

Praying

The theme of worship this summer is "Seeking God Together." We will explore 13 spiritual practices that can deepen and transform our relationship with God and with each other. ¹

These individual and corporate practices are divided into three groups. During the month of June, our focus is on "God within Us." The other sections are "God Above Us" and "God Beside Us."

Our lives are busy. Maybe for some, they're not as busy as they were before the time of Covid, but we all have the same number of hours in a day and we all fill them with something. It's easy to fill our time with work, school, hobbies, meetings, entertainment, recreation, and maybe even mindless activities while neglecting matters of the heart. The spiritual disciplines we'll reflect on and practice during the month of June invite us to turn heart, mind, body, and spirit intentionally toward God. They invite us to set aside time each day to connect with God, to pay attention to our physical and spiritual needs, and bring them to God.

Instead of a sermon, during which I talk the whole time and you listen, I'll offer some reflection on the scripture, ask for some input from you about your experiences, and lead a time of using the spiritual practice of the week. Today we're focusing on prayer.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, he modeled the importance of prayer. Praying was so important to Jesus that his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray. The prayer he taught them has been an important part of worship in this congregation since its beginning. During the last few years, we've been praying it as part of our congregational prayer. I wonder how many of you wish we would return to the practice of praying it at the end of the service? Let me know what is more meaningful to you.

After responding to his disciples' request, Jesus tells a parable about a persistent friend who shows up at midnight needing bread. In Jesus' day, hospitality was essential. To not be able to provide an adequate meal to a guest was unthinkable in that society – more unthinkable than waking a neighbor in the middle of the night.

So of course, the man heads out to his neighbor's house and knocks on the door to ask for three loaves of bread. The neighbor first responds "Don't bother me! We are already in bed!" Jesus tells his disciples that the neighbor will relent and give his friend what he needs, not because of friendship, but because of the friend's shameless persistence.

Is that Jesus' point? Is God like the grouchy neighbor who only responds to pestering? No! Jesus tells the disciples to ask, seek, and knock, for God will surely answer their prayers if they simply ask.

Jesus then goes on to invite the disciples – and us – into an intimate relationship with God, just as intimate as a relationship between parent and child. He drives the point home with a couple of outrageous questions. What parent would give their child a snake when they ask for a fish? Or a scorpion when they ask for an egg? Just as a loving parent gives good things to their children, so will God give the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

¹ The sermon and responsive reading are drawn from Week 1 of "Seeking God Together" from *Current*, a curriculum from MennoMedia, [Current - Menno Media](#).

This parable expresses the importance of relationship. We can have a relationship with God. The good news of this story is that we can talk to God anytime and anywhere.

Prayer is communication and communion with God. It's expressing thoughts and feelings to God and also to ourselves. It's asking questions and making statements. But prayer isn't always about words. It's also about being with God, reaching out to God, and noticing God. Prayer is listening to hear the Voice that tells us the truth about ourselves and others.

Prayer is honesty with ourselves and with God. Honesty includes acknowledging the feelings we don't like. Prayer is a call to wake up and pay attention. It is lament that leads to action. It's an activity that keeps us aligned with God's presence in the world. It's an act of love. Prayer is hanging out with God, bringing everything we have to God, and tuning in to God.

There are endless forms of prayer: wordy and wordless, still and active, repetitive and creative, intentional and spontaneous, silent and aloud, individual and group, formal and informal, musical and visual. There are endless expressions in prayer: joy, hope, peace, despair, confession, help, thanks, praise, sadness, loneliness. There are endless requests made in prayer: for healing, safety, food, shelter, guidance, forgiveness, comfort, peace – for ourselves and for other people.

I want to hear what you have to say about prayer. I warned you in the email I sent yesterday that I'd be asking you share some of your earliest experiences of prayer, your "best" experiences of prayer, and some of the ways you pray.

What are your earliest memories of prayer? When did you pray? Who did you pray with? What prayers did you memorize?

What is one of your "best" experiences of prayer? Under what circumstance was prayer most meaningful for you?

What are some of the ways you pray? Of course, we pray together every Sunday morning. Where else and how else do you pray?

We are going to pray the Lord's Prayer twice this morning – as part of our congregational prayer and as a responsive reading. This is an example of how you can use scripture when you pray. Read a verse and then add your personal prayers to what you just read.

One: Lord, hear our prayer.

Many: Great and mighty God in heaven, holy be your name.

One: God, you are holy. We thank you for your goodness, your kindness. You are loving and gracious. You are over everything and in everything. Lord, hear our prayer.

Many: Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

One: God, we want to trust your plan for us. Help us to see the world that you desire—a world of wholeness and justice for all creation. Lord, hear our prayer.

Many: Give us this day our daily bread.

One: God, we know that there are many who are hungry in the world and in our own communities. Give us eyes to see how you want us to be part of your provision in the world. Give us hands that share generously. Lord, hear our prayer.

Many: Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive those who sin against us.

One: We confess that we are sinners in need of your grace. We recognize that every day we also encounter people created in your image who may need our forgiveness. Give us the grace to seek your forgiveness and to forgive others. Lord, hear our prayer.

Many: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

One: God, we pray for protection in the coming week. Lead us and guide us along the right paths. Be with those in places all around the world where there is violence and conflict. Protect and guide them. Lord, hear our prayer.

Many: For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.