, or praise. The Psalms, which are inspired samples of godly prayer, are heavily weighted on the side of adoration. I've noticed over many years that as we grow in the discipline and in the delight of prayer, it seems that we naturally spend more and more of our time on this first element.

Second, prayer should include confession of our sin; as we remember who we are when we come into God's presence, we see that we have come short of His holiness and have need of His forgiveness.

Third, when we pray, we should always give thanks, remembering the grace and mercy God has shown toward us.

Fourth, prayer rightly includes supplication or petition, bringing our requests for the needs of others and ourselves to God.

I think this is a helpful acrostic for remembering both the elements and the priorities of prayer. Unfortunately, we often spell our prayer life something like S.C.A.T., because we start with supplication and spend very little time, if any, on

adoration, confession, and thanksgiving.” -- <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/simple-acrostic-prayer/>

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

What do you think prayer does in your life?

How do you work prayer into your life?

How do you think prayer affects God?

How do you think prayer affects you?

What does it mean and look like to have a life lived in continual prayer?

Activity of for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week:
Ephesians 6:18, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”
3. Practice praying for two minutes a day, and volunteering one time this week to pray out loud, if there is an opportunity.
4. Pray daily for the Costa Rica Mission Team this week