

A MAKE & DEEPEN DISCIPLES RESOURCE



Week of Prayer
*A Guide for
Individuals and
Small Groups*



Truly Praying:
Shaped by the Scriptures



The Evangelical Covenant Church



A Make & Deepen Disciples Resource
The Evangelical Covenant Church
Website: CovChurch.org
For information: ChristianFormation@covchurch.org
(773) 784-3000



The Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are the word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. As we apply scriptural principles and insights to our lives, Scripture informs and shapes the way we pray.

It's also true that "what you pray forms what you believe." This early Church principle has been recognized by church leaders through the centuries as they have composed services and prayer books.

The Evangelical Covenant Church grew out of a movement known as Pietism, which stresses a personal relationship with Christ and the active living faith of persons transformed by the gospel. The early Pietists gave us a method for the examination of Scripture. They would ask three questions. First, what does the text teach? Second, what does the text command? And finally, what does the text promise? Covenant theologians C. John Weborg and Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom have reframed these questions: *What do we believe? How do we live? What do we hope?*

We will use these questions as an approach to help us weave Scripture into our thinking and our prayers—and thus inform what we believe. We will also add a fourth question, *How do we pray?* This process is not only designed to be a one-week exercise; it is intended to give us a new way of integrating Scripture and prayer into our lives, shaping and helping us to grow on our faith journeys.

During this week of prayer, take time to read and reflect on these familiar Scripture passages. May the Holy Spirit shed a new light on them for you so that they will inform and shape your prayers. Although prayer is a time of intentionally dwelling with and listening to God, we also pray by sharing and celebrating these truths together in community—by singing, drawing and painting, walking and reflecting together, and reminding one another of God's goodness to us.

May this week of prayer inspire and encourage you—not only to pray but also to deeper faith, a greater integration of word and deed and a more glorious hope in Jesus.

About the author: Geoff Twigg has been involved in music and ministry for many years. He advocates for worship and the arts for the Evangelical Covenant Church and teaches at North Park Theological Seminary. Geoff is a member of the ECC Commission on Worship and is minister of music at Trinity Evangelical Covenant Church in Oak Lawn, Illinois. He is married to Vicki, a cellist and fabric artist, and they have three adult children.

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Para recursos del Departamento de Formación Cristiana en español comunícate con Wilson Herrera: wilson.herrera@covchurch.org

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As I walk this land, teach my heart to care, Lord.
Guided by your hand, make my life a prayer, for
though we tend to stray from you,
your power to save
redeems the life we lose.
Make my life a prayer.

Representing Christ—the fragrance of an offering,
comfort in despair, healing to the suffering—
let me walk as Jesus walked
in humble grace
to speak the truth in love.
Make my life a prayer.

Just as I was lost when Jesus came and found me,
let your kingdom come, in and all around me.
Let me find on every street
your word to feed
each hungry soul I meet.
Make my life a prayer.

By my every word, and by my behavior,
show the world your grace, let them see the Savior—
Spirit-filled, a holy flame
in Jesus' name,
to light a world of shame,
make my life a prayer.

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Day One: Truly Centered on God's Word

READ: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Colossians 3:16

What do we believe?

Deuteronomy tells us to remain centered on God's word, loving the Lord our God with every fiber of our being. We are to keep "these commandments" on our hearts, but also share them with our families and friends. They are to guide our thoughts and our decision-making.

With that in mind, read Colossians 3:16. In directing us to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, Paul is saying what we sing together is important—it should be grounded in solid doctrine. The "message of Christ" is the whole revelation of the gospel in the life and work of Jesus. John 1:18 tells us that Jesus is the *exegesis* of God—the full revelation of who God is. That's a wonderful insight.

I love Paul's direction to us, to let the word of Christ "dwell among you richly." A friend of mine pictures Scripture as a marinade that flavors his whole life with the word of God. What a wonderful image!

How do we live?

As followers of Jesus we are accountable to God's word. Our lives are to reflect the guiding principles that shape our decisions and opinions. It should be possible for us to say with Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:16-17, *(Therefore) I urge you to imitate me. Timothy... is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*

Once we have integrated the words from the Deuteronomy passage into our lives, we are to share these words—the commandments of God—with our family and friends. They're not just to be on our individual hearts, but we should impress them on our children and talk about them at any time. We are to reflect them—binding them to our foreheads and writing them on our homes and gates, so that not only are we reminded of these words, but all who see us will know what guides our lives.

What do we hope?

We hope in God's promises that our children will grow up in the fear of the Lord and that our neighbors, friends and family know the blessing of Christ-followers in their midst.

How do we pray?

Pray that your life may embody God's word that it might be visible to those around you.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION: What have you heard God saying through this Scripture? What are you expecting for your life, your family, your church?

Prayer isn't just a quiet thought or a whispered word. Children can work with you to make crafts to wear these words, such as Scripture headbands. Discover ways of reminding one another of the Scripture as you enter and leave the house.

Day Two:

Truly, the Greatest Commandments

READ: Matthew 22:34-40

What do we believe?

From this text we see the Old Testament fulfilled in the New. We see that God in Christ is the one true God who is faithful in his love and keeps all his promises. We see that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's great promise to Israel—to send a Messiah.

How do we live?

As followers of Christ, we live in a way that clearly demonstrates love to God. We honor what honors God—a whole life of worship that seeks justice for all, an attitude that loves unconditionally and shows others the same mercy we have received from God.

When my son was a teenager, I discovered a single phone number repeated several times on the phone bill. My son had called or texted one special friend every evening—and some of those calls lasted quite a while. When I finally saw him with her, things became even clearer. I saw the development of a relationship that began to affect their thinking—not just their plans for next weekend, but their picture of the future.

If we truly believe that these are the greatest commandments, our whole lives should reflect a similar truth—a growing relationship with God. When people see us, they should be able to detect that our relationship with God has changed our habits, our thinking and our future. I would define it like this: *Worship is the evidence of a relationship that changes everything.*

What do we hope?

As we continue to grow in relationship with God, our lives will show evidence of life-changing discipleship. May we learn to love people as we yearn to be loved—and to forgive as we have been forgiven.

How do we pray?

Pray that the Spirit would lead you, as individuals and as a community, into a whole life of worship that reflects an ever-deepening intimacy with God. Pray that your life will be so centered in God's love that you will reflect it in love for your neighbor.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION: Alone, or with your family or small group, memorize these verses from Matthew 22. When verses are memorized, we naturally begin to meditate on them in a way that builds our Christian character and holds us accountable to God's standards.

Cut hearts from red paper. Write “God” on one side and “Others” on the reverse side. Each day reflect on ways God has loved you and others.

Day Seven:

The True Purpose of Our Salvation

READ: 1 Peter 2:9

What do we believe?

First, God has a purpose in our salvation. In today's verse, Peter is referring back to Exodus 19:3-6 where the people of Israel are first addressed as a chosen people.

Second, we are specifically chosen by God. We are called to be ministers of God, set apart as a holy nation to be God's special possession. Paul also tells us (in 2 Corinthians 5) that we should represent God's kingdom as ambassadors of reconciliation.

Quite clearly, from this verse, the purpose of salvation is that we may declare the praises of God. This not only includes vocal praise—but also praising God through lives that demonstrate our commitment to Christ.

How do we live?

We live as individuals who are specifically chosen by God, representing the kingdom of God and living to fulfill God's purpose. How will this look in your life?

What do we hope?

We want to glorify God by collaborating with the Holy Spirit to bring about God's will. We seek to honor God as we work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12). What does it mean for us to pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done”? For what are we hoping?

In these passages, the writers are clearly looking back on memorable times in their history—times when God was with his people to save and bless them. Ask others if they remember treasured times when God was especially present to them. Sharing those stories will honor God and help us all to praise God for his abiding presence.

How do we pray?

Pray for your families, friends, neighbors—all those around you. Pray that you will live a life that gives God praise.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION: Although prayer is a time of intentionally dwelling with and listening to God, we also pray by sharing and celebrating these truths together in community—by singing, drawing and painting, walking and reflecting together, and reminding one another of God's goodness to us. Celebrate this week of prayer by sharing in community with others (Psalm 148, 149 and 150).

Day Six:

The True Scale of Values

READ: Matthew 13:44-45; 2 Samuel 24:18-25

What do we believe?

Today we consider a simple but fundamental truth. While other matters battle for priority in our lives, nothing is more important than our relationship with God. There is no more significant influence than God's will, no greater formative power than God's purpose, and no higher priority than God's kingdom in any action or decision we ever make.

How do we live?

How do our lives display this truth? In high school, I was fascinated by the concept of body language—that we indicate what we think about other people by the way we stand or sit in their company. Body language also reflects the values and priorities of our faith. This is not simply a matter of our public behavior; it's about every thought “being held captive to Christ,” every priority indicated in our choices and in every position we adopt.

Our values are also reflected in our spending and what or who we cherish. That's why David refuses to accept the gift of Araunah's threshing floor in 2 Samuel 24. Araunah is intimidated by David and his enormous army and would be happy just to get away with his life, but David is planning an act of worship to honor God. It's therefore important to David that his offering to the Lord is an appropriate sacrifice and not something obtained by coercion or manipulation. “I will not offer to God that which has cost me nothing” is a great motto for Christian worship.

What do we hope?

A life of worship reflects the true priorities of God's kingdom, honoring God with every thought and action in relation to the world around us. May the body language of the church, the body of Christ, speak clearly of the gospel in such a way that people will be drawn to investigate what we find so valuable in God and our relationship to Christ.

How do we pray?

Pray that you may be committed to helping your family and friends on their spiritual journeys—and that you may be open to receiving their help. You are on the journey together—struggling, rejoicing, grieving—with God. How are you going to celebrate this truth in prayer? As a family, a group or a church, how are you going to challenge one another to display truly Christian values today?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION: Write a letter to God, giving thanks that God is greater than any treasure.

Day Three:

True Community

READ: Psalm 133; Acts 2:42-47

What do we believe?

These texts teach that our intention to be united with fellow believers honors God and enables our gifts and calling to emerge and grow. The psalm almost reads like a formula as it describes the inevitable outcome of living in harmony. It is the anointing of ministers to serve God so that everything works the way God planned it. It's also like the heaviest dew in the Holy Land, falling onto the dry, dusty hillsides of Jerusalem. Suddenly the buried seeds find the moisture they need and everything bursts into life.

How do we live?

It's our task to see that we are united in purpose with other believers and to contribute nothing that is divisive or disruptive to God's plans. We are called to care for each other, to build up community. We are to encourage the gifts and talents of those around us and to help people develop the skills God has given them. Beginning with our families, we then work through our circles of friends, encouraging and enabling them to glorify God.

What do we hope?

May our gifts, as well as the gifts of our families and friends, be developed and used to God's glory and for the benefit of God's kingdom. Following in the example of the young church described in Acts 2, we hope to be a welcoming and supportive community of believers.

How do we pray?

Pray that people in your church and community establish a plan of discipleship and development that helps individuals at every age and stage of faith maturity to fulfill their calling. Pray that more mature Christians share their wisdom and experience with others. Pray that God will show you where you can be involved. Pray that people can learn, try new things, and learn from successes and mistakes alike, to the glory of God.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION: Dip your finger in some olive oil and make the sign of the cross on the forehead or the hand of those you are with. Bless each other. You may wish to use Numbers 6:24-26.

Day Four:

God Truly Knows Me

READ: Psalm 139:1-16; Jeremiah 1:4-5

What do we believe?

There is nowhere in all creation where God does not see us. God knows us intimately, even our most hidden thoughts and dreams. God has a purpose for our lives and intends our character to be shaped into the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:28-30).

The presence of God described in these Scripture passages is not smothering or overwhelming. It's the warm, comforting and nurturing presence of a loving parent and sympathetic friend, the strength we need in weakness. It's a light in the darkness or a hand to hold as we step into the unknown.

How do we live?

We can live in obedience to God's law and in the confidence that God's purposes will be achieved in our lives. God is not far off; wherever we may be and however lost we may feel, God knows what's going on. The Holy Spirit is with us to help, guide and strengthen us whenever we ask. We can encourage everyone around us in this faith, from the youngest who are facing life's obstacles for the first time, to the oldest who are feeling their own strength fade.

What do we hope?

Based on God's promises, we can live in the knowledge of God's love and constant care. So many people fail to remember or recognize God's presence; they feel abandoned or uncared for. Some people will need us to be the hands and feet of Christ, showing God's love and standing beside them as an agent of grace. We can be a blessing to others in Jesus' name.

How do we pray?

Ask God to remind you of the loving presence that surrounds you and to show you others who may need your help, comfort or assistance.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION: Light a candle in an otherwise dark room as a reminder of God's presence with you. Share individually or with your family or small group about your birth story and earliest memories. Reflect on how God is present in your life.

Day Five:

Truth and Justice

READ: Isaiah 58:1-9; Micah 6:6-8

What do we believe?

Our natural inclination is to focus on our individual needs and interests. However, the challenge in these passages comes through the prophetic tradition, a call to look at how our "true religion and virtue" affect the world—and the people—around us. God seems to be saying that true justice will be the evidence that our faith is true, and that kindness and mercy are not only to be shown in our character but experienced by those around us.

We may be humbling ourselves and fasting, but that's not enough. Are we doing anyone any good? This passage again suggests that a whole life of worship seeks justice for all. Christ's disciples should be growing in faith and showing mercy—but more than that, we should be changing the world. These truths we believe are concrete, not abstract, and should bring about real change.

How do we live?

Think beyond your experience, beyond your own social status. Imagine yourself in the place of someone else, someone who is not being treated fairly, who is crying out for justice. Can you speak on their behalf?

What do we hope?

We hope to see a more just society and to show mercy and kindness to those who are treated harshly by the culture where we are comfortable. Can you think of any concrete examples today?

How do we pray?

Pray that your eyes will be opened to understand what justice and mercy mean in today's world and that each new generation will bring its own sense of justice and truth to situations that are hard for you to see.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION: Ask the older individuals you know about unjust situations they remember and what was done to make the world better. Put money in the "Can for Change" (see Covenant World Relief at CovChurch.org) as a tangible way of helping those in need.