



WEEK OF PRAYER

A Guide for Individuals and Small Groups

**Like a Tree Planted by
Streams of Water**

AN INVITATION TO PRACTICE PRAYER IN ORDINARY LIFE



The Evangelical Covenant Church

MAKE & DEEPEN DISCIPLES

ABOUT THE WEEK OF PRAYER

Greetings from the Make and Deepen Disciples team! For more than 60 years, the Evangelical Covenant Church has provided materials for a week of prayer during the month of January. Whether you choose to use this resource at the beginning of the year or at some other time, we want to both challenge and equip followers of Jesus to live a life of prayer and to continually seek new ways to develop this life-giving practice. The Week of Prayer can be used by individuals or groups, over one week or over the course of seven weeks. Each day/week of the resource includes reflection and prayer prompts, but we encourage you to use these as starting points. Feel free to customize the resource for your purposes—adding your own prompts to further enhance the discussion and enrich the time of prayer. The Week of Prayer is available in English and Spanish. You can download from CovChurch.org/resources or order copies at CovBooks.com. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the Make and Deepen Disciples team at mdd@covchurch.org.

Like a Tree Planted by Streams of Water

AN INVITATION TO PRACTICE PRAYER IN ORDINARY LIFE

Author's Note: This week we focus on recognizing regular, daily moments in our lives as invitations to pray. The verses we study this week are related thematically to water. The idea is to use our ordinary and daily interactions with water as opportunities to be mindful of God's presence in our lives.

When I first became a parent, I didn't have time to practice my devotions the way I had before. Before I had my son, I set aside a block of time each day to read and respond to Scripture. After he was born, my sleep sched-

ule was much more erratic and my prayer life suffered. In order to reconcile the real needs of caring for an infant with my need for an active prayer life, I began to pray in a different way. I used activities I did daily as invitations to prayer. Washing the dishes was a time to remember baptism. Folding laundry was a time to pray for my child's future. Wiping the table was a time to give thanks for nourishment. When I could connect my prayer and devotional life to things I did every day, not only did ordinary chores become more fulfilling but I also discovered new ways to connect with God.



The Water of Creation

Read: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” —Genesis 1:2 (NIV)

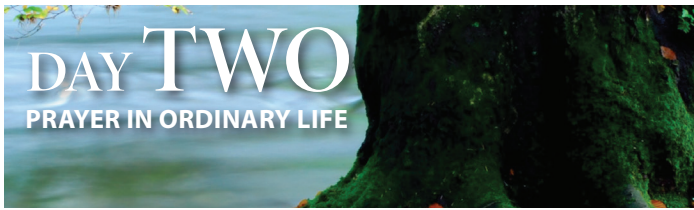
Devotion: Out of depth, God creates the universe. The depth mentioned in Genesis is no ordinary emptiness. The Hebrew word *tehom* suggests an ongoing primal catastrophe that preceded God's creative activity but was subdued by his power. God's creative activity culminates with his declaration of the Sabbath. As humans we are made in God's image, and God works alongside us to create meaning out of the mystery and depth of our lives. God creates good out of depth we cannot comprehend. As we look to the creation story as a model for the good God brings out of chaos, let us pray for eyes to see God's invitation to creative work as a path to Sabbath rest. Life often does not hold sufficient answers for unspeakable circumstances. However, when we know that God is with us amidst the darkness, perhaps we can also meet God in rest, resolving to spend one day of the week living as though we had all the answers, as though God's promise to make all things new has been fulfilled.

Prayer practice: Today be mindful of God's creative action over the face of the waters while cleaning up after dinner. Washing dishes or loading the dishwasher are two ordinary places to find a parallel to God's creation of good from darkness. When we wash dishes, the dirty object is immersed into the hot water and emerges clean and ready for its next use. Likewise, God moves over the chaos of the waters and generates life. Each time you interact with water today remember that the “Spirit of God hovers over the waters.”

In a group setting: Experiment with artistic creation. Have colored pencils, paper, play dough, markers, and watercolors available. Spend some time thinking about the creation story. Then invite each person to create their own illustration of the deep waters mentioned in Genesis. Resist the temptation to illustrate a known experience or object. Let the image move with your feeling. If an abstract depiction feels too challenging, create a picture with large waves, churning rapids, or a whirlpool. How does it feel to think about the mystery from which God created the universe?

For children: Fill a bucket with water. Place several objects in the water that are heavy enough to sink to the bottom (i.e., a stone, spoon, matchbox car, or other toys). Encourage children to reach into the water and pull out the objects. As they retrieve the items from the water, help them connect their discoveries to God's creative action in Genesis.

Prayer: God, whose face was known in mystery, invite me to see myself as made in your image. As you moved in love to generate life, nurture me through your creative action. Restore my life from chaos as you did when you created the world out of the depths. Weave new connections between you and me, myself and others, myself and your image in me. As I face many waters, recreate me. Grant me rest in your good creation.



The Water of Liberation

Read: “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.” —Exodus 14:21-22 (NIV)

Devotion: Often painful circumstances in life can seem like uncontrollable hurdles that thwart our path to God’s promised land. Social systems and unjust situations can also limit our choices and opportunities. It can be challenging to focus on the path God calls us to walk alongside him. Like the Israelites who fled from Egypt only to come up against the obstacle of the Red Sea, we may believe our troubles will overwhelm us. Even though God parted the Red Sea for the Israelite nation, the people of God entered into great discomfort following God’s leadership in Moses.

Notice the phrase, “a wall of water on their right and on their left.” God made a way through—he did not remove the obstacle. Sometimes the best way to find the path toward freedom is to take the first step. It may require trust, discipline, and perseverance, but the first step is all that is needed.

Prayer practice: Throughout the day be mindful of water that flows from faucets, sprinklers, or wells. Whether the drinking fountain at the gym, the sprayer on the kitchen faucet, or the automatic sink in a public restroom, notice the force of the



Justice Like Waters

Read: “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” —Amos 5:24 (NIV)

Devotion: Violent warfare. Discrimination. Cancer. Poverty. Dysfunctional relationships. Political division. The list of things wrong in this world is long, but we place our hope in God’s promise to restore creation, a promise first revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the person of Christ, we see God’s model for restoring the broken world. God does not appear as a conquering king who intervenes through control and power. Instead, God enters the world as a suffering servant, showing us we are not alone in our pain and trauma. Through Christ we see a God who values his creation so strongly that he willingly took on human form to be with us.

Reading the headlines on any given day may cause us to question our belief in a just and loving God. Like Habakkuk we may ask, “How long, O Lord?” But in response to the counter-narrative of lament which recurs consistently throughout Scripture, we see images of God’s righteousness as a stream that never ends. Ultimately we know that God’s love for us is unending, and like a stream or

water. Is the water pressure low? Think about how this changes your interaction with the water—how much longer it takes to wash your hands, fill up a water bottle, or water the lawn. Is the pressure high? Allow the powerful blast of water to remind you of forces that surrounded the Israelites while they walked through the Red Sea. Pray that God would lead you through the obstacles on your path that you may live in freedom according to his plan for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. Let the water be a visual reminder of what God can do for you when you are able to place your faith in him, one step at a time.

In a group setting: Discuss how water pressure affects life’s daily practice. Perhaps someone can recall a time when a shower-head had too much pressure, making a shower a painful experience. In other situations, there is not enough pressure—making it difficult to feel completely clean. Invite group members to draw parallels between these water-related differences and differences in life circumstances. In some seasons of life, we may feel overwhelmed by pressures and expectations. On the other hand, we may struggle with feeling like we are enough to deserve love and belonging. Either of these viewpoints can impede the steps we take in our relationship with Christ.

For children: Ask them to try to use their hands to stop the flow of water coming out of a faucet. Talk about how difficult it is to stop the flow of water with our own effort. Then turn the faucet off. Invite children to make a connection between God parting the Red Sea and using an outside force like a faucet to stop the flow of water. Encourage children to imagine how God makes a way through difficult circumstances we cannot control on our own.

Pray: God, whose hand brought the Israelites out of Egypt, reveal my path to me. Free me from the expectations of myself and others, whose good intentions may prohibit me from living according to your will. Protect me from dangerous and depleting situations and circumstances. Make a way through, that I may follow to your promised land. Amen.

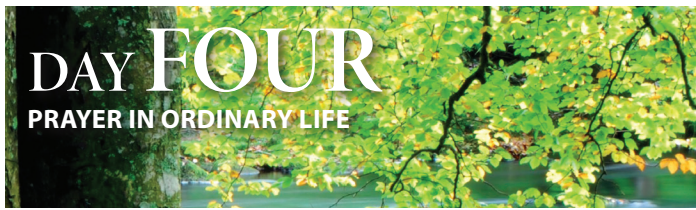
mighty river, it cannot be stopped. Even as we cry out to God, we do not despair because we place our hope in justice that never ends.

Prayer practice: Today be mindful of your encounters with natural bodies of water. Are there rivers, wetlands, lakes, or ponds near you? Do you cross any bridges in your daily commute? Does your city or town have a history of being connected to any waterways? If you live in an arid climate, be mindful of how much of your day revolves around water and its use. Think about what water adds to your environment, and how, like justice, it is essential for the survival of the community. Take time to lament for the land outside the river’s fertile plain, and cry out for God’s mercy in the hurting and broken places on earth.

In a group setting: Read the headlines from your local newspaper together. In corporate prayer offer lament for tragedies and thanksgiving for good news. Take the time to pray for God’s justice in your community.

For children: At bedtime ask children to recall the best and worst parts of their day. Invite them to consider the idea that God is present during good times and bad times. Let children know that God is big enough to hear about our whole day, good and bad. Invite them to consider how God can transform bad things into good.

Pray: God of justice, give us hope and stamina like a river that never ends. In this hurting world break our hearts for the fractured and divided. In our own wounds may we recognize the pain of another. May our hope in your restoration of the universe and our faith in your Son Jesus Christ give us light in the midst of great darkness. May righteousness flow from our lives throughout the generations.



Water of Baptism

Read: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” —Matthew 3:16-17 (NIV)

Devotion: The waters of baptism signal rebirth. When a person enters the water, God’s grace is present and calling them into new life in Christ. As we see in Jesus, baptism is primarily about God’s active presence in a person’s life and not about human effort. Although baptism is a public ritual, it isn’t based on performance, it is a sacrament. Through baptism the community acknowledges an individual’s gifting and calling, celebrating her or his identity in the body of Christ. Ultimately the community recognizes each person’s essential identity. In turn, we offer gratitude and praise to God.

The new birth is about living according to a different set of expectations. Not a set of worldly expectations based on striving, performance, or achievement, but instead the Spirit’s expectation of fullness in creation. The ultimate consequence, death, has been overcome in Christ’s resurrection. We are freed from fear, and now we can live according to God’s call.



Living Water

Read: Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” —John 4:10-14 (NRSV)

Devotion: Here we see God’s invitation through Christ into eternal life. Like a living spring, being in relationship with the Triune God yields an abundant and overflowing life. Surrendering the desire for the immediate, as Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, results in the satisfaction of the ongoing. Placing hope in the ongoing, or in other words, the realm of the Spirit, frees us from the tyranny of the urgent. This is what Jesus means when he explains, “But those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.” However, the satisfaction Christ offers is not completed in individual transformation alone. The cycle of

Prayer practice: Today whenever you interact with water remember your baptism or pray for God’s preparation for the sacrament of baptism. What is God calling you to let go of in your life that you may have freedom to live into your unique calling? Remember that saying yes to one thing means saying no to another. How can you give priority to that which is most worthy of your time? What expectations do you carry with you that must be fulfilled before you can live in freedom? Stages of life yield different fruits according to each new season. What spoiled fruits have you kept too long, preventing you from entering a new season? What fruits do you need to grieve so that you may be free to live according to God’s call?

In a group setting: What can you publicly lament in order to receive the fruit God has in store for you? Take the time to acknowledge, silently or aloud, disappointments, traumas, or hurts in your life. In community pray over these experiences, name them aloud, or pause for 30 seconds to acknowledge an unnamed hurt. Grieve disappointments together so that you may be free to live into the promise of the sacrament of baptism.

For children: Talk about the sacrament of baptism with children. If the child has been baptized, use this time to explain what God has done in their lives through the love of their faithful community and family. Encourage the child to think about how they can live into their baptism as they grow and develop. If the child is yet to be baptized, talk about how baptism is a sign of the work God has been doing in one’s life and that it is open to all who wish to follow Christ.

Pray: God, I thank you for the sacrament of baptism. I thank you for new life and that I am fearfully and wonderfully made in your image. Just as you chose to reveal Christ’s identity through baptism, reveal my vocation to me through your Spirit as one baptized (or who hopes to be baptized) in your name. In the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Amen.

abundance must be continued as a person satisfied in the eternal is transformed into a living well for those surrounding him or her. Being filled by an eternal source, the transformed person is free to love others unconditionally, and as more is drawn from Christ as the source, the more the love of Christ satisfies.

In a group setting: Place a cup of water in front of each person. Together wait for five minutes before you drink from the cup—in silence if possible. As you wait, hold the cup in your hand. Swirl the liquid around gently. Imagine taking a long and cool drink of water on a hot day. After everyone drinks, invite each person to share about a time when they were parched—and what it meant to be refreshed. Imagine God’s love as refreshing your spirit. How can taking care of daily needs become an invitation to remember God’s unending love as personified in Jesus Christ?

For children: Talk to children about the concept of a well, and teach them about how water arrives in their house, whether through a well, city water, water service, or filter. Use this opportunity to tell them that God’s love is like a well that never goes dry or a faucet that never turns off—God’s love is always pouring out for them, no matter the circumstances.

Prayer practice: Be mindful of your own thirst. Each time you drink water or eat food observe the amount of time it takes for you to become thirsty again. Allow this experience to illustrate the importance of surrendering the needs of the immediate and giving priority to a life of the Spirit. Use your physical thirst as an invitation to be present to Christ’s love. When you drink remember that your ultimate hope is stronger than death, and that you may continue the cycle of hope by acting in love toward others. If you have children, say a prayer of thanks today each time your child drinks liquid.



Faith Amidst Mystery

Read: When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” —Matthew 14:26-30 (NRSV)

Devotion: As we see in Scripture, the life of a Christ follower is not always clear or straightforward. At times we are called to follow Christ into the unknown and seemingly impossible. Even the apostle Peter wavers in his faith when he walks out upon the water. Yet Christ’s posture toward Peter never changes. In the surrender of his unbelief, Peter is greeted with Christ’s mercy and judgment, not condemnation. After witnessing Jesus walk on water, the disciples confirm Christ’s identity as the Son of God.

In our lives when the water begins to surround us, when we no longer sense Christ’s presence, when we are out of the boat and the unknown threatens our faith, we have permission to cry out, “Lord, save me!” In fact, these moments or seasons may become the most revealing instances of our lives, as the act of crying out to God draws us closer to him. We need not claim that we have no fear—we need only acknowledge our helplessness. Knowing we must rely on God’s mercy, our cry will confirm our identity as children of the living God. Like Peter, we can admit our fears and surrender our doubt to Jesus.



The Voice of God Like Many Waters

Read: “And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.” —Revelation 14:2 (NRSV)

Devotion: In this verse from Revelation the speaker uses several images to illustrate the sound of God. God’s voice is like the sound of many waters, like the sound of loud thunder, and like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. We see in these metaphors that God’s voice is multi-directional. At once, it surrounds us and stirs something within us, the way the sound of a waterfall or rapids resonates within our being.

Waterfalls hold both striking beauty and awful power. We rely on human-made dams and naturally occurring waterfalls to generate electricity. Mills have historically used the power of rushing water to grind wheat into flour. Human survival is dependent on this powerful and transformative natural formation.

As striking as its powerful imagery is the sound of rushing water. It can be heard many miles from its location and is distinct from any other sound. When approaching

Prayer practice: Spend time studying images of a large body of water (or the real thing if possible). If you’ve ever been on a boat in deep water, fix your mind on the image of the rolling surface of the water. This image can help connect us to the most difficult and traumatic parts of life. Like deep, swirling water, what is under the surface is dark and unknown. To follow Christ onto the water is to enter into those unknown parts of our own life. We often fear seasons of doubt and unbelief. Following Peter’s example, let us cry to God for help. The mysterious and painful seasons are not appropriate times for human certainty, for it is only the Son of God who walks on water without wavering. May deep, dark water remind you of God’s love, that Christ is the Son of God, and that the Spirit continually intercedes on your behalf.

In a group setting: Share experiences related to large bodies of water. Whether driving over a river on a bridge, remembering a family cottage, swimming at camp, or even desiring to see the ocean, share together about what these bodies of water meant to you as you respond to the prayer prompt. After each person shares, leave a space of 30 seconds to one minute of silence before responding. Listen intently to how the person speaking describes their experience. When you respond, simply repeat any words you heard related to thoughts or feelings. May this time of deep listening to one another remind you how God always listens to our heart’s sorrows and joys.

For children: Fill a clear glass or cup with water. Have children look through the cup and describe what they see. Then add dark purple or blue food coloring to the water. Ask the children how this changes what they see. Explain how our feelings can change how we see the world, but the way God sees us never changes. Because God is unchanging, we are free to express all our feelings to God. In fact, this can help us remember that God is all-powerful and we are not, since our way of seeing can change depending on our circumstances.

Pray: God of mercy and faithfulness, save me in my fear. Though I am surrounded by doubt and sometimes feel far away from you, may I trust the action and truth of your call on my life. Give me a strong memory, that I can recollect your blessing as I express sorrow, pain, frustration, or anger. Thank you for remaining with me in my doubt.

a waterfall, one feels surrounded by the sound. Here we learn something about the essence of God. The voice of God is powerful and unmistakable. It is an active force at work in the world and necessary for human survival. God is all around us and resonating in our very being.

Prayer practice: Find or make the sound of many waters. Turn the tub faucet to full power, watch the washing machine tumble clothes in a front-end loader, or listen to an upright washing machine as it works to churn the load. If you live near a waterfall or dam, spend a few moments observing the rushing waters. Google pictures or look through magazines for images of waterfalls and imagine the force present in the water. Picture how God’s voice is as powerful as the rushing water. Put your hand on your chest and imagine your body resonating with the sound of the water. Imagine the mist from the waterfall landing on your face and hands.

In a group setting/ for children: Recreate the sound of many waters. Have the group sit in chairs around a table, and start by gently tapping their fingers in their laps. After about 30 seconds, move to snapping fingers. Then start stamping feet while snapping, and finally move to both stamping feet and pounding the table top with their hands. Have a leader signal to the group when it is time to stop. Remain in silence for at least one minute (or as long as possible depending on the age of the children). Then invite group members to share how they felt after hearing the sound escalate. What did it feel like to be both part of and surrounded by the sound? When we live in community the voice of the Spirit is present to us as individuals but also moves through our communities. In discernment we learn to listen for God’s voice both within ourselves and in the power of his word moving through those around us.

Pray: God, your voice surrounds and stirs within us. Like churning water, may your voice transform our lives. Continually form my community and me. Like many waters, may our voices depict the power of your work in the world. Amen.

About the author: **Lauren K. Carlson** is a spiritual director living in rural Dawson, Minnesota, with her husband and three sons. Trained at the C. John Weborg Center for Spiritual Direction at North Park Theological Seminary, she is a frequent contributor to the Spiritual Directors International blog. In addition to her work in spiritual direction, Carlson is a published poet. She is married to Erik Carlson, pastor of Dawson Covenant Church.



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